OLYMPIC MOVEMENT · 2026

Beyond the Finish Line

Your Career. Your Future. Your Next Chapter.

Dual Career · Retirement from Sport · The Second Half

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Psychologist and Sports Psychologist

Former Athlete

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The dual career is a path for everybody, not only Olympians or pro athletes

- **Child and junior athlete**
- **Student**
  - BA in Political Sciences, SNSPA Bucharest
  - BA in Psychology, University of Bucharest
  - Postgraduate, National College of Defence
  - Postgraduate, Romanian Diplomatic Institute
  - Postgraduate MA in Sports Psychology, Real Madrid and Universidad Europea
- **Public Administration**
  - Director of International Relations, Authority for Youth
  - Personal Advisor, Ministry of Technology and Communications
- **IT and IT Security**
  - 15 years in IT and IT Security
  - Current position: Country Leader for a leading international IT security company

Also working as a Sports Psychologist

Who is in the room?

01

Former athlete

Junior, senior or competitive level. Raise your hand if this is you.

02

Retired athlete

Still in your active sporting career? Raise your hand if you have retired.

03

Retired high-performance athlete

Speaker: retired at 19, after 12 years of performance sport.

Was your transition an easy one? Was it planned?

Why This Conversation Matters

01

Intense and time-limited

Athletic careers are demanding and often end earlier than expected.

02

Identity and wellbeing

Transitions affect how athletes see themselves, their health (mental and physical) and their opportunities.

03

Preparation pays off

Early planning can make a real difference.

Consequences of sports retirement

Topic	Key statistic / finding	What it means	Source
Depression and anxiety	**2.58×** higher prevalence of depression; **2.08×** higher prevalence of anxiety	Former elite athletes have more than twice the prevalence of depression and anxiety compared with the general population.	Runacres & Marshall (2024) *BMJ Open Sport & Exercise Medicine* (37 studies, 24,732 former athletes). *Note: relative comparisons, not percentages of all retired athletes.*
Negative mental health during transition	**15–20%**	A significant minority of athletes may experience negative mental health consequences during retirement, particularly if retiring due to injury, deselection or career dissatisfaction.	IOC Consensus Statement on Mental Health in Elite Athletes (2026) *(derived from two systematic reviews).*
Range of mental health concerns	**12–28%** (varies by symptom)	Pooled prevalence estimates for selected mental health symptoms among former elite athletes ranged from 12% for depression to 28% for alcohol misuse, with substantial variation between studies.	Systematic review supporting the 2026 IOC consensus statement (2026).

Psychological & Emotional

Loss of athletic identity, uncertainty, anger, isolation, anxiety and potential depression.

Social & Personal

Changes in relationships, support networks, daily routines and sense of belonging.

Physical

Reduced training levels, changes in dietary habits and potential long-term health risks.

Professional & Financial

Career uncertainty, income loss, financial instability and challenges adapting skills to new employment.

Table: Runacres & Marshall (2024); IOC Consensus Statement on Mental Health in Elite Athletes (2026).

What athletes are bringing from sports into the corporate world?

Accountability and structure

Athletes train for years under strict schedules, ownership of performance, and direct feedback loops that translate smoothly into corporate accountability

Grit and perseverance

Resilience
Goal oriented
Continuous improvement

Experience in working under pressure

Athletes are used to working under pressure, at competitive level and answering to multiple stakeholders.

THE C-SUITE PIPELINE

68–95%

of Fortune 500 CEOs have backgrounds in competitive sports.

94%

of women in C-suite positions played competitive sports.

80%

of female Fortune 500 executives competed in sports at some point in their lives.

What is a dual career?

Sport

Performance, commitment and ambition.

Education / Employment

Learning, skills and future opportunities.

The dual-career pathway involves athletes pursuing their sporting goals while also engaging in education or vocational work. This can take many forms, including university study, vocational training or part-time employment alongside training. By diversifying their focus, athletes prepare for life after sport and strengthen their wellbeing and resilience.

The Dual-Career Approach

More than sport — a safer, healthier future

Key Benefit	What it means	The impact
Education & Professional Growth	Builds skills and qualifications.	More options and financial security after sport.
Personal Growth & Self-Awareness	Develops identity beyond sport and new interests.	Greater confidence and resilience.
Purpose & Direction	Provides goals, structure and a sense of belonging.	Less risk of loss of identity and motivation.
Smoother Transition	Prepares for life beyond competitive sport.	Fewer crises and better long-term wellbeing.

Dual careers give athletes the tools to build a balanced identity, stay resilient and transition successfully — on and off the field.

Athletes' Voices- the shock of retirement

ROMANIAN FENCING FORMER OLYMPIAN

“I wanted to be a coach. I just did not plan it correctly. I thought I just needed a bachelor's degree in Physical Education. It turns out I also needed to attend the National School of Coaches for two years. I lost those two years. I wish I had planned for this better.”

ROMANIAN FORMER LIGA 1 PLAYER

“I knew the end was coming, but the first day I had nowhere to go: no practice, no games. I was shocked. What am I going to do now?”

ROMANIAN PROFESSIONAL HANDBALL PLAYER

“The first two years after my retirement I was in shock and depressed. I went for an interview and was asked if I knew how to use Excel. The only Excel I knew was my shirt size, XL. I was shocked by how I went from people yelling my name on the court to trying to find a job.”

David Popovici: Olympic Champion and Student

Photo: raed.krishan, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons.

Gold Medals:

Olympic Gold Medal at Paris 2024 Olympics
4 Time World Champion
6 times European Champion
3 Times Juni0r World Champion
7 Times Junior European Champion

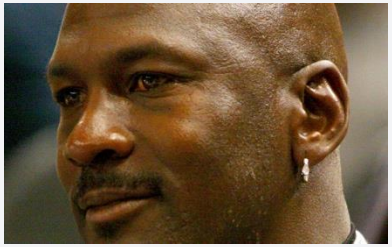
Student while competing: Enrolled at the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Bucharest, in July 2023.

Performance scholar: Part of the University of Bucharest's first generation of performance scholars.

David Popovici is highly vocal and intentional about the importance of education and a dual career for athletes. He frequently emphasizes that an athlete should not rely solely on their sporting achievements, actively using his platform to promote the idea that **education is the core** of a well-rounded life.

Athletes Who Went Back to School

Education after elite sport



Michael Jordan

Completed his geography degree at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

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Shaquille O'Neal

Added a Master of Arts in Liberal Arts from Louisiana State University (2026), following earlier degrees including an MBA and a doctorate in education.

Michelle Kwan

Earned a bachelor's in international studies from the University of Denver (2009), then a master's from The Fletcher School at Tufts University (2011).

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Photos: Michael Jordan by Joshua Massel, cropped by Quadzilla99, CC BY-SA 2.0; Shaquille O'Neal by Robert H Alpert, CC BY-SA 3.0; Michelle Kwan by Kevin Rushforth, CC BY-SA 3.0; all via Wikimedia Commons.

Retirement is not just the end of a sporting career — it is a major life transition that requires preparation and support.

01

Plan early

Start career planning during sport, not after retirement.

02

Protect education

Build study time into training schedules, with flexible arrangements.

03

Stay connected

Offer mentoring and transition support beyond retirement.

What helps? Psychological support, strong social networks, career guidance and proactive financial planning.

Benefits of a Dual Career

01

Enhanced performance

Balancing education and sport can support athletic development.

02

Career preparation

Develops transferable skills and qualifications for life beyond sport.

03

Better work–life balance

Promotes personal growth and a greater sense of integration.

04

Employability

Improves opportunities for employment after retirement.

05

Smoother transition

Helps athletes prepare for retirement and their next professional chapter.

06

Social contribution

Enables athletes to contribute to society in broader ways.

Key message: A dual career strengthens both the athlete and the person beyond sport.

THANK YOU

Beyond Sport. Into Life.

Every athlete deserves the opportunity to thrive, during sport and long after it.

30 years ago