

# ***A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO THE DUAL CAREER OF THE STUDENT-ATHLETE***

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## **An Innovative Sport-Focused Entrepreneurship Bootcamp - ELCAMP**

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## **Abstract**

The sports career of high-level athletes always has an end and it occurs for various reasons such as injuries, decreased performance, lack of financial support, among others. It happens at different ages with economic support that depends both on the sport and on the sporting level. Faced with this situation, high-level athletes in many cases generate economic income and/or savings to be able to start an investment in business development, which could be linked to sport due to knowledge of the activity and the association of their curriculum. But in this process, not all athletes have the knowledge and skills to start a working life according to the demands of the labor market and errors and mismanagement could happen that generate a serious social problem because the athlete can see his economy greatly affected. Their insertion into the job market is still important. In order to improve this situation, the ELCAMP project (An Innovative Sport-focused Entrepreneurship Bootcamp) was generated through a methodology of analysis of the situation and detection of the training needs of high-level athletes at the end of their career or already retired, establishing a formative curriculum that was implemented in an adaptable and accelerated program. The results of the process have generated great acceptance among the participants and interest among the different stakeholders, concluding that this type of training is practical and direct and meets the needs and expectations of high-level athletes.

**Keywords:** bootcamp, entrepreneurship, olympics, high level athletes, sport business, dual career.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. *Dual career of athletes (elite and Paralympic athletes)*

In the last decades, elite athletes have increased their training hours (Conzelmann & Nagel, 2003). The more time athletes spend competing with and training youth, the greater their chance of preparing for a future career (Heinemann, 1998). The concept of *dual career* refers to the challenge of combining a sports career with studies or work (Ryba et al., 2015). Dual Career (DC) is briefly defined as a “path focused primarily on sport, but which also includes study or employment” (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2015, p.1). Nowadays, it is crucial to consider the athlete from a holistic perspective. Although the sports career is made up of different clearly differentiated stages, such as the initiation, learning, start of the competition, competition at a higher level and sports retirement (Guidotti et al., 2015; Lupo et al., 2015; Stambulova, 2007), there are other equally important dimensions in personal development. Research has shown that athletes face demands in various domains of development, including athletic, psychological, psychosocial, academic/vocational, financial, and legal (Wylleman, 2019; Wylleman et al., 2013). Likewise, previous studies indicate that the intervention and support of these athletes must be approached in a comprehensive manner (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2018; Torregrosa et al., 2004).

### 1.2. *Transition to the post-sport career*

The transition to career after sport or athletic retirement is an unavoidable stage for athletes that combines sporting aspects (such as the reasons for ending their sporting career and the satisfaction in it) with non-sporting aspects relevant to starting a new life. Retired athletes must know how to manage this new stage of their lives, start or continue studies or work, rethink their personal identity and renew their lifestyle and social networks. Resources that help athletes in this transition to a post-sport career should include: (a) Advance retirement planning

while the athlete is still active in sport, (b) Voluntary completion of the sports career, (c) Exploration of multiple personal identities and positive experiences in roles other than athlete (eg, as a student or employee), and (d) Effective social support from family, coach, peers, player associations and sports organizations.

All these elements could facilitate the subjective control that athletes have over the withdrawal process and their active coping strategies to address the main challenges of transition. On the other hand, a purely sports-focused identity can lead to an identity crisis (i.e. a misinterpretation of themselves), while a lack of support from coaches, teammates, player organizations and sports entities can generate additional difficulties in retirement planning and subsequent adaptation. The more the athletes are focused exclusively on sport (for example, by working under a professional contract), the more vulnerable they will be during the transition to a post-sport career.

### **1.3. Sports entrepreneurship**

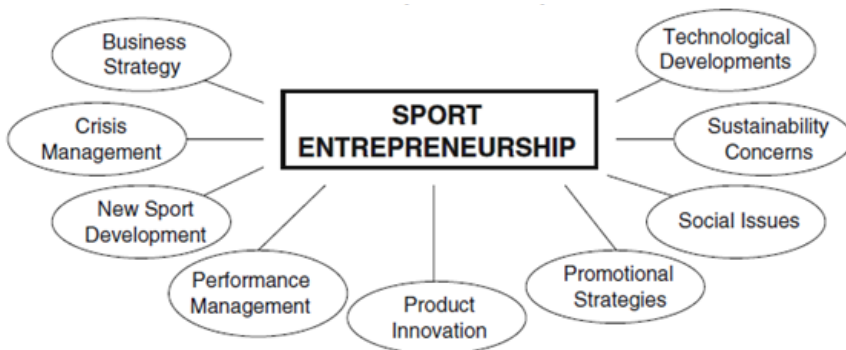
Sport as an industry is among the largest in the world and cuts across other industries, including education and tourism, which have a comprehensive focus on social innovation and social entrepreneurship. Sport has become ingrained in the social fabric of most countries in the world and offers a unique perspective on entrepreneurship. The sports entrepreneurial process is usually initiated by organizations, people or governments that are inserted in both economic and social spheres (Ratten, 2011, 2014).

Entrepreneurship implies that people in the sporting context develop a mindset that encourages innovation. An entrepreneurial mindset is defined as “the way of thinking about business that focuses on creating opportunity in uncertainty and goes hand in hand with a growth-oriented perspective, flexibility, creativity, innovation, and renewal” (Harms et al., 2009, p. 68). Sports entrepreneurs encourage change and continuous innovation by looking for future trends and opportunities. Therefore, sports entrepreneurs can be

defined as people who are innovative, proactive and take risks in the sports field when developing a venture. These entrepreneurs may have experience in a specific industry (Klepper, 2001) or in a niche area such as sports.

Sports-based entrepreneurship is defined as any form of business or venture in a sporting context. Previous research has discussed the importance of innovation in sport (Mullin et al., 2007; Schwarz & Hunter, 2008). The main characteristics of entrepreneurship are innovation, proactivity and risk taking (Holt et al., 2007). In the sports context, these characteristics are important in both for-profit and non-profit types of sport. Through sport, new ideas can thrive and provide the foundation for entrepreneurship to occur. Sports entrepreneurship is dynamic and impacts various management areas, such as business strategy, crisis management, development of new sports, performance management, product innovation, promotional strategies, social issues, the concerns of sustainability and technological advances (Ratten, 2010) (Figure 1).

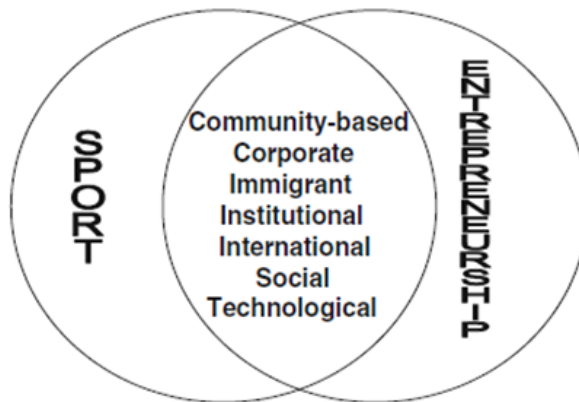
**Figure 1. Dynamic aspects of sport-based entrepreneurship (Ratten, 2010)**



There are numerous types of entrepreneurship that occur in sport, including community-based entrepreneurship, corporate entrepreneurship, ethnic entrepreneurship, immigrant entrepreneurship, institutional entrepreneurship, international entrepreneurship, social

entrepreneurship, technological entrepreneurship, and female entrepreneurship (Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Sport-based entrepreneurship categories (Ratten, 2010)**



## 2. Objectives of the ELCAMP project

With the developed concepts of dual career and the transition of the athlete from the sports career to the job market through taking advantage of the economic development capacities together with the image of the athlete, the ELCAMP project was born. It focuses on strengthening the skills and competences of elite athletes. Paralympians in sport-focused entrepreneurship, using innovative methods and connecting athletes with each other and others interested in entrepreneurship.

The main motive and objective of this project is to support the implementation of the EU Guidelines on Dual Careers for Athletes through the development of a sport-focused entrepreneurship program with innovative approaches through a modular bootcamp curriculum, training toolkits and learning, mentoring and networking platform in line with the needs and expectations of elite and Paralympic athletes.

To develop this project, a dual professional support mechanism was needed for elite and Paralympic athletes in order to initiate, develop,

implement and scale their business ideas and transform them into socio-economic values for them and the sports industry. This part was implemented with an innovative entrepreneurship bootcamp curriculum through gamification-based learning, networking and mentoring platform to support the employment of these athletes in the sports labor market.

### **3. ELCAMP Methodology**

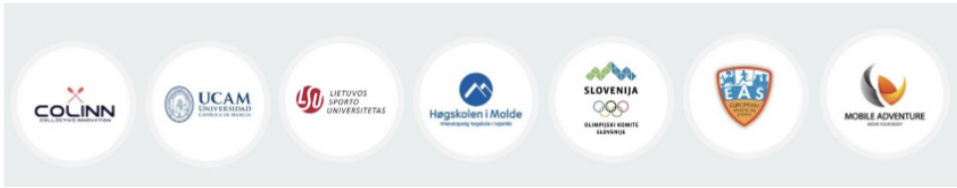
#### **3.1. Population, target groups**

The population to which the project was directed are elite athletes and Paralympics from Spain, Slovenia, Norway, Italy, Poland and Lithuania. The final beneficiaries of the project are talented and retired athletes, sports entrepreneurs, sports organizations, start-ups, accelerators and incubators, innovation and technology centers/networks, universities and investors from all over Europe.

#### **3.2. Working group, consortium**

The project partnership structure was formed by stakeholders from different levels. The project consortium has a social enterprise working on sports innovation and entrepreneurship (Collective Innovation), three expert universities in dual majors and sports entrepreneurship (UCAM and Lithuania Sports University, Molde University College), an umbrella sports organization at European level (The European Paralympic Committee), a national-level sports umbrella organization (The National Olympic Committee of Slovenia), a European athletes network (The European Network of Athletes as Students) and a sport-related technology expert partner (Mobile Adventure from Poland) (Figure 3).

**Figure 3. ELCAMP project partners**



### 3.3. *Bootcamp curriculum development*

This part of the project consisted of four phases. In the first one, a bibliographic search was carried out and with the results of that search a draft curriculum was created that was contrasted by a group of employer experts. Later it was tested with a survey to determine which one of these were the topics most in demand by the target groups. Finally the experts from the project consortium established the training modules for the course and the gamified tools for its development.

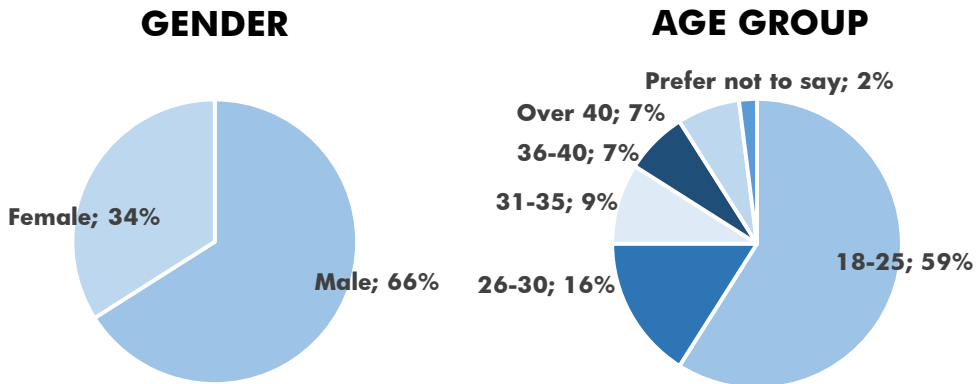
In the first phase of the development of the course, a report was made with a bibliographic search on DC entrepreneurship and accelerated learning courses. This search had two phases, one for each participating country and later an executive report integrated with all the partners.

Subsequently, an interview format with mentors was developed to develop the understanding of sport-focused business competencies. This action was carried out by comparing and evaluating 10 companies/startups focused on sports.

The next phase was to develop and implement a survey on training needs analysis of elite and Paralympic athletes in sports-focused entrepreneurship that was conducted between the universities of UCAM and Lithuania Sports University, Molde University College. Both in the different interviews and surveys, approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Catholic University of Murcia (UCAM).

The results of this survey were presented at international conferences based on a sample of 186 participants (122 men and 64 women), the older groups being between 18-25 years old (59%) and 26-30 years old (16%) shown in Figure 4.

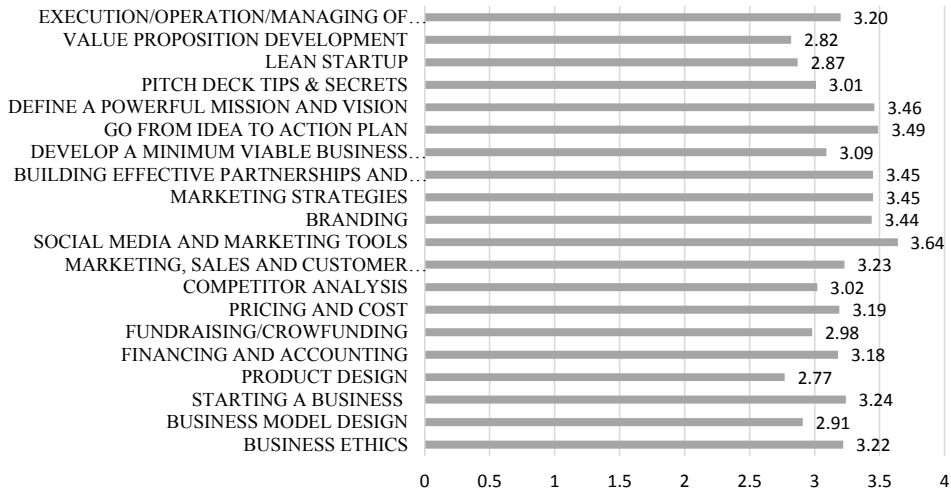
**Figure 4. Gender results and age group**



Regarding educational level, it should be noted that, in general, participants with a university degree (n=121) are the most prominent, followed by those with a master's degree (n=22) and secondary education or equivalent (n=22). Based on the results on the status of the participants, the vast majority are full-time students (n=53), followed by full-time employees (n=45) and scholarship athletes (n=27). The type of sport with the highest percentage of participation in all countries is individual (55%), followed by team sports (38%).

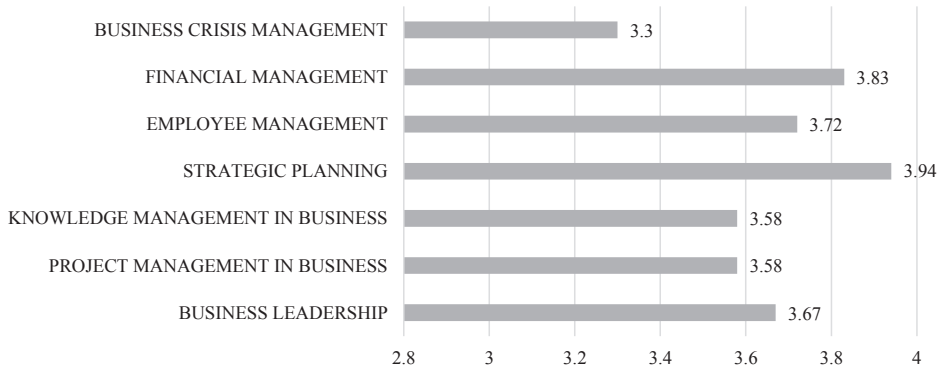
As the most relevant results in terms of training needs analysis in entrepreneurship focused on sport, this part of the questionnaire corresponds to the choice of a series of answers according to the degree of interest of the participants in the topics, how much they need it in their training, following a 5 Likert scale. Regarding business knowledge, the participants highlighted social networks and marketing tools (M=3.65) and moving from the idea to the action plan (M=3.49). (Figure 5).

**Figure 5. General entrepreneurial knowledge**



Referring to business awareness, the participants highlighted the skills to transfer the best means of communication for the transmission of messages ( $M=3.95$ ) and the skills to search for new information ( $M=3.89$ ); in the opportunity creation business, participants valued decision-making ( $M=3.53$ ) and problem-solving skills ( $M=3.49$ ) more highly; concerning business management, participants highlighted strategic planning ( $M=3.94$ ) and financial management ( $M=3.83$ ); with respect to the social and social skills of entrepreneurs, the participants value negotiation skills more ( $M=3.63$ ) and social networks and skills to maintain with employees ( $M=3.53$ ) (Figure 6) and finally in terms of the key focuses of SportsTech, the participants highlighted the monitoring and analytics ( $M=3.53$ ) and the sale of tickets and merchandising and the training and recruitment ( $M=3.45$ ).

**Figure 6. General entrepreneurial social/soft skills**



Once the information was collected (literature review, interview, survey), a focus group meeting was organized to evaluate the research findings and determine training needs, preparing a ELCAMP curriculum according to the needs found (Figure 7).

**Figure 7. Sport-focused entrepreneurship bootcamp curriculum**



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**Intellectual Output 1**

**Sport-Focused  
Entrepreneurship  
Bootcamp Curriculum**

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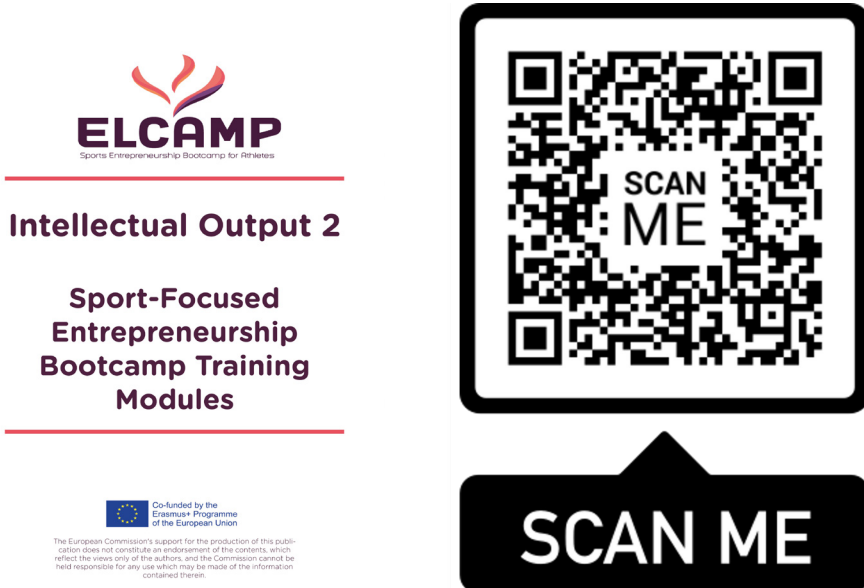
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### 3.4. Development of training modules model Bootcamp of entrepreneurship focused on sport

The researchers and managers of this project carried out a distribution of the training modules where, based on a module writing guide, a development format was elaborated with a review of the bibliography related to the theme of the module and in similar modules, carrying out a comparative analysis. In turn, the resources to be used were determined, an index of each module was created, with a glossary of terms and the content based on the data collected. The practical applications to be used and the module evaluation tools (competence measurement) were identified and developed, while work was being done on the related visual design, testing and reviewing the module based on the results of the tests. The result can be seen in the following *ELCAMP training modules link* (Figure 8).

**Figure 8. ELCAMP training modules**



### ***3.5. Development of a toolkit for the training course for the Entrepreneurship Bootcamp model focused on sport***

In this phase of the project there was again a distribution among the partners of the training tools that were going to be developed with an identification and examination of them, developing the content that will be used in the planning tools and with the creation of the algorithm to be used in these tools. Subsequently, they were tested, reviewed and integrated into the gamification-based learning platform developed by the technology expert partner MOBAD (Mobile Adventure from Poland).

### ***3.6. Pilot tests of the business training camp (Bootcamp) focused on sports for elite athletes ELCAMP and development of a web platform for learning, mentoring and networking based on gamification***

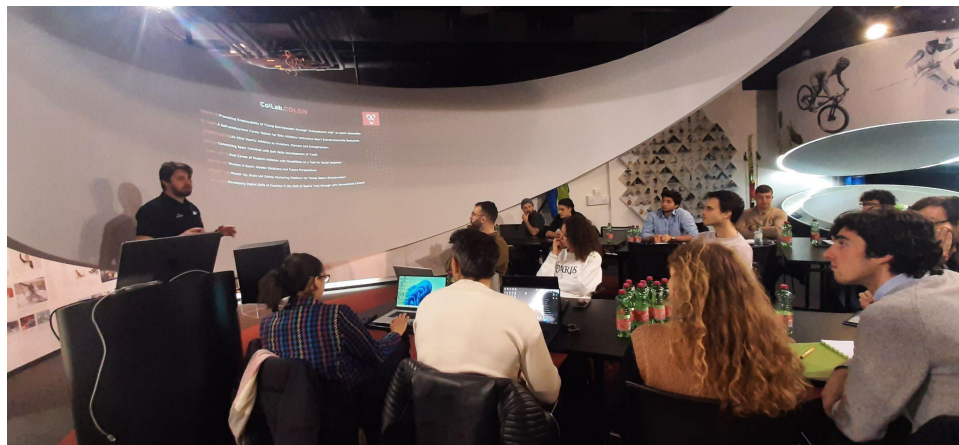
After the creation of modules, the gamification and distribution of them together with the necessary tools for the ELCAMP training course, workshops were organized with 5-8 athletes on entrepreneurship focused on sport, at a local level, with an announcement to the candidates for the bootcamp training, online registration and online training of the business training camp were carried out, gathering information through interviews with the participants. There was an analysis of the results and evaluation of the process that led to a review and update of the training course.

The training workshop was held at the Olympic Committee of Slovenia and was monitored by all the consortium partners in a transnational meeting (Figure 8). For this, the online platform was activated and the web platform was launched based on gamification.

Participants (active and retired high-level athletes) from five different countries shared and discussed the learning experience and completed a technical approach to each of the modules.

In an analysis of the possible dissemination of the ELCAMP web portal, some alternatives for consolidation and publication through sports organizations, Olympic committees and federations were proposed.

**Figure 8. Workshop with athletes Slovenia, March 2023**



#### **4. Conclusions**

Entrepreneurship and development of a business idea in sport is one of the options for many high-level athletes once it comes time for retirement from the sport. For this reason, it is important to provide them with training resources in the area of sports entrepreneurship. To carry out this training, an accelerated course model (BOOTCAMP) was created. It's necessary that the desing is well supported by scientific literature, by the opinion of employers, by the perception of athletes towards their own needs and in a didactic model that allows through technology, reach competencies and allow athletes to reconcile between their training and competitions with specialized training that allows them to generate future opportunities. ELCAMP is an example of a proper methodology applied to the creation of content necessary for the integration of the high-level athletes in the future labor market.

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