The Future-Oriented Hopes and Goals of Adolescent Student-Athletes in Finnish Sport High Schools

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Abstract

As most young athletes do not end up making a living in sport, and professional athletic careers are relatively short, adolescent athletes need to think about and plan their future outside of sport. The present longitudinal study examined the future-oriented hopes and goals of adolescent student-athletes in Finland at the beginning and end of sport high school. Gender differences in these hopes and goals were also examined. The sample consisted of 381 student-athletes (51% females, 49% males) in the autumn of the first year of high school and 351 student-athletes (50% females, 50% males) in the spring of the third year, who filled in a questionnaire at both measurement points. A total of 11 goal categories consisting of 49 subcategories were identified using directed content analysis. Changes across time and gender differences in these hopes and goals were examined using the "N-1" chi-squared test. The results showed that sport-related hopes and goals were the most common at both measurement points. However, only 51% and 27% of the participants mentioned dual careers in their goals for the future at the beginning and end of high school, respectively. The female participants reported statistically significantly more goals related to education and a dual career and statistically significantly fewer goals related to sport than males. Further, male participants reported statistically significantly more often not knowing their future hopes and goals than females.

Keywords: future orientation, hopes and goals, dual career, sports high school, gender

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The integration of sport with education or work has been termed a dual career in European sport psychology discourse. In modern, economically developed countries, such as in Finland, adolescent athletes need to safeguard their future employability and adaption to life after athletic retirement and are therefore expected to combine their academic and athletic aspirations (European Commission, 2012). The successful integration of both careers can help athletes achieve their hopes and goals in both spheres of life in a way that is sustainable for their health, well-being, and life satisfaction (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019). However, the successful combination of these two domains is likely to be a major source of concern during the adolescent years, due to the overlap of multiple life transitions and the intensification of demands in both sport and school (Ryba et al., 2016; Knight et al., 2018). Indeed, due to these challenges, athletes may be at risk of early termination of their athletic and academic careers. Given that the exploration of the future is crucial in terms of sustainable dual career construction, there is a need to better understand student-athletes' future-oriented hopes and goals across sport high schools to facilitate their meaningful dual career (dis)continuation (Ryba 5 et al., 2017; Ronkainen & Ryba, 2018). In the present study, future-oriented hopes and goals are studied among Finnish sport high school student-athletes. According to the Finnish Olympic Committee, a dual career pathway is a cherished value in Finland, and there is a strong effort to enable athletes to balance competitive sports with school or work (Finnish Olympic Committee, 2023). This issue is likely to be of particular concern during the high school years since they coincide with the crucial transition from junior to senior levels in most sports in Finland.

Future-Oriented Hopes and Goals

Young people's hopes and goals are related to their future orientations. As a term, future orientation refers to the process of considering, imagining, and planning for the future (Sica et al., 2016). Future orientation provides grounds for exploring options, planning, setting goals, and making commitments. Understanding this among adolescents is especially important because how adolescents think about their future can crucially influence their later lives, as the decisions made during adolescence can enhance or restrict one's future options (Nurmi, 1991). Studies have shown that young athletes who spend a considerable amount of time in sport-related activities may compromise the time needed to explore other career and identity options outside of sport. This may be problematic considering that most young athletes do not end up making a living in sport (Brewer & Petitpas, 2017; Park et al., 2013), and it is extremely difficult to find work without proper education or any work experience.

Cultural norms, social expectations, rules, values, family, peers, and role models influence hopes and goals (Nurmi, 2004). Future orientation develops in cultural and institutional contexts, which consist of demands and standards set by social and institutional sources. For example, in Finnish context, where the present study was carried out, values include equality, democracy, freedom and non-discrimination (Brunila & Ylöstalo, 2015). Cultural norms and social expectations provide individuals with knowledge about their possibilities and the desired age-specific goals in that particular environment. For example, developmental tasks consist of normative expectations to achieve a certain goal at a certain age and to provide models for how they should be achieved (Havighurst, 1948; Nurmi, 1987). Changes in future-oriented goals are likely to happen during adolescence and emerging adulthood, as age-related developmental tasks and life contexts change quickly (Nurmi, 1991) and individuals

gain more life experience. When facing challenges in goal attainment, individuals can either develop coping mechanisms or reconstruct their goals.

In earlier studies conducted in Finland that explored future-oriented hopes and goals (e.g., Nurmi, 1987),questionnaires have been used to ask people about the hopes, fears, and expectations they have for their future. The answers were typically classified according to the topic of their content. The content categories used differ from one study to another. In the vast majority of studies concerning the future hopes and goals of adolescents, the most frequently mentioned topics are occupation and education (Fonseca et al., 2019; Massey et al., 2008; Nurmi, 1991; Ranta et al., 2014; Seginer, 2009). Similar results have been found across cultures (e.g., Nurmi, 1991). Consequently, the most mentioned categories are family, marriage, leisure activities, and financial well-being (Fonseca et al., 2019; Nurmi, 1987, 1991; Nurmi et al., 1994; Seginer, 2009). Research findings suggest that adolescents with goals related to age-specific developmental tasks and demands experience higher well-being compared to those with goals inconsistent with age-related challenges (Marttinen et al., 2016). Although a few previous studies have specifically examined the future orientation and aspirations of young athletes (Mortensen et al., 2013; Ronkainen & Ryba, 2018; Ryba et al., 2017), a clear limitation in the earlier research is the scarcity of longitudinal studies examining how hopes and goals develop across time (as an exception, see Ryba et al., 2021). Such investigations are important because they can help to better understand how adolescent athletes construct their career pathways as they mature, and this information can be used to facilitate effective career interventions.

The Role of Gender in Hopes and Goals

Cultural and social expectations concerning life span development vary considerably according to gender (Fivush, 2010; Skrubbeltrang, 2020), and narratives of gender,

gender stereotypes, and hierarchies influence future-oriented thinking, hopes, and goals by providing information and models of the possibilities and limitations. Although policies and practices, such as the Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes (European Commission, 2012) and the European Commission's statement on gender equality in sport (European Commission, 2014), emphasise the importance of gender equality, this aim is often not realised. Indeed, recent studies have found that whereas male athletes typically invest more in sport-related goals and pursue professional careers in sport, female athletes are more like to invest in education and to drop out of sport (Ekengren et al., 2020; Ryba et al., 2021; Ronkainen et al., 2016). Due to gender hierarchies that position men as the norm in sport, female athletes also face extra demands, challenges, and constraints (Saarinen et al., 2023; Kavoura et al., 2015, 2018), are underrepresented in professional sporting programs and executive and coaching positions, and receive less financial support from official committees and ministries in Finland (Turpeinen et al., 2012).

Cultural narratives support men's professional careers in sport, whereas for women, elite sport is not seen as an existing career path (Ryba et al., 2021). In a study conducted by Skrubbeltrang et al. (2020) in Denmark, only 2% of female 12–15-year-old student-athletes representing both individual and team sports reported wanting to pursue a professional career in sport. These expectations and stereotypes are reproduced in daily life in social interaction, for example, through identity construction, model learning (Kavoura et al., 2015), and coach-athlete interactions (Saarinen et al., 2023). Gender differences in future orientations and goals are also anchored in the cultural context in which the individual lives. Although Finland is regarded as an egalitarian country and ranks high in gender equality reports, some differences remain in the opportunities available to men and women (Brunila & Ylöstalo, 2015; Humbert et al.,

2015), especially regarding professional sport. For example, opportunities for developing a professional sporting career vary considerably between genders, as only 1.6% of professional athletes in Finland are women (Lämsä, 2018). Consequently, the aim of the present study was to explore the future-oriented hopes and goals of Finnish adolescent student-athletes at the beginning and end of sport high school. In addition, gender differences in these hopes and goals were examined.

Methods

Philosophical underpinnings

The present study is positioned within the philosophical realm of critical realism, subscribing to ontological realism and subjectivist epistemology (Ryba et al., 2022; Ronkainen & Wiltshire, 2021). Critical realism assumes that the world is how it is, regardless of the constructions and interpretations that people use to view it (Archer, 2007), which is important for obtaining objective measures of a fixed reality, such as athletes' future-oriented hopes and goals, at certain time points. Similarly, epistemological constructivism is important for understanding individuals' subjective experiences and employs a transactional developmental framework that views psychological experience as ongoing, inseparable from the sociocultural context, such as sport high schools, and arising out of a particular history (Ryba et al., 2016). In the context of this study, this means that although athletes' hopes and goals are unique, they do not exist outside of a particular social and cultural context.

Participants and Procedure

The present study was conducted as a part of the Winning in the Long Run research project (Ryba et al., 2016) following talented adolescent student-athletes from the

beginning to the end of sport high school in Finland. Currently, there are 15 upper secondary schools in Finland that are dedicated sport schools, according to the Ministry of Education and Culture. These schools collaborate with sport federations and athletic clubs to arrange morning practices for the athletes, offer the possibility of extending the 3-year academic curriculum, give study credits for sport, and assist with dual career planning. The admission to these sport high schools is competitive, and to be accepted, the adolescent athletes must demonstrate strong potential in their sport and have sufficient grades in their secondary school reports.

The first measurement point (T1) was in the autumn of the first grade of high school. At T1, the sample consisted of 381 student-athletes (51% female and 49% male) enrolled in six different sport high schools. The mean age of the participants was 16 years (SD = 0.17), and the participants were divided evenly between individual (50%) and team sport (50%). The participants' grade point average (possible range from 4 to 10) was 8.85 (SD = 0.62). The second measurement point (T2) was in the spring of the third grade of high school. At T2, the sample consisted of 351 student-athletes (56% female and 44% male). From the missing data at T2, part (n = 15) was due to the fact that participants filled in the survey but did not answer the particular question concerning hopes and goals, part (n = 15) was due to the drop-out of the participants between the time points. Reasons behind of drop-out might include, for example, the absence of students from school on the day of the study, or graduation or transferring to a different school between the T1 and T2. The participants were enrolled from seven different sport high schools, as one new school joined the research project at the end of the first grade. At both measurement points, the participants filled out an online questionnaire containing an open-ended question about future goals.

The Human Sciences Ethics Committee of the relevant university, Finland, approved this study in June 2015. Ethical guidelines for human subjects were followed throughout the data collection process. In Finland, informed consent from the guardians of young people over 15 years old is not required.

Data Analysis

The questionnaire contained an open-ended question about future-oriented hopes and goals stating, "Young people have different hopes and goals for their future. What kind of future-oriented hopes and goals do you have? Write them down in the blank space under". The answers were coded using directed content analysis. Previous research on the future-oriented hopes and goals of adolescents (e.g., Nurmi, 1991) was used to guide the coding process. The hopes and goals data coding started by transferring all of the T1 data (students' answers) to Excel, reading all of them, and attempting to identify the same kind of answers (e.g., "Elite athlete" and "Pro-athlete"). Then, the coder created subcategories (e.g., elite/professional athlete) and main categories (e.g., "sport") by classifying the answers. Most of the answers contained more than one goal. Individual goals could not be coded into more than one subcategory. Given that this study focuses on dual careers, the category "dual career" was created for answers mentioning hopes and goals related to both sport and education or profession/work.

Intercoder reliability was assessed using Krippendorff's alpha (Krippendorff, 2004). Four test rounds were carried out before the final coding of the data. Initially, three independent coders coded the same random sample of 50 answers from T1 using the same coding scheme. The answers with $\alpha < .67$ were then discussed by the coders to determine whether they represented a new category or whether some of the existing coding categories needed to be modified. Some of the coding categories were then expanded to better fit the data. The same three coders subsequently coded another

random sample of 50 answers from T1 using the updated coding scheme. One new subcategory was added under the theme of self-actualisation, and some of the subcategories were expanded. After four test rounds, additional rounds were not found necessary, as the Krippendorff's alphas were acceptable ($\alpha > .67$). All data from T1 and T2 were coded using the updated coding scheme. While coding the data from T1 and T2, a list was made of answers that could not be coded or were uncertain. This list was discussed with another coder, and based on this discussion, some of the coding categories were modified. Finally, the coded data from T1 and T2 were updated to match the final coding scheme.

The "N-1" Chi-squared test (Campbell, 2007; Richardson, 2011) was used to calculate the comparison of proportions between time points and between genders as with this method, a statistical analysis can be carried out with a sample size as small as one observation per cell. The analyses were carried out using the MedCalc calculator (MedCalc, 2022).

Results

Future-Oriented Hopes and Goals at the Beginning of the Sport High School in Finland

The data at T1 consisted of 777 hopes and goals (see Table 1). The final coding scheme consisted of 11 main categories and 49 subcategories. At T1, the most commonly mentioned category was "sport" (42.6%), consisting of general goals, such as "succeeding in sport and becoming a sport legend". The most commonly mentioned subcategory in sport and overall at T1 was the subcategory of "general or ambiguous success in sport" (19.3%). Moreover, the second biggest category mentioned at T1 was "education" (23.3%), consisting of general success-related goals, such as "doing well in

school and getting good grades". "Success in studies" was the most commonly mentioned education subcategory (10.7%). The third largest category was related to profession or work (14.2%), consisting of hopes and goals such as "not ending up unemployed" and "getting one's dream job". When interpreting the findings concerning this category, it should be noted that although in the present study "not ending up employed" was treated as a profession- or work-related goal, it might be conceptualized also as a fear. The most common subcategory was "getting a good job or profession" (10.7%). Moreover, 9.4% of all hopes and goals concerned self-actualisation, and 3.1% concerned relationships. The self-actualisation category consisted of eight subcategories, out of which being successful and growth/development as a person were the most popular. The relationship category consisted of subcategories of "having a family" (2.4%), including hopes and goals of "having children and getting married", and "other relationships" (0.6%), including hopes and goals such as "having good friends", "having positive people around oneself", and "getting new friends". Only 0.6% of all reported hopes and goals concerned beliefs and values.

The final four categories consisted of one subcategory each. "Health" (1.4%) consisted of hopes and goals related to "living or staying healthy"; "lifestyle" (1.7%) included hopes and goals such as "travelling" and "staying in good shape"; and "do not know" (1.5%) consisted of answers indicating not having future hopes or goals, or not knowing what they were yet. Other (2.2%) was a miscellaneous category that included all the specific goals that did not fit into any other category or subcategory, such as "catching a 2 kg salmon", "surviving life alive", and "moving away from a certain city".

"Dual careers" was an exceptional category. Instead of individual hopes and goals, all answers were coded into it, meaning that all the answers containing *both* sport and education or profession/work hope or goal were coded in this category. Overall,

51.2% of the participants mentioned dual careers at T1. This category was divided into four subcategories, with “sport and school/work but not combined” (46.2%) as the most common subcategory. This subcategory consisted of answers mentioning sport and school/work hopes and goals, but not necessarily combined, such as “to play professional football abroad” or “get a good job and family after athletic retirement” are examples of this subcategory. Dual careers that prioritised school or work over sport were mentioned only once at T1.

Insert Table 1 about here.

Future-Oriented Hopes and Goals at the End of the Sport High School in Finland

Overall, the number of reported goals was lower at T2 (699 goals among the sample of 381 athletes) compared to goals at T1 (777 goals among the sample of 351 athletes) (see Table 2). In two of the categories, the number of hopes and goals did not change between T1 and T2: the categories of “health and beliefs” and “values”. Most notably, the number of sport-related goals decreased between T1 and T2, with a decrease of 20.0%. At T1, sport-related goals were reported more often than other goals, but at T2, there was no difference between sport and other types of goals. From T1 to T2, we observed a statistically significant decrease in the number of hopes and goals related to “general/ambiguous success in sport” (11.87%), becoming an elite/professional athlete (3.04%), growth/development in sport (0.14%), participation in international level competitions (the decrease being 2.01%), international level success (1.36%), and participation in youth international level competitions (64%). The number of hopes and goals related to profession or work, in turn, increased from T1 to T2, the increase being 4.15%. Although from T1 to T2, there was a statistically significant decrease in the number of goals related to “finishing high school” (1.79%) and “success in studies”

(8.10%), the results showed a statistically significant increase in the number of goals related to higher education (3.97%) and being accepted to a degree program (4.35%).

Similarly, the number of hopes and goals related to self-actualisation increased between T1 and T2, with an increase of 5.62%. There was a statistically significant increase from T1 to T2 in the number of goals related to happiness (1.99%), having fun (1.66%), a good life (1.44%), wealth (1.25%), and independence (0.87%). Additionally, we observed a statistically significantly higher number of hopes and goals related to relationships (2.49%) and lifestyle (1.62%), as well as higher responses in the do not know (3.61%), and other (3.82%) categories, at T2 than at T1.

The number of participants who mentioned hopes and goals in relation to dual careers decreased 23.8% from T1 to T2, as only 27.4% of the participants mentioned dual careers in their answers at T2, in comparison to 51.2% at T1. The number of participants mentioning sport or school/work but not combined and combined statistically significantly decreased from T1 to T2, with the decrease being 20.83% and 2.52%, respectively.

Insert Table 2 about here.

Gender Differences in Future-Oriented Hopes and Goals

A combination of the goals from T1 and T2 resulted in a total of 1474 hopes and goals, of which 59.43% were reported by females and 40.57% by males (see Table 3). Overall, the females reported more hopes and goals in each category, except in the categories of "sport" and "do not know". In six of the categories, female and male participants reported an equal number of hopes and goals: profession/work, health, relationships, lifestyle, beliefs and values, and other. The male participants reported statistically significantly more sport-related hopes and goals than the females did (difference between genders being 10.98%), especially related to becoming an elite or professional

athlete (difference between genders being 7.43%). The females reported statistically significantly more hopes and goals related to education overall (difference between genders being 4.86%), although the males reported statistically significantly more goals related to growth or development as a student than the females did (difference between genders being 0.5%). The females reported statistically significantly more goals related to happiness (2.7%) than the males, and the males reported not knowing their future hopes and goals statistically significantly more often (2.12%) than the females. The female participants mentioned dual careers statistically significantly more often (10.72%) in their answers than the male participants, especially sport and school/work but not combined (9.04%).

Insert Table 3 about here.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to examine the kinds of future-oriented hopes and goals that adolescent Finnish student-athletes have at different stages of sport high school. Gender differences in these hopes and goals were also examined. This study yielded novel insights into the future-oriented hopes and goals of student-athletes in the Finnish dual career context, and the results could be used to help develop strategies to support young athletes' successful and sustainable dual careers especially in the Nordic countries (Ronkainen & Ryba, 2018).

Aligned with earlier research (e.g., Cosh & Tully, 2014; Ryba et al., 2021) showing that student-athletes tend to prioritise athletic career over education, the results of the current study showed that goals related to sport were reported the most frequently and goals related to education second most frequently. The third most common category was profession/work. Other common goals reported in previous studies have been related to family, marriage, leisure activities, and financial well-being (e.g., Fonseca et

al., 2019; Nurmi, 1991). In the current study, these equate with the family, lifestyle, fun, and wealth subcategories, which fall into the categories of relationships, lifestyle, and self-actualisation. In line with these previous studies, self-actualisation goals were reported frequently in the current study (9.4%). However, goals related to relationships and lifestyle were not reported as often, which can be explained by the fact that the student-athletes participating in the present study were quite young, and having a family might not be relevant for them yet.

Contradictory to earlier research conducted in Finland (e.g., Nurmi, 1991) showing that goals related to identity exploration, friends, and becoming more independent are important for adolescents, the results of the present study showed that only a few had considered these. This suggests that adolescent student-athletes are highly committed to training and athletic goals and have developed a strong athletic identity, leaving no time to explore other options outside of sport (Houle et al., 2010). Similarly, Stambulova et al. (2015) found that as time restrictions increase, social life is the first life domain student-athletes in Swedish sport high schools compromise, only then education and finally sport.

The second aim of the study was to determine the kinds of future-oriented hopes and goals that adolescent student-athletes in Finland have at the end of sport high school. Changes in hopes and goals are likely to happen as students transition from adolescence to emerging adulthood and gain more life experiences (Nurmi, 2004; Schwartz et al., 2014). In this study, the overall number of goals decreased by the end of high school. In particular, the number of goals related to general and unspecific subcategories showed a statistically significant decrease. Interestingly, the number of sport-related goals decreased statistically significantly by 20%. This can reflect the emerging transition to higher education, or it can be due to goal reconstruction. Goals

are reconstructed when facing challenges in goal attainment (Nurmi, 2004). Combining elite-level sport and high school is a demanding and new kind of challenge for the students, as most of them may not have experienced dual careers on this level of demand before. Young athletes have been shown to have little awareness of the complexity of athletic talent development and all related factors (Mortensen et al., 2013). The students may have had very optimistic and broad goals at the beginning of high school, which are likely to change after gaining experience in their new life situations. Similarly, some of the student-athletes also withdrew from sport during their years in high school. Indeed, earlier studies have shown that 13% of student-athletes terminate their athletic careers during sport high school years in Finland (Sorkkila et al., 2019).The adjusted and reconstructed goals are likely to be more realistic and defined. The results of the current study showed a similar development.

As people tend to reconstruct their goals to match age-related developmental tasks and role transitions (Nurmi, 2004), emerging adults continuing to develop their identity could be expected to report goals especially related to work, love, and worldview (Schwartz et al., 2014). As expected, the number of goals related to profession/work statistically significantly increased across the stages of high school (the increase being 4%). Further, the number of goals related to higher education and being accepted to a degree program increased. Such goals may be perceived as ways of obtaining a profession/work in the future and can be explained by the emerging transition to higher education. Applying for higher education is common in Finland. For example, in 2020, 84% of high school students applied for higher education after graduation from high school (Official Statistics of Finland, 2021). The number of goals related to relationships statistically significantly increased across the stages of high

school as well (the increase being 2%). However, no changes were evident in the number of goals related to beliefs and values.

The number of goals related to self-actualisation increased statistically significantly by 6% from the beginning to the end of high school. This may be related to the simultaneous decrease in sport-related goals and retirement from sport. After retirement from competitive sport, the students have more free time, and goals related to self-actualisation and leisure activities start to take the place of sport-related goals. In addition, not knowing one's future hopes or goals increased significantly from T1 to T2. On the one hand, this result may reflect the goal reconstruction process (Nurmi, 2004). For example, when a student with a strong athletic identity chooses to retire from sport, it can take some time for them to explore their other future possibilities and construct new goals. On the other hand, it may simply reflect identity exploration during late adolescence and emerging adulthood (Schwartz et al., 2014), or perhaps the result of the length of the questionnaire used.

The results showed that only 51% of the participants at T1 and 27% of the participants at T2 mentioned dual careers in their answers, proportions that may be considered high or low, depending on the perspective. The categories included in dual careers were mentioned more often than any other categories. However, as all of the participants were studying in sport high schools at both time points meaning that they were pursuing a dual career, it was surprising that many of them (e.g., 73% of the participants at the end of high school) did not mention a dual career in their hopes and goals for the future. In addition, sport and school/work but not combined was the single most common dual-career subcategory mentioned at both time points. This may have been influenced by a variety of factors. First, fewer goals overall were reported at T2 than at T1, and the number of sport-related goals decreased significantly, which, in turn,

became visible in the number of responses mentioning dual careers. Second, some students may have found the dual career pathway to be too demanding after gaining more experience since the beginning of high school (Nurmi, 1991), and therefore reconstructed their goals (Nurmi, 2004). Third, around T2, the student-athletes were approaching the transition from upper secondary school to higher education. In Finland, there are currently no dual career programmes in place to help support the continuation of dual career pathways through higher education (Nikander et al., 2021). Knowledge of this may have had a negative impact on how the student-athletes perceived their possibilities of combining sport and education in the future.

The third aim of the present study was to examine gender differences in the future-oriented hopes and goals of student-athletes in Finnish sport high schools. In line with previous research findings (Skrubbeltrang, 2020; Ryba et al., 2021), the male participants reported statistically significantly more sport-related goals than the females did (the difference being 11%), especially the related goals of becoming an elite or professional athlete. Only 4% of the female participants in the current study reported wanting to become an elite/professional athlete. This finding is in line with previous research findings suggesting that female athletes are less likely to pursue professional athletic careers than their male counterparts (e.g., Ekengren et al., 2020). Aligned with earlier research suggesting that female athletes are more focused on their education than their male counterparts (e.g., Ryba et al., 2021), the results showed that female student-athletes reported statistically significantly more goals related to education (5%) than male student-athletes. Although earlier Finnish research (e.g., Nurmi, 1991) has found males to be more focused on wealth and work and females more interested in marriage, family, and taking care of domestic chores, no differences were evident in the number

of goals related to these categories in the current study. This may be due to the fairly equalitarian culture in Finland.

The results of the present study showed that the male student-athletes reported not knowing their future hopes and goals statistically significantly more often (2%) than the females, and the female student-athletes mentioned dual careers statistically significantly more often (11%) than the males, especially sport and school/work but not combined (9%). These findings are in line with previous Finnish research suggesting that male athletes are more relaxed about their career aspirations and are likely to focus exclusively on their athletic careers, whereas female athletes experience cultural and societal pressure to invest in a dual career (Saarinen et al., 2023; Ryba et al., 2021). As many structural inequalities limit women's ability to develop professional athletic careers (Turpeinen et al., 2012), it is important to develop and provide female athletes with more options for constructing dual or professional athletic careers. However, as most young athletes do not end up making a living in sport regardless of their gender, it is crucial to find ways to make secondary and higher education more appealing to all young athletes.

Limitations and Future Research

The present study had some limitations that should be taken into account before generalising the results. First, the sample consisted of Finnish athletes from white middle-class families, which limits the generalisability of the results across cultures. Second, some of the participants dropped out of sport high school during the study period, indicating that the sample at T2 represented student-athletes who were particularly committed to pursuing a dual career pathway. Third, the questionnaire used to assess athletes' hopes and goals was open-ended, meaning that participants were able to provide very short answers if they wanted to. This may, for example, be one of the

reasons why so few participants mentioned dual careers in their future hopes and goals. Future studies should attempt to use questionnaires with additional clarifying questions to assess athletes' future hopes and goals. Fourth, the researchers' own thoughts and beliefs might have impacted the research process (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). This possibility was taken into account by assessing intercoder reliability and avoiding making assumptions while coding the answers. For example, if the student answered hoping to have a long career in football and become the best, the answer was divided into two separate goals, and "to be the best" would be coded into the subcategory of general success, as it does not specifically mention football or sport. Therefore, it is possible that some of the goals have been coded into different subcategories than the students meant. This would result in fewer hopes and goals related to sport, education, profession/work, and dual careers.

In future research, it would be important to use multiple methods to gather information about the hopes and goals, for example, by interviewing the participants in addition to using a questionnaire or by including multiple questions in the questionnaire itself. This would produce further information about the future orientation of adolescent student-athletes and insights for supporting successful dual-career pathways. It would also be interesting to examine gendered patterns in the construction of hopes and goals across time (Ryba et al., 2021). As the student-athletes reported many goals outside of sport and some did not report any sport-related goals at all, it would be interesting to examine the extent to which all student-athletes are interested in competitive sport or whether there are some among them who are not that invested in sport, despite studying in a specialised sport high school. Additionally, further qualitative research is needed to gain a better understanding of the factors behind why so many of the student-athletes did not mention a dual career in their hopes and goals for the future. A better

understanding of this could help better support the well-being and sustainable dual-career pathways of young athletes beyond high school. In addition, further research in different cultures is needed, as values and goals are culturally constituted (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Conclusions

The present study provides an important theoretical and empirical contribution to the existing literature on young people's future orientation by longitudinally examining student-athletes' hopes and goals and gender differences in these goals. Similar to the previous research findings on adolescents' hopes and goals, goals related to both their occupations and education were the most common among student-athletes (e.g., Fonseca et al., 2019; Nurmi, 1991). The results of the current study showed that the future-oriented hopes and goals of student-athletes in Finnish sport high schools mostly coincide with age-specific developmental tasks of adolescence at the beginning of high school and emerging adulthood at the end of high school. The differences between genders were relatively small but echoed the findings of other studies on the future orientation of young athletes suggesting that female student-athletes are more focused on their education and report wanting to pursue a professional athletic career statistically significantly less than their male counterparts (Ryba et al., 2021). A surprising finding was that only half of these athletes mentioned dual careers in their future goals at the beginning of high school, and the percentage dropped even further to 27% by the end of high school. Further research on the factors behind this finding could be

expected to provide deeper insights into how to support young athletes' successful and sustainable dual-career construction beyond high school.

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Data available from the last author upon a reasonable request.

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Table 1.

The Number of Hopes and Goals Reported at T1 in Each Category and Subcategory.

Category	Subcategory	T1 Frequency	Total
Sport	Becoming an elite/professional athlete	67	331
	International level success	15	
	Participating in international level competitions	29	
	National level success	3	
	Participating in national level competitions	6	
	Youth international level success	1	
	Participating in youth international level competitions	5	
	Getting an athletic scholarship	1	
	General or ambiguous success in sport	150	
	Growth/development in sport	30	
	Enjoying sport	1	
	Being injury free	4	
	Choice about specialisation	1	
	Having good facilities	1	
	Having a plan B	1	
	Continuing sport	10	
	Good career in sport	6	
Profession/work	Good job/profession	83	110
	Well-paid profession	9	
	Finding a good profession	12	
	Success in work	6	
Education	Finishing high school	25	181
	Graduating to a certain profession	20	
	Higher education	27	
	Success in studies	83	
	Growth/development as a student	2	
	Acceptance to a degree program	24	
Dual career	Sport and school/work but not combined	176	195
	Combining sport and school/work	15	
	Dual career prioritising school/work	1	
	Dual career prioritising sport	3	

Self-actualisation			73
	Being succesfull	31	
	Fun	6	
	Meaning	1	
	Wealth	7	
	Growth/development as a person	17	
	Happiness	9	
	Good life	1	
	Independence	1	
Health	Health	11	11
Relationships	Family	19	24
	Relationships	5	
Lifestyle	Lifestyle	13	13
Beliefs and values	Helping others	1	5
	Valuing self and others	1	
	Home	2	
	Belief in God	1	
Do not know	Do not know	12	12
Other	Other	17	17

Note. T1 = Time 1.

Table 2.

Comparison of Proportions of Hopes and Goals Reported at T1 and T2 in Each Category and Subcategory.

Category and subcategory	Comparison of proportions				
	T1 %	T2 %	Difference %	chi-squared	p
Sport	42.60	22.60	**20.0**	**66.40**	**< 0.01**
Becoming an elite/professional athlete	8.62	5.58	**3.04**	**5.10**	**0.02**
International level success	1.93	0.57	**1.36**	**5.36**	**0.02**
Participating in international level competitions	3.73	1.72	**2.01**	**5.50**	**0.02**
National level success	0.39	0.57	0.18	0.25	0.62
Participating in national level competitions	0.77	1.14	0.37	0.54	0.46
Youth international level success	0.13	0.14	0.01	< 0.01	0.96
Participating in youth international level	0.64	0.00	**0.64**	**4.49**	**0.03**
Getting an athletic scholarship	0.13	0.00	0.13	0.91	0.34
General or ambiguous success in sport	19.31	7.44	**11.87**	**43.85**	**<0.01**
Growth/development in sport	3.86	1.72	**2.14**	**6.09**	**0.01**
Enjoying sport	0.13	0.00	0.13	0.91	0.34
Being injury free	0.51	0.57	0.06	0.03	0.88
Choice about specialisation	0.13	0.14	0.01	< 0.01	0.96
Having good facilities	0.13	0.00	0.13	0.91	0.34

Having a plan B	0.13	0.00	0.13	0.91	0.34
Continuing sport	1.29	2.00	0.71	1.16	0.28
Good career in sport	0.77	1.00	0.23	0.22	0.64
Profession/work	14.16	18.31	**4.15**	**4.68**	**0.03**
Good job/profession	10.68	13.73	3.05	3.21	0.07
Well-paid profession	1.16	0.72	0.44	0.76	0.38
Finding a good profession	1.54	2.43	0.89	1.52	0.22
Success in work	0.77	1.43	0.66	1.50	0.22
Education	23.29	20.89	2.40	1.23	0.27
Finishing high school	3.22	1.43	**1.79**	**5.09**	**0.02**
Graduating to a certain profession	2.57	1.86	0.71	0.85	0.36
Higher education	3.47	7.44	**3.97**	**11.45**	**<0.01**
Success in studies	10.68	2.58	**8.10**	**37.84**	**<0.01**
Growth/development as a student	0.26	0.14	0.12	0.26	0.61
Acceptance to a degree program	3.09	7.44	**4.35**	**14.24**	**<0.01**
Dual careers	51.18	27.35	**23.83**	**43.26**	**< 0.01**
Sport and school/work but not combined	46.19	25.36	**20.83**	**34.27**	**<0.01**
Combining sport and school/work	3.94	1.42	**2.52**	**4.36**	**0.04**
Dual careers prioritising school/work	0.26	0.28	0.02	< 0.01	0.96
Dual careers prioritising sport	0.79	0.28	0.51	0.88	0.35
Self-actualisation	9.40	15.02	**5.62**	**10.95**	**< 0.01**

Being successful	3.99	3.29	0.70	0.51	0.47
Fun	0.77	2.43	**1.66**	**6.61**	**0.01**
Meaning	0.13	0.00	0.13	0.91	0.34
Wealth	0.90	2.15	**1.25**	**3.91**	**0.05**
Growth/development as a person	2.19	1.43	0.76	1.18	0.28
Happiness	1.16	3.15	**1.99**	**7.08**	**<0.01**
Good life	0.13	1.57	**1.44**	**9.47**	**<0.01**
Independence	0.13	1.00	**0.87**	**5.16**	**0.02**
Health	1.42	2.72	1.30	3.12	0.08
Relationships	3.09	5.58	**2.49**	**5.58**	**0.02**
Family	2.46	4.01	1.55	2.86	0.09
Relationships	0.64	1.57	0.93	2.98	0.08
Lifestyle	1.67	3.29	**1.62**	**4.06**	**0.04**
Beliefs & Values	0.64	0.43	0.21	0.30	0.58
Helping others	0.13	0.14	0.01	< 0.01	0.96
Valuing self and others	0.13	0.00	0.13	0.91	0.34
Home	0.26	0.14	0.12	0.26	0.61
Belief in God	0.13	0.14	0.01	< 0.01	0.96
Do not know	1.54	5.15	**3.61**	**15.24**	**<0.01**
Other	2.19	6.01	**3.82**	**13.98**	**<0.01**

Note. T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2.

Table 3.

Comparison of Proportions of Hopes and Goals Reported by Female and Male Participants.

Category and subcategory			**Comparison of proportions**		
	Female %	Male %	Difference %	chi-squared	p
Sport	8.65	39.63	**10.98**	**19.34**	**< 0.01**
Becoming an elite/professional athlete	4.11	11.54	**7.43**	**29.63**	**<0.01**
International level success	1.14	1.51	0.37	0.38	0.54
Participating in international level competitions	2.51	3.18	0.67	0.59	0.44
National level success	0.23	0.84	0.61	2.78	0.10
Participating in national level competitions	0.68	1.34	0.66	1.65	0.20
Youth international level success	0.11	0.17	0.06	0.10	0.76
Participating in youth international level	0.23	0.50	0.27	0.77	0.38
Getting an athletic scholarship	0.11	0.00	0.11	-	-
General or ambiguous success in sport	13.58	13.88	0.30	0.03	0.87
Growth/development in sport	2.40	3.51	1.11	1.58	0.21
Enjoying sport	0.11	0.00	0.11	0.66	0.42
Being injury free	0.46	0.67	0.21	0.29	0.59
Choice about specialisation	0.23	0.00	0.23	-	-
Having good facilities	0.00	0.17	0.17	-	-

Having a plan B	0.00	0.17	0.17	-	-
Continuing sport	1.94	1.17	0.77	1.32	0.25
Good career in sport	0.80	1.00	0.20	0.16	0.69
Profession/work	16.89	15.05	1.84	0.89	0.35
Good job/profession	12.67	11.37	1.30	0.56	0.45
Well-paid profession	0.68	1.34	0.66	1.65	0.20
Finding a good profession	2.51	1.17	1.34	3.31	0.07
Success in work	1.03	1.17	0.14	0.07	0.80
Education	24.09	19.23	**4.86**	**4.87**	**0.03**
Finishing high school	2.17	2.68	0.51	0.40	0.53
Graduating to a certain profession	2.63	1.67	0.96	1.49	0.22
Higher education	5.94	4.52	1.42	1.41	0.23
Success in studies	7.76	5.52	2.24	2.79	0.09
Growth/development as a student	0.00	0.50	**0.5**	-	-
Acceptance to a degree program	5.59	4.35	1.24	1.13	0.29
Dual careers	44.64	33.92	**10.72**	**8.72**	**< 0.01**
Sport and school/work but not combined	40.31	31.27	**9.04**	**6.43**	**0.01**
Combining sport and school/work	3.57	1.77	1.80	2.21	0.14
Dual careers prioritising school/work	0.51	0.00	0.51	-	-
Dual careers prioritising sport	0.26	0.88	0.62	1.28	0.26
Self-actualisation	12.79	11.04	1.75	1.02	0.31

Being successful	2.97	4.68	1.71	2.94	0.09
Fun	1.71	1.34	0.37	0.32	0.57
Meaning	0.11	0.00	0.11	-	-
Wealth	1.14	2.01	0.87	1.83	0.18
Growth/development as a person	2.28	1.17	1.11	2.44	0.12
Happiness	3.20	0.50	**2.7**	**12.57**	**<0.01**
Good life	0.57	1.17	0.60	1.59	0.21
Independence	0.80	0.17	0.63	2.60	0.11
Health	2.28	1.67	0.61	0.66	0.42
Relationships	4.68	3.68	1.00	0.87	0.35
Family	3.54	2.68	0.86	0.85	0.36
Relationships	1.14	1.00	0.14	0.07	0.80
Lifestyle	2.97	1.67	1.30	2.52	0.11
Beliefs & Values	0.57	0.50	0.07	0.03	0.86
Helping others	0.23	0.00	0.23	-	-
Valuing self and others	0.00	0.17	0.17	1.49	0.22
Home	0.34	0.00	0.34	-	-
Belief in God	0.00	0.33	0.33	2.89	0.09
Do not know	2.40	4.52	**2.12**	**5.06**	**0.03**
Other	4.68	3.01	1.67	2.58	0.11

Note. A statistical analysis was not carried out if the frequency of answers by either gender was less than 1.