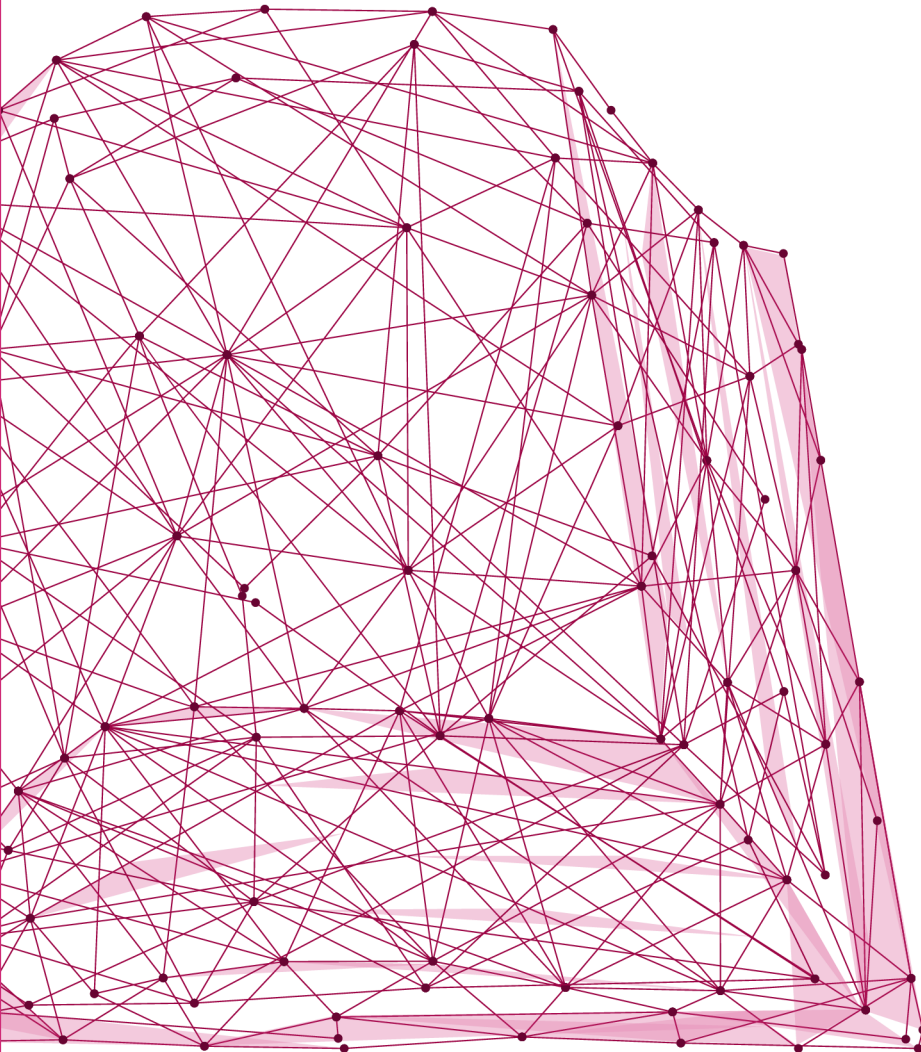




# GLOBAL SPORT DEVELOPMENT SYSTEMS AND ATHLETES' ACCESS TO EDUCATION

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research explores elite sport development systems and aspects of educational attainment and opportunities for elite athletes in a variety of national sport development systems. The countries analyzed for this project are the United States, the United Kingdom, Russia, Senegal, and Qatar. These were selected by the researchers because of the heterogeneous social-political contexts, the diverse histories in relation to sport and education, and the expectation of a variety of approaches toward elite athlete development and education attainment. The objective of this research is to compare and contrast the examined systems to ascertain best practices and approaches for elite athletes to gain a viable education experience and career development for life after formal competitive sport.

Often in elite sport development; the primary focus is on training, performance, and the ultimate bottom line of victory. Top performance at an amateur, professional or international level in sports can be a great revenue source for several stakeholders ranging from sponsors, media distributors and the athletes themselves. Often the total preparedness of the elite athlete, the sound mind along with the sound body, become competing entities with athletic achievement winning out as the priority. Pursuing education options during peak athletic development years while providing a source of income and/or national pride can be deemed at best a secondary endeavor. Thus, many countries, including the five examined for this report, have taken on a more methodical and focused approach to elite sport development and education and career options for the elite athlete as part of a total country plan.

Sport and sport development often are used by countries to advance goals or non-sporting objectives such as a healthier citizenry, tourism, better workforce, national pride and international status. This is clear when the researched country systems use sport development as a cornerstone for economic development and investing in sports capital because

of these ancillary benefits. These can materialize due to a greater emphasis on not only elite development, but also expansion of mass participation and recreational opportunities since so few people are recognized as elite. The ostensible benefits of sports participation are wide ranging but as noted in this report, sport development cannot overshadow education attainment and career progression outside of the athletic space for any athlete regardless of classification.

The research involved a detailed review of literature in each country to present appropriate structural context for the empirical work. The primary research involved several interviews with key stakeholders involved in the sport development and/or education systems within each country. This empirical work was conducted to provide an increased understanding of education and career options for the elite athlete. The interviews focused on reviewing practices and commonalities in various global economic and socio-cultural conditions.

A comparative research analysis was conducted to identify and understand aspects of the research systems. Research was conducted at three levels of analysis: macro, meso, and micro levels. The macro level of analysis includes elements of socioeconomic, cultural, governmental and other state organizational support for national sport development systems. The meso level includes law, policy, and infrastructure services that enable sports programs. The micro level consists of operation, processes and methods for development of individual athletes. The micro level is primarily where education fulfillment for elite athletes is managed although the macro and meso levels impact how important education is with regard to sport development in the areas of governmental policy, organizational (NGB or Olympic Committee) support and funding options and alternatives.

The diversity of the systems presented some interesting findings but also opportunities for improving access and education programming for elite athletes worldwide. For example, the United Kingdom and Russia were

similar in governance and organization of sport development in that education and sport development are largely two separate entities. This is in contrast to the United States where elite sport development is largely grounded in the existing primary, secondary and higher education (university) model. Qatar and Senegal presented two relatively young sports development systems each within the frame of a National Sports Policy and governmental ministry much like those of the U.K. and Russia.

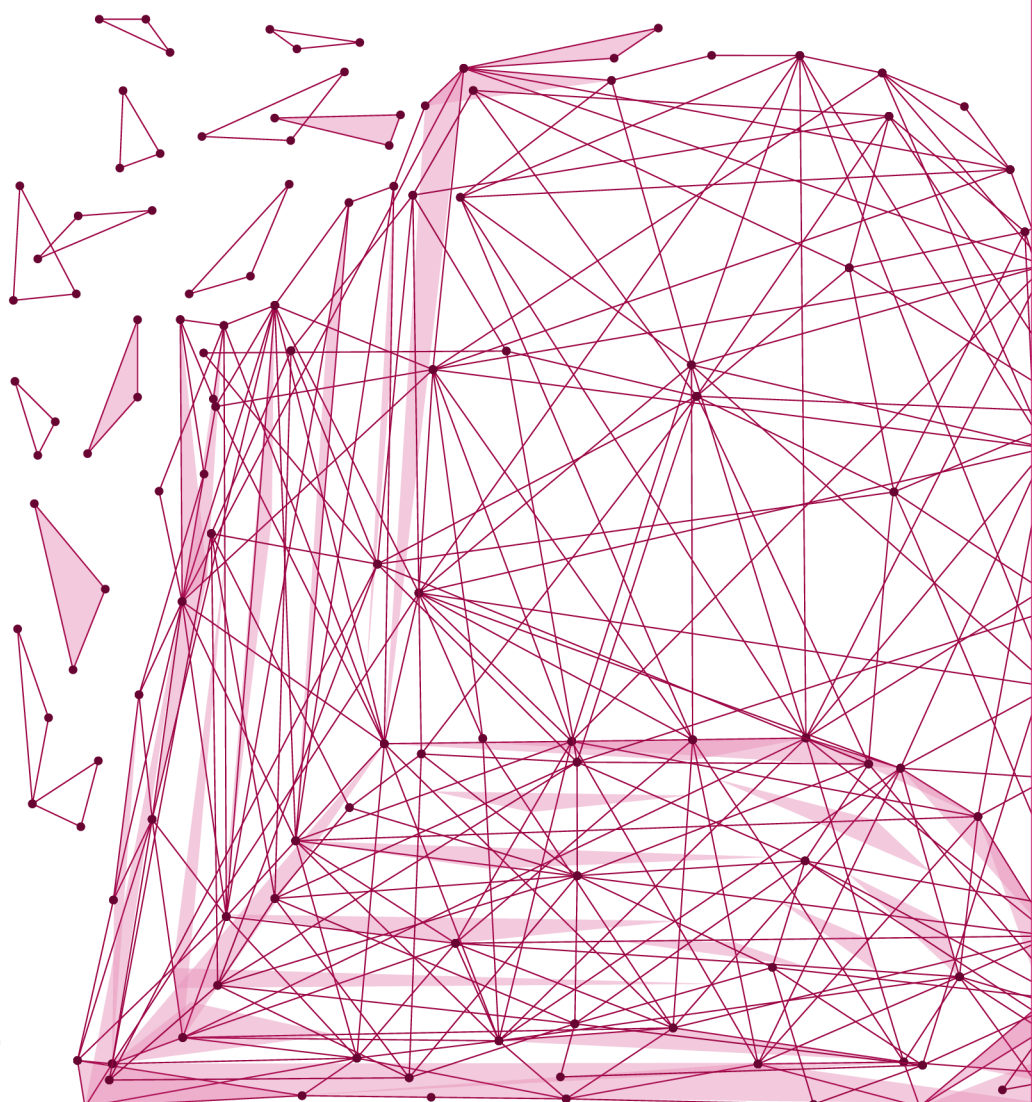
Among this study's most significant recommendations to improve education attainment for elite athletes across the spectrum of national sport development models include, at the macro level, recognizing the national and governmental context of education and sport, and how this context shapes elite sport development and education support for elite-level athletes. The researchers recommend continuing high-level research in this space to aid development of stronger policies for the education support of elite athletes. At the meso level, best practice suggestions include reviewing, developing, and implementing evidence-informed policies that formalize and clarify the commitment to elite sport and education support for elite athletes. Countries should also integrate organizational structure at the national level for publicly funded coordination of athlete education as part of long-term athlete development and wellness. There are anchors for this in the systems identified in this project, but improved availability of resources across the spectrum is critical to fund comprehensive athlete education.

Other meso level considerations that should be explored to improve education access for elite athletes include support and resources for teachers, coaches, parents, and athletes specifying the knowledge, skills and abilities to be taught at each level of athlete development over the long-term. In addition, in many countries, such as the United States unlike in Europe, infrastructure issues limit access to sport development and education attainment. Where this exists there needs to be a country

plan that increases infrastructure so that travel from home and training facilities to school, college and university is convenient for athletes. Another area that is problematic in many of the systems is having broad based input on policy and organization from key stakeholders including athletes, coaches and NGBs.

From a micro level perspective, focusing mostly on elite athlete development inside and outside of the sporting spectrum, several best practices can be implemented. We find that identifying and developing talent are strong points for the systems examined. They are evolving processes; countries should continuously research and evaluate the needs of elite athlete. With regards to the whole person, countries should implement systems to ensure that all athletes receive the support and resources needed for success outside of sport in their education and career development. This can include specialized programs of study tailored to the athlete. Well-developed organizational structures that focus on education or athlete development and that provide integrated support such as sport academies, Olympic training centers and other national systems for supporting athletes exist now in the U.K., the US and Russia.

Since athletes often want to have careers in sports after competing, whether in coaching or administration, organizations can focus on education access in related areas such sport medicine, teaching and coaching, media and sport management. Much of this infrastructure exists at universities worldwide, but expansion online and in other special education formats that cater to the training schedules of the elite athlete are recommended. Many athletes want jobs and careers outside the sports space; sport ministries and NGBs need programming that leads to other education and sport programs beyond the sports industry. Many good examples exist such as the IOC partnerships with Hilton hotels and other programs that assist athletes with education, life skills, and employment should be adopted in all countries.



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