

November 2013

High Schools for Athletes Research Project

Extended Case Study:

Building A Bridge Between
Education And Sport



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Introduction

For many competitive athletes of high school age, sport training and academic study are often two opposing and incompatible challenges. The recognition of this challenge is not new, however work is moving ahead to develop and implement a standardized system that can share and promote best practice. The priority for many talented high school athletes may be to complete their high school education as rapidly as possible to progress into the collegiate sport system, where sport coaching provision and facilities of the highest possible standards are available to an international student market. However, students will not reach their collegiate goal unless supportive, focused and relevant academic and sporting provision of the highest quality is offered during their high school years.

Policymakers, government educational departments and sport ministries the world over have the ambition to fund and train athletes capable of representing their nation at the highest level of sport. Yet on the other hand there remains a clear responsibility to equip high school athletes with a quality academic education to successfully live life after sport. Not every competitive athlete will progress into professional sport for one of a variety of reasons - yet even for those who succeed against the odds in forging a career in competitive sport of any discipline; retirement from competitive professional sport typically arrives years before an athlete's 40th birthday.

This case study assesses three approaches to solving the challenge of bridging education and sport at a high school level.

- Firstly, the work of the International Baccalaureate and the World Academy of Sport to develop a partnership aimed at helping students of International Baccalaureate World Schools achieve optimal academic and sporting results during their pre-college Diploma programme, and a parallel project to quality-assure sport high schools as a pioneering step towards creating a new network of accredited Athlete Friendly Education Centres.
- Secondly, an overview of the policy and development work conducted in 2010 by the Canadian Sport Schools organization in British Columbia, to define an ideal partnership model to improve quality control standards, knowledge transfer and partnership working across Canada's network of sport high schools.
- Thirdly, an overview of research conducted in 2012 by FA Consulting and Coaching on the Swiss approach to education and elite sport, including the concept of quality labels, introduced by Swiss Olympic in 2004, and how these contribute to an overall process to support dual careers for athletes.

Consistent Challenges and Diverse Solutions

The five case studies of sport high schools conducted by the World Academy of Sport in 2013 represented a global cross section of schools where young people of outstanding athletic talent can achieve a balanced focus on highly specialized sport training and a high school level of study. Although located in different and contrasting areas of the world, in different cultures and with varying levels of access to resources and facilities, common characteristics are nevertheless apparent in each school:

- A strong focus on student welfare and support, often coordinated by teachers who are themselves former athletes.
- An academic curriculum with flexibility in its scheduling and a tolerance of long periods of managed absence, for students away on competition or training tours.
- A network of excellent partnerships to connect the competitive athletes in each school to organizations such as sport clubs, governing bodies of sport and medical institutions.
- A higher than average student-staff ratio, and a typically lower than average dropout rates.
- A focus, wherever possible, on the accommodation of competitive athletes into regular high school education programmes. More often than not, sport schools seek to build a structure of support around elite sport students to help them to integrate into a regular programme of high school education.

In many ways, this echoes research on a wider scale by Radtke, S., & Coalter, F. (2007)¹, who conducted a review of sport schools in ten countries globally (eight within Europe) and concluded that although the format of sport schools can vary depending on the educational system in place in each country or region – for example, some may be part of a national system and others may be relatively independent and autonomous institutions – a number of universal characteristics tend to define the goals of sport schools in meeting the needs of competitive athletes:

- *The need to integrate young athletes within standard secondary schools for their own educational and social benefit (although this might not always be possible for sports with specific locational requirements, e.g. skiing)*
- *The need to cooperate with sports federations to decide on the relevant definition of 'elite pupil' status.*
- *The need to include pupils of all abilities and educational levels in sport schools.*
- *The need for flexibility in the curriculum (achieved in a variety of ways).*
- *The possibility of permitting pupil athletes to extend the duration of their studies.*

¹ Radtke, S., & Coalter, F. (2007). 'Sport schools: An international review'. University of Stirling.

- *A variety of flexible educational support systems (e.g. pupil partners, summer schools, distance learning, mentoring).*
- *The need to provide boarding facilities. This is especially so where expertise is limited, where sports require particular facilities, or to achieve some degree of critical mass in certain sports.*
- *Close (and ongoing) working relationships with sporting federations for the provision of elite coaching and the assessment of progress.*
- *Close liaison with the elite pupils' local team/sports clubs and coaches.*

Across the sports high school sector as a whole, these principles represent a common set of ideal goals that would best match the requirements of student athletes the world over. These principles and characteristics have formed the basis for the development of an 'Athlete Friendly Education Centre' standard and this is explored further in part one of this case study.

Previous research from the World Academy of Sport

(<http://www.ibo.org/announcements/2013/waos.cfm>) also highlighted negative perceptions held by athletes and parents of the educational options in many sport high schools, particularly in relation to a lack of flexibility in the delivery of educational programmes. Evidence has also shown that, for some athletes, a preference may currently exist to defer post 16 education in order to commit to the training required to move forward their athletic career – but, more often than not, the numbers of athletes who actually return to education after the conclusion of their sporting career is low. As a result, career progression is often an issue, and finding a way for athletes to build a viable career path with long term “job security” is a concern across the sports industry.

It remains apparent that the ways in which state education departments, regional school boards and individual sport high schools approach these challenges – and the extent to which they successfully meet the needs of student athletes – varies considerably.

- There appear to be few standardized models of established 'best practice' in the sport high school sector. Although studies into very successful sport high schools are relatively commonplace – over the last decade the subject of several detailed research programmes by various institutions - the success factors underpinning the best performing high schools in this specialized sector do not appear to have been converted into a standardized template of educational techniques that can be replicated and implemented in a regional, national or global format. There are exceptions such as the Swiss and Canadian models, one of which is discussed later in this paper.
- Similarly, there appears to be no universally accepted process to measure the performance and quality of sport high schools, and the extent to which they balance and achieve optimal sporting and academic outcomes.
- Where best practice does occur, there appears to be no universal forum to disseminate this work and to advance this specialized educational and technical sector.

Part One - Providing a Global Solution

The International Baccalaureate

The World Academy of Sport, as a global education institution and forum for the sport sector, approached this challenge by developing a standard of best practice for sport high schools, underpinned by the ambition to create the highest possible quality of high school education for competitive athletes that could be scaled and applied anywhere in the world. In sharing this vision with the International Baccalaureate (IB), the World Academy of Sport created a unique partnership that, after several years of joint research and development, launched in June 2013 a strategy to test and implement a pilot project to work with selected International Baccalaureate World Schools to provide a flexible academic programme for competitive student athletes.

The International Baccalaureate offers four high quality international education programmes to more than one million students in 145 countries. Its most well known programme is the Diploma Programme for 16-19 years-olds. For 45 years, IB programmes have gained a reputation for rigour and high academic standards, for preparing students for life in a globalized 21st century, and for helping to develop citizens who will create a better, more peaceful world.

One of the fundamental components of a consistent and high quality standard of sport high school education is the provision of a flexible curriculum. Competitive athletes at a high school level often attend regular training schedules in morning and evening hours that overlap the standard high school teaching timetable. Additional absences for tournaments and extended training sessions can further restrict the student athlete's ability to fully integrate with a school timetable. A core principle behind this pilot project is the recognition that competitive athletes are therefore different to other categories of learners; their unique needs are best met by a flexible academic timetable of the highest possible quality.

Concurrency of learning

Student participation in the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme course of learning is measured strictly by two years of contact time; missing significant numbers of class sessions immediately disadvantages a student who wishes to pursue the full diploma. Linked to this is the concept of *concurrency of learning*, a unique feature of the International Baccalaureate programme that ensures a high standard of learning to educate students across several Diploma subjects in a way that interconnects and adds educational value to each subject through a standardized teaching methodology.

In order to successfully achieve the Diploma, students must complete their studies within a two year timeframe. As noted above, this can be a challenge for many students who are undertaking a rigorous course of study whilst training for competitive sports at a high level.

"Teachers and schools have a responsibility to help students make meaningful connections between different disciplines through providing instruction, teaching schedules (often also referred to as timetables) and learning environments that support this process. Concurrency of learning is expected in the Diploma Programme as it

*provides one important means of supporting interdisciplinary learning.*²

The Pilot Project

The International Baccalaureate defines its programmes as courses to help students to develop the intellectual, personal, emotional and social skills to live, learn and work in a rapidly globalizing world. These outcomes are as meaningful and beneficial to a student athlete as any other category of learner. The challenge for the World Academy of Sport and International Baccalaureate partnership was one of implementing a system to minimize the number of missed timetabled teaching sessions, to ensure that student athletes can make the most of the opportunities to enhance their interdisciplinary learning through the concurrency model applied by the International Baccalaureate.

In 2012, work began on a pilot project with a select number of International Baccalaureate World Schools. Firstly, all IB World Schools were contacted, briefed on the initiative and invited to submit an expression of interest to participate in a pilot project. Interested schools were then asked to self-assess the challenges they face in teaching the Diploma programme to competitive athletes, and to outline how they would like to structure their IB-guided approach through a pilot project.

Schools were also asked to select a preference from one of two options for the pilot framework:

1. An extended (up to four year) diploma, whereby competitive athletes are provided with a timetable combining their sport and educational commitments over a period of up to four academic years. This will allow student athletes to extend the last two years of secondary school by up to two further years and to improve their sport, school and life balance. Students will receive individual certificates based on each individual Diploma programme course or
2. An additional tailored programme (a modified timetable and format of participation) to better support athletes to achieve the normal diploma in the standard two years. Most schools specialize in several sports, highlighting the common challenges and the need, above all, for flexibility.

A number of IB World Schools have now been shortlisted to participate in the pilot study with a view to launching the project for the 2014 academic year.

The development of an 'Athlete Friendly Education Centre' standard

Critical to the success of the pilot project initiative is the need to assess every participating school, to ascertain whether each individual institution is robust enough to run a pilot programme and to measure the outcomes of the pilot against a standardised set of criteria. Following joint research and development work between the World Academy of Sport and the International Olympic Committee, informed in part by earlier work of several independent studies into the general characteristics that define successful sport schools, a detailed assessment framework based on the following broad categories of evaluation will be used:

² 'Disciplinary and interdisciplinary understanding', Diploma Programme: From principles into practice, IB 2009

- How effectively does the school integrate academic and sport priorities, and is this implemented in a holistic, school-wide process?
- How many students in the school are of competitive athlete standard (supported by an independent, signed declaration from the relevant national federation of sport), and what are their current academic results in comparison to the school's student body as a whole?
- Are the athletic facilities (and athletic accommodation, where appropriate) local and of the appropriate standard? Is support (measured relative to the standard of services provided to a national squad in each relevant sport) in place for sport medicine, nutrition, coaching and mentoring?
- Is the school's staffing structure qualified and committed to supporting competitive athletes, with at least one full time member of staff committed to supporting this group of learners? Does the school maintain regular links with the relevant national sport federation?
- Does the school provide athlete-centred pastoral care, including lifestyle management support, counselling and the maintenance of regular links with parents and the wider 'athlete entourage'.

Schools that submit for evaluation and successfully meet the defined competency criteria will be accredited as 'World Academy of Sport Athlete Friendly Education Centres'. This accreditation will also be open to schools that are not participating in the International Baccalaureate pilot project – the first steps towards creating a worldwide grouping of quality-assured sport high schools.

Although in its early stage of implementation, the pilot project developed by the World Academy of Sport and the International Baccalaureate will launch in 2014 to test a new system of flexibility within a standardised and carefully managed educational framework.

This initiative, twinned with the Athlete Friendly Education Centre accreditation programme, will for the first time create a community of sport high schools that are committed to give student athletes the opportunity to balance sport and academic priorities as part of a global network of best practice standards. Further details can be found at <http://www.olympic.org/content/olympic-athletes/athletes-space/entourage/schools/>

Part Two – Providing a standardized solution

The Canadian Sport School Model

Policy work carried out by the British Columbia Canadian Sport Centre represents a further example of an initiative to unify standards of education and sport coaching for student athletes through a structured process and a pilot project.

Education in Canada, a vast country with relatively disconnected centres of population, is largely within the regional jurisdiction of each of ten provinces. Although high school level programmes to support competitive athletes exist in each province, and examples

of good sport high schools can be found across the country, the overall provision is subject to little standardisation or quality control.

In July 2010 the Pacific Canadian Sport Centre (British Columbia) conducted a research programme to assess both the current status of sport high school education in Canada and to identify best practice. Drawing on existing contemporary research of the sport high school models globally³, the authors found that:

- *Current or former sport school student athletes won 82% of German Olympic medals from 2001 – 2004*
- *Austria ski school athletes won 90% of the Austria ski medals at the Olympic Games from 1992 – 2006*
- *National Sport School (Calgary) current or former students made up 10% of Team Canada at 2006 Torino Winter Olympics*
- *10 INSEP athletes competed for France at the 2004 Olympics in Athens (Radkte & Coulter, 2007)*

The Quebec Sport-Etude system was identified as a model of best practice within Canada. Based closely on models followed in other countries (most notably, *Sport Etudes Lausanne, Switzerland*, established in 2002 and the subject of a World Academy of Sport case study in 2013) the Pacific Canadian Sport Centre characterised the core features of the Quebec Sport-Etude system as follows:

- Students in the Quebec sport-etude system spend 60% of their active school time in the classroom in regular timetabled classes, and the remaining 40% of their time in sport classes or training.
- To qualify as a sport-etude institution, each school must meet standard criteria established by the Quebec Ministry of Education, Leisure and Sport. Formal agreements must be established between the high school, relevant sport federations and any sport organisations (clubs, facilities and support centres) and these must clearly define the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder in the sport-etude system.
- The Ministry of Education, Leisure and Sport also organises conferences to facilitate the sharing of best practice and to coordinate policy and implementation of the province-wide programme.

By referencing the Quebec sport-etude system as one of best practice (and by drawing on the research by Radkte and Coulter cited earlier in this report), the Pacific Canada Sport School identified an ideal model that would standardise and improve the provision of sport schools nationally, and were able to contrast this against the overall lower standard of sport high schools across Canada. The challenge was not one of creating more sport schools, but instead to standardise the existing range of schools and to integrate them more closely into provincial education programmes.

³ Way, R., Repp, C & Brennan, T (2010). 'Sport schools in Canada: The Future Is Here.' Canadian Sport Centre Pacific.

"Currently, the majority of sport academies (in Canada) are very disconnected from both the education system and the sport system... Sport funding of organizations do not include sport schools in any accountability framework. Many school sport organizations do not connect to them but rather regulates against connection. PSOs (Provincial Sport Organisations) with the exception of Hockey do not include sport schools in their long term athlete development plans or strategic plans... Quebec's sport-etude program stands in stark contrast to the majority of programs in other provinces, with its extensive partnership agreements and focus on high performance athletes.

Further, there is little transfer of knowledge between neither existing sport schools nor forums organized to facilitate sharing. The rich knowledge existing in high performance training centres is not made available to the sport academies; and best practices from Quebec are not being implemented nationally.

Thus due to this situation it is clear there is a fantastic opportunity to advance a sport schools and long-term athlete development across the country as currently the situation is vibrant due to the explosion in the numbers of school delivering sport academies and the number of student athletes, who with their parents want to enroll in these programs of choice."⁴

The Partnership Approach

Following this research, a partnership vision was developed that would bring together the most influential and relevant sport organisations in each Canadian province to implement a reformed network of sport high schools, with the consistent aims of implementing agreed quality control standards, disseminating best practice, standardising credit offerings and, above all, providing the best possible sport and academic provision for competitive athletes. The partnership proposed is broad and ambitious, bringing together nine separate organisations (or their equivalent) in each province to work together towards a single project goal:

Organisation	Role	Recommendations
<i>Provincial Ministries of Education</i>	Develop Sport Schools and maintain quality control	Research and develop new education models, funding for sport schools to balance academic and sport priorities, develop a sport academy model for middle and elementary schools, and develop standards and policies for sport schools.
<i>Provincial Ministries of Health / Sport / Healthy Living</i>	Raise standards and develop accountability frameworks	Work with multisport organisations to plan and fund sport schools, work with the provincial Ministry of Education to develop performance standards.
<i>Network of Canadian Sport Centres</i>	Provide leadership and training for sport high schools in the context of long term athlete development plans	Integrate sport schools into CSC long term planning, increase awareness among major funders of the sport school initiative and provide a link between sport schools and regional sport centres. Also determine performance standards, provide advice and training, assist the startup of new sport schools.

⁴ Way, R., Repp, C & Brennan, T (2010). 'Sport schools in Canada: The Future Is Here.' Canadian Sport Centre Pacific.

<i>Provincial Multi-Sport Organizations</i>	Supporting role	Fund initiatives to advance sport schools, integration of sport schools into individual sports' long term athlete development pathways.
<i>Schools and School Districts</i>	Education of students and provision of sport support for student athletes	Assist in assessing the performance of sport schools and identify areas for improvement, share best practice and assist in knowledge transfer.
<i>Provincial Sport Federations</i>	Provide a link between 'regular' school sport programmes and integrate elite student athletes into sport schools	Develop principles and procedures to support students in sport schools, enhance performance standards in sport schools, identify and allocate sport school students into the most appropriate competition structures (provincial sport competition or school sport competition).
<i>Coaches Association of Canada</i>	Provide education to sport coaches	Educate sport coaches in terms of the sport high school credit system standards for graduation.
<i>National Sport Organisations</i>	Assist in developing sport specific academy models	Create a resource for sport schools from a common generic template, develop a national curriculum and licensing system for sport schools, input into policies and procedures, skills testing, pilot project guidelines, training and resource support.
<i>Provincial Sport Organisations</i>	To partner with sport schools and school districts to support student athlete training	Include sport schools in long term athlete development plans, and act as partners or agents of national sport organisations.

The partnership vision represented in the above table is in many ways reflected in the three educational institution hubs integrated into an existing Canadian Sport School model in British Columbia: The Pacific Institute for Sport and Exercise at The Interurban campus of the Camosun College in Victoria, the Canadian Sport School Kelowna and the Northern BC Campus of the Canadian Sport School in Prince George. Collectively they form the 'BC Canadian Sport School', operating to achieve the following school-centered and student-driven objectives⁵:

- Reducing the academic classroom time required by student athletes compared to traditional schools. The Sport School recognises the sport-specific training that athletes do and provides athletes with high school credits for that training.
- Making students better all-round athletes. Sport School seminars in nutrition, injury prevention and sport studies provide athletes with the tools to improve their performance and to teach them strategies for tracking and monitoring their physical and mental health.
- Providing support, coordination and advocacy. When athletes miss school to compete they often fall behind on their homework, miss exams and spend most of the year trying to catch up. The Canadian Sport School supports the athletes by liaising with the athlete's home school to help coordinate homework and exam writing.

To date, this approach has developed a clear recognition of the most significant challenges facing sport high schools in Canada, and has drawn together a solution in terms of a consistent, quality-assured standard template for sport high schools. This template has the potential to be implemented as a scalable pilot project, as the first step towards developing a nationwide sport school project.

⁵ Canadian Sport School website: <http://www.thecanadiansportschool.com>

The Swiss Approach to Education and Elite Sport

Research undertaken by FA Consulting & Coaching for the IOC⁶ examined a group of Swiss Olympic certified educational institutions and one foundation in Switzerland which help athletes to achieve success on and off the field. The institutions were:

- Stiftung Sport Gymnasium Davos (SSDG) – A Swiss Olympic Sport School
- Alte Kantonsschule Aarau and Scuola Professionale per Sportivi d'Elite (SPSE) – Both Swiss Olympic Partner Schools
- Le Centre Sport Etudes of Lausanne (CSEL) – A Foundation facilitating education and professional sport.

The study used the input-process-output model to demonstrate how the right combination of inputs i.e. the Swiss system, coupled with an efficient process (athlete friendly educational institutions), may produce the desired output of helping athletes to succeed in education, employment, life and elite sport.



The study observed that the **input level** tends to set the context where education and sport are successfully rooted. The Swiss education system is designed to bring education and sport together by offering a minimum level of sport during the six years of primary school and this is legislated at federal level. This is further reinforced by the Swiss Olympic concept of '12 building blocks to success'⁷ which forms the basis of talent development in Switzerland.

As student athletes move through lower and upper secondary education, the balance between education and sport becomes harder to achieve and the **process level** highlights how the system in place can deliver the desired output(s).

Swiss Olympic decided to bridge education and elite sport and in 2004 introduced two categories of quality labels – '*Swiss Olympic Sport School*' and '*Swiss Olympic Partner School*'. Sport schools tend to provide a systematic approach under one roof whereas partner schools tend to have a more facilitative approach. As of 2011/12, there were approximately 50 'label' schools, supporting some 2,500 students, of which five were Swiss Olympic Sport Schools and the remainder were Swiss Olympic Partner Schools. In addition to these Swiss Olympic quality labels, there are additional systems and structures in place that support dual careers for athletes such as Canton recognition of

⁶ Swiss Structure of "Education & Elite Sport" – Best Practice? by FA Consulting & Coaching, 2012

⁷ http://www.swissolympic.ch/Portaldata/41/Resources/04_ethik/ethik_charta/soziales_umfeld/12_Bausteine_zum_Erfolg_-_Grundlage_der_Nachwuchsforderung_d.pdf

'competitive sport friendly' institutions and the Center of Sport and Study in Lausanne which is structured as a foundation.

At the **output level** of the three step model, the study identified a number of features or success factors that are exhibited by the educational institutions which help to support the delivery of the outputs:

Infrastructure

- The quality label approach provides consistent recognition of an athlete friendly institution which helps with recognition and funding.
- Other public and private initiatives such as the Centre Sport Etude in Lausanne also have a role to play.
- Direct provision or access to training facilities and sometimes boarding facilities is an important component.

School management and administration

- A flexible approach is required to balance the student athletes' needs whilst ensuring that compliance with educational standards is upheld.

Teachers and lecturers

- Athlete friendly institutions tend to offer highly versatile and 'service minded' teaching staff who are willing to support athletes.

Technology

- Making lessons available through distance learning and other flexible approaches via an intranet or the internet ensures that athletes can keep up with their studies while they are training or competing.

The study concluded that the current system is efficient and in particular endorses the significant value of the 50 or so Swiss Olympic labeled institutions. However the study also recognizes the need for the Swiss system to be enhanced by an alignment of elite sport and university education and vocational schools and private sector initiatives.

Conclusion

The International Baccalaureate and the World Academy of Sport Programme, and the specific solutions developed in Canada and Switzerland, demonstrate that the challenge of providing high quality provision for student athletes can be successfully tackled. Crucially, the first step in this process for both cases, and indeed for any coordinating body seeking to build or reform its provision services to competitive athletes of high school age, is the recognition that athletes are a special category of learner with specific needs that are not always fully met by the conventional and relatively inflexible models of mainstream high school education.

The second step in this universal process is the development of a pilot project that seeks to meet the specific needs of competitive athletes, based firstly on an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of existing provision, and then the development of a template that can be implemented across several institutions to test the new methodology.

It may be the case that a system of full standardisation will never be achieved and should not be sought. Each school, each district and each country is likely to be different. The profiles of students and the cultural expectations of parents, educators and coaches will differ, as will the demands and technical requirements of each individual sport and the quality and availability of sport training facilities in each high school. Nevertheless, the implementation of quality control standards, the sharing of best practice and the development and maintenance of defined partnerships that seek to bring together the best expertise from where it resides within any national sport system are all universal, necessary and achievable objectives.

World Academy of Sport, November 2013