Original Article

Self-identification features of professional athletes in modern Russia

PETR RYSKIN¹, MAXIM KOCHERYAN², ELENA DAVYDOVA³

^{1,2,3}Department of Physical Education and Sports, Ural State University of Economics
RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Published online: June 30, 2019

(Accepted for publication: June 07, 2019)

DOI:10.7752/jpes.2019.02162

Abstract:

The purpose of this article is to study the attitudes of the athletes towards the motivation of "high achievements" in the framework of the development of professional sports in Russia. The analysis of the established practices in professional sports allows evaluate the existing system from the point of view of an athlete. A multistage survey was chosen as the main research method. The general sample of this study is represented by 17-45-year-oldsports masters, international sports masters and honored sports masters whose main occupation and a source of income and "social capital" to meet most social needs includes sports activities such as training and demonstration of "high sports results". The study shows that Russian athletes evaluate the positive dynamics in their activities by the level of remuneration.

Key Words: professional sports, sources of income for athletes, self-identification, motivation.

Introduction

Professional sport is considered as the labor activity of the individual, aimed at "the production of sports achievements." Consequently, a professional athlete does not just get a sports result in a competitive fight, but it produces a sports result, which is then "consumed" by society. As noted in the work of Babiak 2009, professional sport is a unique social institution for the production and consumption of sporting achievements in society. In a number of Babiak works, it is noted that, depending on the quality of the sports result, the professional receives a certain remuneration of a financial nature, and also claims a higher status position, which in turn opens up to the athlete the possibility of producing a qualitatively higher result and greater reward. This activity requires a lot of physical, intellectual, psychological costs, "social sacrifices" associated with the lack of time to communicate with family and friends, soul searches, self-development, rest, etc.

The activity of a professional athlete is characterized by the early age of activity cessation, as well as the difficulties of physiological adaptation: injuries, problems with hormones, weight, the effects of stress, "sports medicine", etc. By the degree of health impact, professional sports can be compared to "harmful production". Professional athletes are on the same list with miners, metallurgists, test pilots, submariners, etc. However, the specificity of professional sports lies in the peculiarities of building mechanisms for the motivation of an athlete by self-identification in the coordinates of the achievements of high sports results and the corresponding status and profitability. Understanding the interrelations of these processes is the subject of this study.

Material&methods

Formation of the personality of a professional athlete is determined by the institutional specifics of the sports profession, so it is necessary to determine what the context of the study will be understood as "profession" as a whole, and what is the essence of professional sport as a type of profession?

The "profession" can be understood as a social function, the actual social activity, as well as the institutional sphere that defines the normative and value orientations of the activity. As a result of this function, individual and group social needs are satisfied, and for a professional this function brings income. The basis of this approach to understanding the profession can be found in the works of Weber 2013, Parsons 1991, Zuckerman H. & Merton R. K. 1971, Westerbeek H. M. & Shilbury D. 2003 and other authors.

To understand the origins of professional sports, one must turn to the experience of forming "unions" and "associations", which, according to Eisenberg 2006, were the interpretation of club sports. For example, in the work of Lukaschuk 2009 it is noted that as far back as the XVIII - XIX centuries in England, sport was closely associated with conspicuous consumption. Occupation of sports activities and maintenance at their own expense of professional athletes, participation in tournaments for money, stakes, provided for substantial cash spending and thus determined the high position of gentlemen in British society. Thus, "athletesserving gentlemen became professionals: controlled and disciplined by employees".

Sport of the middle class was intended not so much and not only for the possibility of ostentatious spending and "club communication about", but for personal pleasure, contemplation of the competition and therefore defiantly declared himself amateur. A similar doctrine was adopted in Soviet society. Since the competition from a game event turns into a predominantly sporting one, the main significant features of which, along with strict rationalization, have become specialization, the achievement of material success as a result of their own work in sports arenas, sport has become a profession. Obviously, one of the most important subjects of studying the phenomenon of "sports" from the standpoint of sociological science is analyzing it as an institution of professional socialization, environment, industry of the professional athletes formation. Self-identification issues in professional sports have included many works: Curry 1987, Henry K. B., Arrow H. & Carini B. 1999, Miller K. E. & Hoffman J. H. 2009, James J. D. & Trail G. T. 2008, Tasiemski T. & Brewer B. W. 2011, etc.

Regarding the possibilities of self-identification, status positioning within the framework of the institute of sports, in the works of Alkemeier 2006 and Gulbin J.P., Croser M.J., Morley E.J. & Weissensteiner J.R. 2013, it is noted that "in the diversity of sports life socially different tastes, values, ways of thinking and ideas about themselves for men and women from different social strata appear." All these differences are part of social representative work, through which the sensual-bodily becomes recognizable in its other being, showing itself in a specific way. Sport becomes an expression of "performance culture": football players, triathletes, boxers become real performers. Thus, professional sport in its various social manifestations serves as the institutional form and social practice of socialization of the individual, his upbringing, transformation of objective reality, and satisfaction of the needs of a socio-cultural, economic, leisure character.

The distinctive features of the institutional sphere of sports include: the reproduction of this social activity in the framework of the relevant social group - the classic sports community; as well as competitiveness with receiving laurel wreaths as a reward. Methodological approaches to professional sports surveys are reviewed in Miller K.E. & Hoffman J.H. 2009, Radaelli G., Dell'Era C., Frattini F. & Messeni Petruzzelli A. 2018, Stenling C. & Fahlén J. 2016, Stephan Y. & Brewer B.W. 2007. As a method for collecting data, a questionnaire was selected by branches of sport. The study used the sampling method. The general sample of this study is represented by the total number of SportsMasters, International SportsMasters and Honored Sports Masters, aged 17 to 45 years, whose main occupation in life is a source of material income and "social capital" to meet most social needs is sports activities : training and demonstration of high sports results. In the course of the study, representatives of various sports were surveyed, according to which high results were achieved in the Urals Federal District for a long time, sports schools and professional clubs were formed, whole galaxy of SportsMasters, International SportsMasters and Honored Sports Masters were brought up:

- athletics;
- cross-country skiing and biathlon;
- rock climbing, motorcycling;
- boxing, judo, sambo, classic wrestling, taekwando;
- football, volleyball, basketball, badminton, hockey, table tennis;
- swimming.

The survey involved athletes who are at different stages of their professional careers, so we can analyze not only the characteristic features of self-identification of professional athletes, but also the institutional causes of problems of general socialization.

The study involved:

- athletes who believe that they are at the beginning of their professional career;
- professionals at the peak of their skills;
- professionals who have decided to complete, or have already completed a sports career.

The research hypothesis includes the following assumption: at various stages of professional development, self-identification has a different degree of relevance for an athlete. To the greatest extent this issue is actualized among those of professional athletes who, for various reasons, decided to end an athlete's career. Novice athletes rarely look ahead so far. As for the professionals at the peak of their careers, they often think about this issue. The distribution of respondents by stage of professional career is as follows (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Distribution of respondents by career development stage (current professional status)

Compiled by the authors

For those who are at the beginning of their careers (72% of the total number of respondents), a more project and uncertain vision of the studied process is typical. The paradox is that an athlete often deliberately chooses a career as a professional athlete for the next 10-15 years, but does not think about what he will do after retiring from professional sports, as he arranges for post-sporting life. In this case we are not talking about the retirement age (the average age of retirement from professional sports is 25-30 years). In addition, professional athletes in Russia rarely insure themselves in the event of injury and getting status as an incompetent out of age.

The study revealed the reasons for this behavior of professional athletes, because at this stage the foundation for self-identification was laid, when the athlete decided to associate his life with professional sports and became a member of the national team, received an attachment, etc. It is at the beginning of their professional careers that sportsmen make decisions, set priorities between sports and education, between training, competitions and getting a profession.

Results

The concept of success in life, its components and social attributes, as well as ways to achieve success, express the structure of the value complex of a professional athlete. The ideas about success in life as an indicator of the value orientations of professional athletes are operationalized as follows (Figure 2):

- decent career;
- high social position;
- strong, friendly family;
- self-realization, the ability to express oneself;
- the ability to develop oneself, self-improvement;
- prestigious education;
- stable financial position.

Figure 2. Value orientations of professional athletes

Compiled by the authors

According to the survey, the success of life professional athletes are associated primarily with the presence of a strong and friendly family (49.7% of the total number of respondents), a decent career that ensures a high level of well-being (36.2% of the total number of respondents), as well as the opportunity of development and self-improvement (36.2% of the total number of respondents), that is, to improve their social status, thereby ensuring an increase in the level of well-being of themselves and family members.

Financial stability as a component of successful life is noted by 22.1% of respondents. Further, according to the importance of professional athletes, self-actualization and the ability to express themselves in life through professional activities (22.1% of the total number of respondents), high social position (12.7% of the total number of respondents), as well as prestigious education (8 % of the total number of respondents).

Obviously, self-realization does not occupy a leading position in the priority values of life success. This is probably due to the uncertainty of the social expression of self-expression and self-realization. Education, is one of the last places in the priority values of life success.

This is a specific feature characteristic of Russia as a whole, and not only for the community of professional athletes - today education, even prestigious, does not guarantee success. In addition, professional athletes are focused primarily on the demonstration of high sports results, which guarantees them professional success.

Next, we consider the gender characteristics of the value orientation of professional athletes, Figure 3.

Figure 3. Gender features of the value orientation of professional athletes

Compiled by the authors

Men and women rank their life success priorities somewhat differently. It is interesting that both men and women professional athletes, the family is in the first place among the priorities of life success. This is probably due to the fact that athletes (taking into account the schedule, workload and training) rarely build a strong family. Among men and women, there are a number of differences in the understanding of life success. So according to the two-dimensional distribution, women are much more focused on self-realization (60.6% versus 39.9% in men).

This is probably due to the fact that women "shift" the responsibility for making money (high status, prestigious work, etc.) on men. Thus, in men, compared with women, there is a significantly greater orientation towards a career (59.2% versus 40.7% in women) and a high social position (73.6% versus 26.3% in women).

We will dwell separately on the respondents' assessment of their income level, Figure 4.

Figure 4. Distribution of respondents by income level

Compiled by the authors

According to the survey, the majority of respondents rate the level of financial and social well-being at the average level. So according to the survey, more than 60% of respondents indicate in the questionnaire that they have a good prosperity, no frills. About 16.7% of respondents say that their family is wealthy and they do not deny themselves anything. 20.8% of respondents state that the fact that they only have enough money for the most necessary things, and only 1.3% of respondents say they are below the poverty line.

In general, according to the study, the situation with the social security of professional athletes and their level of professional security (organization of sports processes) is more positive in the field of group sports such as volleyball, football, and also among various martial arts - judo, boxing, Greco-Roman wrestling and etc. Further in table 1 we present the distribution of answers to the question about the sources of funding for the various needs of professional athletes at various stages of their careers.

Table 1. Sources of funding for various needs of professional athletes at various stages of a career, % of respondents

Sources of funding	Stages of a career				
	Early career	At the peak of a career	In a career slump	At the end of a career	Generally
Sports organizations	3	0	0	0	2
Sport Federation	1	5	7	0	0
Friends	40	41	29	33	39
Relatives	69	68	64	50	67
Oneself	25	36	29	17	27
Team	2	0	0	0	1

Compiled by the authors

Thus, according to the survey, in the solution of emerging social, domestic, family, professional problems in most cases, help relatives and family members (67% of the total number of respondents) or friends athletes (39% of the total number of respondents).

More rarely, the sports industry comes to the rescue most often in the person of the coach (33% of the total number of respondents). Otherwise, the athlete is forced to solve their financial difficulties and other problems on their own (26% of the total number of respondents).

Next, we will provide information on the types of satisfaction of various needs of athletes at various stages of their professional careers at the expense of professional associations, table 2.

Table 2. Assistance in satisfying various needs at various stages of a professional career at the expense of professional associations,% of respondents

Needs	Stages of a career				
	Early career	At the peak of a career	In a career slump	At the end of a career	Generally
Apartments	9	18	8	0	10
Money	22	18	38	0	22
Recreation	7	0	0	0	5
Sport equipment	42	50	38	17	42
Family problems	6	0	0	17	5
Sport camps	2	9	8	0	3
Education	1	0	0	0	1
Employment	0	0	0	17	1
Nothing	3	4	0	17	3

Compiled by the authors

Table 2 shows that the sports industry helps mainly at the peak, with money and livelihoods in a downturn. At the same time, help is also resolved in solving family problems and meeting the need for rest at the beginning of a career, but in general it is very rare. 17% of those who completed a sporting career say that sport didn't help them at all to adapt to the non-sporting life, while athletes at the beginning and at the peak of their careers say only 3-4%.

In general, the sports industry is most actively involved in solving the vital problems of professional athletes at the beginning of their careers. Probably in order to stimulate the athlete to produce a high sports result. Next, we consider the self-identification of athletes within the framework of the coordinates of "income - sports result", Figure 5.

Figure 5. Assessment of the truth of the statement "As long as you win the sport will provide you with everything, otherwise you only rely on yourself"
Compiled by the authors

The figure shows that the athlete is convinced in practice and understands that the sports industry helps him in solving life problems only when he, as a professional, produces a high sports result. Otherwise, the athlete is forced to rely only on himself, his strength and ability. Especially this understanding comes at the stages of recession and the end of a sports career, trying to get out of sports and realize themselves in a different way. Although already at the peak of his career, a professional is becoming more and more convinced of this. Professional athletes unequivocally highly appreciate the importance of sport as an institution of personal development, and with each passing year it is getting higher. Professional sports are institutionalized and stabilized as a sphere of vital activity, providing the athlete with more and more social opportunities and guarantees. Thus, almost all respondents, regardless of gender, age, sport, and level of professional qualifications, recognize that the experience and knowledge they gained through sports activities helps them to be realized in other areas of life. Figure 6 shows the results of professional life in sports according to the estimates of the athletes who participated in the survey.

Figure 6. The results of professional life in sports estimated by athletes
Compiled by the authors

Analysis of the data in Figure 6 makes it possible to note that thanks to sport such vital social skills were acquired as the ability to overcome difficulties (60% of the total number of respondents), maintain physical health (38% of the total number of respondents), "I can do something in life", "I got good skills and I won't be perish", "I learned to live" (respectively 36%, 34%, 15%, in total - 85%).

The results of self-identification of athletes are as follows: a person who has achieved a lot, standing confidently on his feet, who has managed to break into people, has realized himself not only in sports but also in life, can provide the family with everything - (respectively 13.6%, 19%, 12.2%, 8.2%, 3.4% - in the amount of 46.4%).

As a result, thanks to professional sports activities, the respondents: gained key life skills - 85%, able to overcome difficulties - 60%, have a fairly high social status - 46%.

The study showed that in most cases a professional athlete is not able to independently design and implement his life strategy, since he lacks the communication skills necessary for this. Within the framework of the institute of professional sports, this "inability" is literally cultivated, since vital autonomy and strategic (adaptive, socially viable) personality store of a professional athlete allegedly "prevent him from concentrating on producing a sports result."

A professional athlete, thus, turns out to be socially, socially, everyday, untenable, unable to solve the pressing problems of "winning one's place" in society. Modern Russian sports industry and infrastructure are designed so that an athlete produces a sports result, and all other issues - housing, food, leisure, clothing, etc., are not decided by him but by his "helpers" - coaches, club, sports association, sponsors, patrons etc. The Russian professional should not think about anything other than a sporting result.

The main acquired quality of a professional athlete is its inconsistency, which is the result of the narrowness of the social functionality, inability to plan their lives independently, household and communication limitations, professional and life inflexibility, formed within the framework of sports professional socialization.

Conclusions

The status of an athlete who gives the highest sports result is not "professional" in Russia, in the strict sense of the word. An athlete does most of his time in sports and receives, in exchange for a high sports result, a material reward that ensures his life, as well as other social opportunities and benefits. However, at the state level, his status as a professional athlete is not fixed in the majority. There is no employment contract fixing the labor nature of its main type of activity, which means that its legal status is uncertain.

In addition, as a result of the existing system of relations, as applied to a professional athlete, there are no clear social guarantees from the state: pensions, disability benefits, etc. A professional athlete is de facto not recognized by the state and society as an employee in the field of sports, and if recognized, the level of his support does not at all correspond to the level of professional competence.

In general, social and material support of professional athlete's work is carried out by various interested "structures", federations, etc. Relationships are often "beneficial" in nature and can be unilaterally broken, which negatively affects the level of satisfaction and social stability of an athlete as a high-level professional. In this case, it is very difficult to defend any rights of a professional athlete.

The nature of self-identification of professional athletes in modern Russia is determined by the following factors:

- the factor of unsystematic, when we say that there is no national system to ensure the process of post-sports rehabilitation of professional athletes (including professional and household);
- a pronounced social monofunctionality of a professional athlete, his "social infantilism", which is understood as the lack of knowledge and experience of a non-sporting character in a professional athlete, which would provide him with the opportunity to improve in society in a different socio-professional status;
- increased social expectations and exploration, ambitions, when we can talk about the psychological difficulties of a professional athlete, associated with the need to rebuild their own career, to win a high social position, acceptable social status in a different social and professional role;
- "offense" on the state and the infrastructure (institute) of sports, for the fact that they obviously do not create the conditions for a "transition" from the sports sphere to the non-sports. Resentment is expressed in psychological tension, fatigue and negative state, including the "decadent" mood among professional athletes, which is often the basis of their deviant (delinquent) behavior.

References:

- Alkemayer, T. (2006), Sociology of sport, *Philosophical and Literary Journal Logos*, **3**, 54.
- Babiak, K., & Wolfe, R. (2009), Determinants of corporate social responsibility in professional sport: Internal and external factors, *Journal of sport management*, **23**(6), 717-742.
- Curry, T. J., & Weaner, J. S. (1987), Sport identity salience, commitment, and the involvement of self in role: Measurement issues, *Sociology of Sport Journal*, **4**(3), 280-288.
- Eisenberg, K. (2006), Sportsman. *Philosophical and Literary Journal Logos*, **3**, 3-22.
- Gulbin, J. P., Croser, M. J., Morley, E. J., & Weissensteiner, J. R. (2013), An integrated framework for the optimisation of sport and athlete development: A practitioner approach, *Journal of sports sciences*, **31**(12), 1319-1331.
- Henry, K. B., Arrow, H., & Carini, B. (1999), A tripartite model of group identification: Theory and measurement, *Small Group Research*, **30**(5), 558-581.
- James, J. D., & Trail, G. T. (2008), The relationship between team identification and sport consumption intentions, *International Journal of Sport Management*, **9**(4), 427-440.
- Kruger, D. J., Falbo, M., Blanchard, S., Cole, E., Gazoul, C., Nader, N., & Murphy, S. (2018), University sports rivalries provide insights on coalitional psychology, *Human nature*, **29**(3), 337-352.

- Lukashchuk, V. (2009), Transformation of sports: from fun to industry, *Sociology: theory, methodology, marketing*, **2**, 130-143.
- Miller, K. E., & Hoffman, J. H. (2009), Mental well-being and sport-related identities in college students, *Sociology of sport journal*, **26**(2), 335-356.
- Parsons, T. (1991), *The social system*. Psychology Press.
- Radaelli, G., Dell'Era, C., Frattini, F., & Messeni Petruzzelli, A. (2018), Entrepreneurship and human capital in professional sport: A longitudinal analysis of the Italian soccer league, *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, **42**(1), 70-93.
- Stenling, C., & Fahlén, J. (2016), Same same, but different? Exploring the organizational identities of Swedish voluntary sports: Possible implications of sports clubs' self-identification for their role as implementers of policy objectives, *International review for the sociology of sport*, **51**(7), 867-883.
- Stephan, Y., & Brewer, B. W. (2007), Perceived determinants of identification with the athlete role among elite competitors, *Journal of applied sport psychology*, **19**(1), 67-79.
- Tasiemski, T., & Brewer, B. W. (2011), Athletic identity, sport participation, and psychological adjustment in people with spinal cord injury, *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, **28**(3), 233-250.
- Weber, M. (2013), *From Max Weber: essays in sociology*. Routledge.
- Westerbeek, H. M., & Shilbury, D. (2003), A conceptual model for sport services marketing research: integrating quality, value and satisfaction, *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*, **5**(1), 3-23.
- Zuckerman, H., & Merton, R. K. (1971), Patterns of evaluation in science: Institutionalisation, structure and functions of the referee system, *Minerva*, **9**(1), 66-100.