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**'School, family and then hockey!' Coaches' views on dual career in ice hockey**

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### Article

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## 1 “School, family, and then hockey!” Coaches’ views on dual career in ice hockey

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3 hockey!’ Coaches’ views on dual career in ice hockey. *International Journal of Sports Science &  
4 Coaching*, 13(1), 38-45.

### 7 **Abstract**

8 Despite the extensive research into coaches’ roles in supporting athletic development and  
9 motivation for sport, few studies have examined coaches’ attitudes and practices towards  
10 athletes’ dual careers. The present study extends European research into athletes’ dual careers by  
11 examining Finnish ice hockey coaches’ attitudes and practices surrounding players’ education.  
12 Ten male coaches aged 28-52 participated in semi-structured interviews. The data was analysed  
13 with an existential-narrative theoretical framework and with thematic and structural narrative  
14 analysis. Three composite vignettes were created entitled “supporting athletic development and  
15 players in reaching their own goals”, “enjoyment and physically active lifestyle” and  
16 “developing good persons”. The analysis revealed that although all coaches embraced the official  
17 rhetoric where school is a priority over ice hockey, most of them had few practical examples of  
18 how this view had informed their coaching practice. It is concluded that young players may be  
19 easily lured into dreams of professionalism, whereas coaches’ dominant narrative of education as  
20 a back-up may be ineffective to spark athletes’ interest and engagement with education.

21  
22 Keywords: youth sport, education, coaching philosophy, narrative, existential psychology

23

## 24 **“School, family, and then hockey!” Coaches’ views on dual career in ice hockey**

25 Unlike practitioners in many other fields of teaching and education, coaches in youth sport  
26 environments often have limited formal training or financial compensation for their work (1,2). It  
27 has been reported that coaches often draw their coaching philosophies and practices from various  
28 resources, including accumulated coaching experience, own athletic experiences, and  
29 interactions with other coaches and people affiliated with the sport clubs (3,4). With the lack of  
30 formal job descriptions to outline goals and responsibilities associated with the coach role,  
31 coaching practices can vary considerably across and within different sports and age groups in  
32 terms of key areas of emphasis (such as, winning, participation, skill development, fun,  
33 physically active lifestyles, and/or elite performance). Therefore, it has been argued that sport  
34 organisations do not seem to have systematic programs to teach life and sport skills (5).

35 Gilbert and Trudel (3) examined how Canadian youth sport coaches frame their role, and  
36 found nine internal components: emphasis on team, personal growth and development, sport-  
37 specific development, winning, safety, positive team environment, fun, equity, and discipline. It  
38 was noted that coaches’ emphasis shifted based on the age group and competitive level, and there  
39 was a common implicit assumption that competitive sport required a different approach to  
40 coaching than recreational sport. In another Canadian study, Wilcox and Trudel (6) examined  
41 one youth ice hockey coach’s philosophy of practice and found two central principles: winning  
42 and supporting player development. It was found that although the coach asserted that he  
43 promoted equal playing time, his actual decisions depended on the playing time left in a game  
44 and players’ performance level.

45 In addition to the growing investment in athletic development, young talented athletes are  
46 also expected to complete compulsory education and make important decisions concerning

47 higher education. It has been observed that there are increasing expectations for athletes to  
48 engage with education, and while some young athletes may prioritise sport over education (7,8),  
49 others may be highly motivated to achieve in both domains, and may experience sport and  
50 education as not only compatible, but also complementary (9,10). A number of recent studies  
51 have highlighted the multiple benefits of dual careers for athletes: for example, it can provide  
52 psychological benefits (e.g., balanced lifestyle, broader identity development, self-esteem, better  
53 preparedness to athletic retirement), social benefits (e.g., expanded social networks and support  
54 system) and financial benefits (e.g., broader skills and better chances for employment) (8-12).  
55 However, the dual career pathway involves a number of challenges, including difficulty in  
56 matching training and competition schedules with exams and obligatory classes, fatigue,  
57 finances, limited social life, and general lack of time (11,13,14). Studies have emphasised that  
58 supportive environments and collaboration between different actors at school, sports clubs and  
59 home, is crucial for developing a sustainable dual career (9,14).

60 Coaches have been seen as central non-parental socialising agents in young athletes' lives,  
61 (5) and have been found to impact athletes' self-perceptions and motivation in sport (8,15).  
62 Therefore, it can be assumed that their views on education can also be important for athletes. Yet,  
63 there is little research focused on coaches' approaches towards dual career. In professional  
64 football, it has been observed that coaches may not be supportive of education as they may think  
65 that it takes athletes' focus away from developing their sporting careers (16). In contrast, Knight  
66 and Harwood (14) found that coaches in different youth elite sport environments were  
67 consistently supportive of athletes' dual careers. However, the level of communication between  
68 coaches and the educational institutions varied considerably, and while some clubs had  
69 established protocols for communication, in other clubs keeping the contact was left to athletes'

70 and parents' responsibility. Moreover, in a football academy, coaches felt that interfering with  
71 players' education was not their responsibility, because the club had appointed an education and  
72 welfare officer to take care of such issues (14).

73 The current study extends the literature on coaching practice and athlete development by  
74 examining Finnish ice hockey coaches' perspectives on athletes' dual careers. In the Finnish  
75 system, sport and education have traditionally been separate, and sports participation has been  
76 organised within a volunteer-based club system. A small number of upper secondary sport  
77 schools were officially established in the 1990s, and only in the 2000s a more extensive sports  
78 academy network was established to extend dual career support to higher education (17).  
79 However, while the academy athletes participate in morning practices organised by coaching  
80 staff employed by the academy, most training still takes place in sport clubs which are not  
81 officially linked to educational institutions. Therefore, in the sport clubs there are no sport-  
82 related consequences for poor academic performance, and the clubs' own policies are open to  
83 coaches' interpretations. Moreover, coaching education is offered both by local clubs and the  
84 Finnish Ice Hockey Association, but attending the courses is not a strict requirement especially  
85 when coaching younger age groups. Ice hockey is the country's biggest professional sport  
86 characterised by traditional masculine values, hard training load, and availability of the  
87 professional athlete developmental pathway. In 2013 in Finland, more than half of the country's  
88 professional athletes were ice hockey players (18). With this background, the study sought to  
89 explore the following research questions:

- 90 1) How do youth ice hockey coaches articulate their attitudes towards dual career and how  
91 do they view their roles in supporting players' holistic development?
- 92 2) What are the practices coaches engage in to support players' educational success?

93 3) Is the coaches' everyday coaching practice in line with their ideas surrounding dual  
94 career?

## 95 **Methodology**

### 96 **Conceptual Framework**

97 The theoretical underpinning of the present study lies in existential psychology and narrative  
98 inquiry. While existential philosophers have rarely articulated an existential perspective  
99 specifically focused on education or coaching (19), from this approach it is generally emphasised  
100 that an educator (or a coach) can never choose for the student (-athlete) when it comes to  
101 attitudes towards life choices and meaningful goals (20). The existential view emphasises that  
102 our lives are permeated by uncertainty, incompleteness of meanings we assign to our experience,  
103 and necessity of choice (21). Young athletes face important decisions in terms of committing to  
104 meaningful goals in and outside sport, and accepting responsibility for their decisions. For an  
105 authentic choice, the person must feel that s/he is also free to choose otherwise, and to be able to  
106 assign subjective truth to that choice (19). From an applied perspective, this means that instead  
107 of seeking to indoctrinate student-athletes to a culturally dominant and preferred value, coaches  
108 should help athletes develop self-awareness and understanding of their situated embodied  
109 possibilities, so that they can make responsible choices for themselves (21). An existential view  
110 emphasises that making a choice means not-choosing the alternative, and that some values and  
111 aspirations may present themselves as incompatible. For the present study, it is of interest to  
112 study how coaches articulate their views on the role of education in athletes' lives and how they  
113 engage in practices which seek to influence athletes' career decisions.

114 A critical constructivist approach to narrative has been proposed as a position which can be  
115 integrated with the existential view to gain a more contextualised understanding of psychological

116 phenomena (22). Narrative theory complements the existential approach by its focus on cultural  
117 situatedness of experience and meaning. As Smith and Sparkes (23) asserted, “whilst people  
118 often depend on and act to defend what they experience as their interior lives and their personal  
119 authenticity, we draw and build our personal stories on the narrative resources that culture, local  
120 worlds, and relationships make available to us” (p. 5). Analysing coaches’ stories about athlete  
121 development and education not only allows for insight into how they construct meaning in  
122 coaching practice, but also enables us to better understand what kind of cultural narrative  
123 resources are available for them. Coaches’ stories, then, are the narrative resources that are  
124 passed on to the young players to bring meaning to their experiences and to help them project  
125 themselves to future possibilities in sport and life.

## 126 **Participants**

127 Participants of the present study were 10; male, Finnish ice hockey coaches aged 28-52. They  
128 had an average of 14,3 years of coaching experience and had been players themselves before  
129 becoming a coach (one of them was not coaching in the ongoing season). Most of them were  
130 asked to start coaching by former teammates, friends, or other coaches. Two participants were  
131 professional coaches, two were semi-professional, and six were amateur. Eight coaches were  
132 working with junior teams (aged 10-17), one coach worked with a men’s team, and one coach  
133 was a manager for all junior teams in his club.

## 134 **Procedure**

135 After obtaining institutional ethical approval for the study, participants were invited to take  
136 part in a semi-structured interview. They were informed that the interview was a part of a  
137 longitudinal study on athletes’ dual careers (24), and that the focus of the interview was on their  
138 coaching philosophy and everyday practices. All participants provided an informed written

139 consent. The interview started with a broad opening question, “tell me your story of becoming a  
140 coach”. Probes and follow-up questions were developed from participants’ stories to gain an  
141 understanding of their life trajectories and contexts. We then asked participants to elaborate on  
142 their coaching philosophy and their goals as a coach. For dual career, we asked for both their  
143 general views (e.g., what are your views on dual career? Can a player succeed in both school and  
144 sport?) and concrete experiences and practices (e.g., what are your club’s daily practices for  
145 student-athletes? Do you have examples of how you follow up on your players’ educational  
146 achievement?). At the end of the interview, coaches were also invited to ask questions and  
147 elaborate on topics that they found important but were not covered during the interview. Five  
148 coaches were interviewed in Finnish by the fourth author, and five coaches who were  
149 comfortable with the language were interviewed in English by the second author.

#### 150 **Data analysis and representation**

151 All interviews were transcribed verbatim and then read through several times by the first  
152 author to become familiar with the data. Initial codes and memos were developed to record first  
153 impressions and ideas, and to inductively identify core themes and narratives holding together  
154 each participant’s account. Whilst five interviews had been conducted in Finnish, all notes and  
155 codes were written in English to allow the second and the third author to be involved in  
156 reviewing the emerging themes. Research meetings were held between the co-authors to discuss  
157 impressions and ideas and to share experiences from the actual interview situations and  
158 interactions that took place between the interviewer and the participant.

159 Thematic narrative analysis (25) was used to develop themes in a more systematic manner to  
160 include higher and lower order themes, and to involve psychological terminology. This stage of  
161 the analysis focused on identifying the building blocks or “what’s” of the stories, and sought to



162 compare and contrast central issues and themes across cases (25). In the final stage of the  
163 thematic analysis, the development of themes was guided by theoretical commitments in  
164 existential psychology and specifically the concepts of authenticity and choice. The thematic  
165 approach was then complemented by structural narrative analysis which sought to discern the  
166 core plot and the narrative types underlying each individual narrative (26). As Smith and Sparkes  
167 (26) explained, a structural analysis allows for identifying “the type(s) of narrative a person  
168 draws on from culture to shape their personal stories, and better know what type of story is  
169 guiding a person’s actions, thoughts, hopes, emotions, and psychological health” (p. 283). In this  
170 stage, the analysis focused on one participant’s account at a time to understand the internal logic  
171 and connections within each story. After completing a structural analysis for each participant’s  
172 story, similarities across cases were identified to form a typology of storylines.

173 In order to preserve participants’ voices, we represent our results in a form of composite  
174 vignettes (27), where accounts of multiple coaches were amalgamated into three different  
175 narratives. In constructing the vignettes, we drew upon the structural analysis where we had  
176 identified three different storylines, and identified narrative segments in interview transcripts that  
177 most clearly illuminated these narrative types. At this point, the selected interview segments that  
178 were in Finnish were translated to English by the first author. Narrative segments were then  
179 merged through re-organising and connecting sections to develop coherent and evocative stories  
180 using the participants’ first person voice. Insertions from the researchers were kept to the  
181 minimum and were only used to clarify the context, correct grammar, or connect sentences  
182 (28,29). Narrative segments were included from all participants’ stories.

## Results

183

### 184 **Vignette 1: Supporting athletic development and players in reaching their own goals**

185 *As a coach, I never had personal goals, for example I wanted to become a national league*  
186 *coach or something like that. All my work has targeted that individual players would develop as*  
187 *much as possible, that I could tell and teach those things that I know, and in that way help them*  
188 *move to a higher level. My main idea has been that I can give something to the players in their*  
189 *pursuit of their goals... So that as many as possible would become as good players as they can*  
190 *and have the potential to become [professional]. We try to give them the possibility to play*  
191 *hockey, try to teach them to be better players and we try to teach them why you should practice*  
192 *so many hours, if you want to go become pro players.*

193 *Of course the goal is that the team I am coaching at that time will be as successful as*  
194 *possible. The last five [players], I had to teach them more and more, but they can't be a part of*  
195 *the game team. It [also] takes too much practice time. Because we [the club] try to make players*  
196 *who can go to NHL, so we have to take care of the best players. So [the coaches] have to find the*  
197 *balance.*

198 *Many youth players have the dream of playing in NHL, but in reality only a small percentage*  
199 *will actually get there. The reality is that, even from the better players, only few even become*  
200 *national league players. Education, on the other hand, opens possibilities for the future. If and*  
201 *when they don't become professionals, they have [other] options in life. It is wise to tell the big*  
202 *mass quite early, that although they should have goals [in hockey], it should not come at the*  
203 *expense of education. It's important that coaches and team leaders give the message that*  
204 *education is truly important. [So] I try to keep them in that level that school comes first, and then*  
205 *hockey second. Unfortunately, many [professional] hockey players only start thinking what they*

206 *should do after they are over 30, and in these days it is difficult to find work without proper*  
207 *education. Yesterday, I was talking to one former pro player who told me that he knows a lot of*  
208 *players who are age of thirty-five, and they have nothing.*

209 *We don't really formally follow [how they do at school], but in the normal interaction with*  
210 *players we ask them how they are doing – also at school and in broader life, is everything in*  
211 *balance? We often have personal discussions [with players], [but] I admit that they're often*  
212 *much about hockey. Usually only when they already have difficulties [at school], then we*  
213 *interfere. Maybe we should be interested in these things earlier... For example, I don't know my*  
214 *players' [grades] – or how they are doing at school.*

## 215 **Vignette 2: Enjoyment and physically active lifestyle**

216 *I think that I'm more of an educator than a coach of the skills. Of course I have realised that*  
217 *from these 24 boys, zero to three go to the top. [For] others, the more important goals are that*  
218 *they now enjoy, they get to the physically active lifestyle model, and enjoy ice hockey. I want to*  
219 *feel like players enjoy training and doing what we do, that's definitely the most important,*  
220 *because it's their hobby, still they are not professionals. I'm not professional either so that's,*  
221 *that's probably the most important thing. Of course we do as high quality training as possible, so*  
222 *we enable those, who in [the] future may [be]come top players, [to] have the skill level at the*  
223 *right things in the juniors. But that's just, you know, we enable. So we see the other goals, or I*  
224 *see the other goals even more important than the skill level of ice hockey.*

225 *We actually talked about it yesterday, that if we are coming to training it takes probably two*  
226 *hours of your day, there is still 22 hours... I asked them what else is important and then first was*  
227 *probably eating, I guess, then sleep, and third was school so... It's very important how the*  
228 *coaches see the players, you know, how they feel and what's important to their life. They are*

229 teenagers, they are young adults, there is something more than just ice hockey. Always when I  
230 have those talks with players, we always talk about school as well. Those young boys are, you  
231 know, “no it’s not fun and it’s boring” and so on. I will try to respond to that, no but you have to  
232 take care of that. That’s the most important thing for you, beyond the ice hockey. You have to  
233 remember that not every one of you is going to make it as a career, so school is still important.

234 We have had couple of these events, when we had a game or training session on Saturday,  
235 [and] the school [also] had a school day. And it’s very obvious for me that of course they go to  
236 school. So you know, parents are, maybe they are not even asking anymore, but at the first time  
237 they were asking what to do. I said, go to school, of course you go to school, and then if the  
238 school days ends so that you can come to the games, you come to the games. [And when] we  
239 were in the West coast, we played two [away] games there, it was a Sunday. And when we came  
240 back, there was like one hour that everybody had to have a school book with them, and they had  
241 to at least be quiet. I don’t know if they did anything, but at least it was required. I said, [it’s] the  
242 same, I’m not playing with my [phone]. I’m reading as well, so it’s good for me as well.

### 243 **Vignette 3: Developing “good persons”**

244 [For me], it’s not so much about trying to teach them how to be athletes, it’s more like trying  
245 to teach them how to be a good person, how to be... How to live their life. And [I value] the  
246 possibility that I can be a part of that story, be a part of their everyday life. I don’t know what  
247 they’ll become, but to be a part of that story and, I don’t know, to have some sort of effect on  
248 them when they grow up. [So] we’re talking pretty much only about being a good person and  
249 then maybe something good will happen in hockey as well. And [also to be] a good ice hockey  
250 player, but main thing is [being a] good person.

251 *[As you grow older] you start seeing that hockey is only such a small part of this bigger*  
 252 *picture. I guess that's something that I try to tell the kids as well. Realising there are so many*  
 253 *things in life besides hockey. [But] I think in our sport, it's maybe harder than in other sports,*  
 254 *because everybody knows that you can earn money from playing hockey. It's really hard to tell a*  
 255 *16 or 17 or 18 year old kid that you will need this education in 20 years' time. They don't buy it.*  
 256 *They don't care. So that's why it's really important that you start to influence them early enough,*  
 257 *in third grade or fourth grade or fifth or sixth grade, so that it's kind of built in to them.*

258 *[In] every team I [have been] coaching, we have... [the] guys take their school books with*  
 259 *them. We study on the bus and it's a very good thing. In my team, 12 players [have] school*  
 260 *grades over the nine point [average]. For me it's [a] very big thing. [If the guy has] three or four*  
 261 *exams next week, I can say hey, go home and study. I don't want them [to] focus only [on] hockey*  
 262 *because [so few] guys every year go to the top. But I want them to practice as well as they can.*  
 263 *And they [also] go to school and make a good life.*

264 *I think the stories of other athletes [are important]. They hear stories that some pro athlete is*  
 265 *saying that I went through that path [combining sport and education]. If they are saying that*  
 266 *yeah it was doable, and it was easy, and yeah they really helped me go through that path... I*  
 267 *have a couple of good stories [about top players] that I keep on telling to the guys, but not too*  
 268 *many.*

## 269 **Discussion**

270 The first vignette exemplified the dominant narratives of sport coaching where the main task  
 271 of the coach is to focus on athletic development. This narrative structure, where the most  
 272 important aspects of sport are athletic development and achievement, penetrates all aspects of  
 273 elite sport and has been identified not only in elite athletes' stories (30), but also in research

274 literature asserting that “no doubt a degree of agreement exists in and about coaching, in that its  
275 primary purpose is about athlete learning and performance improvement” (31) p. 211). Within  
276 this narrative, discussion about education was tightly connected to the limited prospects for  
277 youth players to reach the professional status, and the short time span of the professional athletic  
278 career. As such, these narratives conformed to the dominant dual career discourses, where  
279 education has often been viewed as a way to prepare for a post-athletic career (9), or as a back-  
280 up plan for youth athletes that get de-selected, or for some other reason can’t secure professional  
281 contracts (16). For the participants represented in the first vignette, the coach’s job was to  
282 provide the possibility for the talented athletes to reach the professional status, but  
283 simultaneously outline realistic expectations “for the masses” for whom hockey would not  
284 provide a professional pathway.

285       Albeit recognising that the “official truth is, school first and hockey second” (coach 8),  
286 coaches within the first vignette had few examples about how that “truth” informed their daily  
287 practices and interactions with the players. Aware of the official club policies that for coaches “a  
288 minimum is that they take school seriously” (coach 6), all coaches mentioned that school is one  
289 of the topics they take up in one-to-one developmental discussions with players. However, when  
290 asked for more concrete examples, most of them did not recall specific incidents when they  
291 would have discussed education with their team, and did not know what kind of grades the  
292 players had at school. That is, whilst coaches were unanimous about the value of education for  
293 youth players, for most of them it had few implications for their practice. Such findings resonate  
294 with a study by Bean and Forneris (32) who found that coaches’ recognition of the value of life  
295 skills doesn’t necessarily imply having the skills explicitly integrated into coaching practices.

296 Within the first vignette, education was narratively constructed as “a plan B” for those who  
297 don’t “make it”, rather than something that should be pursued for its own sake. Similar to the  
298 observations by McGillivray and Macintosh (16), we may ask whether the hockey culture is  
299 experiencing a “movement towards a forced – or instrumental – engagement with education”  
300 (p.383). The lack of authentic alignment with the educational discourses was illustrated by coach  
301 8, who confessed that as a coach who is not so emotionally engaged, “it’s easy to tell them that  
302 you have to go to school and there is more [in life] than to play hockey”. However, as a father he  
303 had followed his more authentic narrative and advised his talented son that, “you have the chance  
304 to be a [professional] hockey player so practice a lot”. As such, it was implied that the  
305 professional prospects in ice hockey may easily lure the young players, their parents, and perhaps  
306 some coaches into the “NHL dream” narrative, leaving little consideration for exploring  
307 alternative life projects outside sports.

308 The second vignette illustrated the tension between performance and participation  
309 approaches to coaching. Such tensions have enduring presence in the narrative context of Nordic  
310 sport culture (33), and the vignettes revealed ambiguity within the ice hockey coaching  
311 community. For younger age groups, sport was mainly framed as a hobby rather than a  
312 (potential) career; however, in older age groups, the approaches were diverse. The coaches  
313 telling the second storyline had made an active choice to prioritise the non-elite pathway whilst  
314 also seeking to provide adequate challenge to the potential elite players. Given that sport  
315 participation would remain a hobby for the large majority of young players, schoolwork was  
316 described as the natural priority.

317 In contrast to the first vignette, the coaches in the second vignette could tell stories about  
318 concrete situations when they had discussed education and broader life issues with young

319 athletes and their parents. As such, the second vignette illustrated a closer alignment between  
320 stated personal values and actual practices than the first vignette. However, requiring athletes to  
321 sit quiet on the bus without checking if they were actually doing their schoolwork could still be  
322 interpreted as formal compliance with the club policy, rather than actual interest in players'  
323 educational engagement. Storying the coaching practice as a hobby indicated a lack of  
324 seriousness in engagement with the coach role, and perhaps undermined the potential influence a  
325 coach could have on players' life choices.

326 The third vignette was similar to the second one in constructing the coach's role as an  
327 educator rather than a teacher of athletic skills. The vignette aligns closely with the life skills  
328 literature (34) where sport is seen as one context for broader development as a person. Within  
329 this vignette, coaches also rejected the belief that mere participation would produce "good  
330 persons" (32), and aligned themselves with the approach that personal development should be  
331 actively facilitated by the coach. Similar to the second vignette, the third vignette described  
332 actual strategies used to engage players with schoolwork, and also exemplified the coach's  
333 knowledge of and pride in his players' educational achievement. Yet, the vignette also contained  
334 a more reflective account about the challenges in trying to influence young athletes whose  
335 dreams and aspirations may not coincide with adults' advice and official club policies. Similar to  
336 coaches in the study by Gould et al., (35), the coach stressed the importance of developing a  
337 good relationship with players in order to have an impact on their personal development. This  
338 coach also talked about the need for subtle means to influence players' life decisions, rather than  
339 simply telling the athletes that they must do their schoolwork properly. Telling stories about  
340 professional players who had successfully completed the dual career pathway was given as an  
341 example of how education could be presented as an attractive life project for players'



342 consideration. Such approach has similarities with the existential view on education, which  
343 Saeverot (20) described as a “kind of seduction where the teacher can ensnare the pupils, making  
344 them aware of, and perhaps interested in, another perspective which challenges their present  
345 attitude to life” (p.558).

346 Overall, the coaches put little trust on youth players’ ability to make responsible choices  
347 concerning education. Finnish youth national teams’ recent successes and consequent media  
348 attention were mentioned as sources of youth players’ unrealistic dreams, and coaches’ dominant  
349 perception was that everyone wanted to become a professional player. Whilst all coaches  
350 engaged with educational discourses and told that they considered athletes’ schoolwork  
351 important, the means to communicate these values to players were generally not well reflected  
352 upon. None of the coaches talked about working to increase athletes’ awareness of their  
353 possibilities and capacity to make choices, whereas many of them described authoritarian  
354 practices to ensure that athletes engaged with schoolwork. The danger is that, despite the good  
355 intentions, such approaches may actually increase the distance between the coach and the athlete  
356 (20). That is, the dominant authoritarian attitudes combined with an instrumental approach to  
357 education (a back-up or a plan B) does not seem to enhance athletes’ capacity for choice, and  
358 might not lead them to view education as an intrinsically meaningful life project.

359 From an applied perspective, it is important to recognise that if sport clubs wish to enact a  
360 policy about dual careers, coaches also need more support in developing means to implement  
361 that policy to their practical work. Many participants in the study mentioned that coaches “must  
362 be interested in players’ education”, but how this could be done was less well articulated. This  
363 finding supports previous studies that indicate that coaches seem to value life skills development  
364 in sport, but often might not know how to promote it, or describe how the positive development

365 takes place (32). A specific structural challenge for the Finnish context (in comparison to the  
366 American model, for example) is the separation of sport and school, and coaches often had  
367 difficulty in gaining information about what was happening in the schools. They didn't have  
368 access to any school reports, often didn't know the teachers, and mentioned that some parents did  
369 not want them to interfere with something that was "not their business". To advance integration  
370 of personal development and dual career agendas into coaching practices, it is important to  
371 support individual coaches through coaching education, but also target structures to facilitate  
372 better communication between sport clubs and schools.

373       Based on the interviews, it is clear that the coaches were informed about official policies and  
374 had adopted the dominant dual career discourses, constructing education as a back-up plan for  
375 those who couldn't realise their dreams in ice hockey. Yet, researchers and policy makers  
376 promoting these discourses should be aware of the instrumental ethos implied in these views, and  
377 seek to broaden the discussions to include transformative potential and intrinsic value of  
378 education for athletes, regardless whether sport becomes their professional pathway or not. It  
379 may be questioned whether dominant narratives communicated within current dual career  
380 policies encourage athletes to engage in personal reflection in order to make authentic choices  
381 concerning their embodied possibilities.

382       As a limitation of the present study, using one-shot interviews with coaches only revealed  
383 how they narratively construct their coaching practice, and not what they actually do. It is likely  
384 that social desirability of presenting positive attitudes towards dual career played a role in how  
385 coaches co-constructed their stories with the researchers. Moreover, given that that the stated  
386 coaching philosophies and actual practices often misalign (36), using observations in  
387 combination with interviews could develop a more complete picture of practices surrounding

388 dual career. In addition, some coaches had not given much prior thought to how they approach  
389 dual career, and therefore they might not have been able to articulate their views in rich detail.  
390 This could have been enhanced by, for example, multiple interviews or sending the coaches some  
391 questions for reflection prior to the interview.

## 392 **Conclusions**

393 The present study contributed to the limited literature on coaches' strategies to foster athletes'  
394 personal development with a specific focus on dual career. All study participants agreed that dual  
395 career was important for all athletes, either as an alternative life plan if the dreams of  
396 professionalism would not become true, or for facilitating the transition out from professional  
397 sport to the job market. Yet, there was a great diversity in the degree of integration of these  
398 attitudes to the coaching practice, from being an integral aspect of daily communication, to a  
399 topic that was taken up only in formal developmental discussion with players. In future studies, it  
400 will be valuable to examine how coaches and other support staff engage in dual career discourses  
401 in various national and sport sub-cultural contexts in order to better understand how current dual  
402 career policies are implemented in clubs and teams. Moreover, it is the researchers' task to  
403 challenge the dominant dual career discourses that inform policies, and question what these  
404 discourses work to omit and whether there are alternative (and better?) ones.

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