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ELITE ATHLETES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF DEBRECEN**Abstract:**

Student athletes often face challenges in building up a dual career as they try to meet the requirements of the athletic and academic fields at the same time. In fact, the peak of the sport career and the academic studies at the university tend to overlap. According to the main objectives and guidelines of the European Union, the University of Debrecen has come up with a Sport Conception that lays great emphasis on integrating student athletes into higher education, balancing the athletic and academic fields and supporting dual career. The objective of the study is to explore how student athletes are able to combine their athletic and academic goals with the environment, policies and requirements of the university.

Document analysis was used to explore the structure of university sport. During the analysis, the Sport Conception of the University was especially taken notice of. The examination of dual career was carried out through case studies in groups involving top-performance and elite student athletes of the University of Debrecen (n=15). The groups were formed according to the distribution of gender and sport, the level and the type of sport (individual or team sport disciplines).

The analysis of the Sport Conception of the University of Debrecen shows that the university supports student athletes, who intend to graduate while maintaining their athletic career, with different measures and regulations. The results of the case study analysis indicate that it is important for top-performance student athletes to be also successful on the academic field parallel to their athletic career. The combination of sport and education needs compromises and good time management. This is very much influenced by the nature, attributes and level of sport, and the number of trainings per day/week. Another crucial point is the choice of major at the university.

As for the summary the realization of a successful dual career needs to have strategies ensuring student athletes that they can reach the best result possible on both fields. The different kind of support provided by the university and the relationships between student athletes and their professors, peers and coaches are the most significant factors of the athletic career.

Keywords:

higher education, elite athletes, dual career in sport, sport concept