

Researcher uncovers what athletes need to perform well

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Watching her father qualify for the 1988 Olympics was what inspired UQ PhD graduate Dr Caroline Ringuet to research the needs of high-performance athletes.

“He was an elite runner and qualified for the Seoul Olympic Games marathon team for Mauritius, but it was never easy for him to be so successful because he had to juggle sport, work and family life; just like many athletes today,” she said.

Completed through UQ's School of Human Movement Studies, Dr Ringuet's study involved interviewing 35 elite athletes and 41 administrators of high-performance sport from around the world.

The research identified nine factors which influence an athlete's performance including funding, lifestyle and coaching.

“It was not surprising that participants would recount the need for money, career and education support programs, specialist services, or lifestyle and balance,” Dr Ringuet said.

“One finding of particular concern was the mismatch in the expectations of athletes for support and the delivery of support provided to them.

“This could have important implications for performance outcomes.”

Given 35 percent of the sports administrators involved in the study were

ex-elite athletes, Dr Ringuet presumed they would empathise with the performance development needs of sports people.

Her research revealed, however, that the groups had quite different priorities.

“Where the athletes and administrators had different perceptions, it was usually because administrators referred to the need to achieve competitive success while athletes referred to the need for personal development,” she said.

“For example, athletes often described funding as a need because they lacked the money to support both daily living and sport expenses.

“Although administrators felt similarly, they also perceived the need to direct funds towards infrastructure development and sport program delivery to improve athletic performances.

“In contrast, no athlete reported infrastructure development and sport program delivery as an area requiring extra financial resources.”

Dr Ringuet's findings were presented at the 13th Commonwealth International Sport Conference held in Melbourne during the 2006 Commonwealth Games; the International Olympic Academy 14th International Postgraduate Seminar on Olympic Studies in Greece in 2006; and the 2004 Pre-Olympic Congress in Thessaloniki, Greece, before the 2004 Athens Olympic Games.

The study was also commended by the International Olympic Committee as an “important and pioneering body of work”.

Now a sports management academic at Griffith University, Dr Ringuet plans to undertake further research in this area.

“I am now working on a project with the Australian Institute of Sport to enhance the way we provide support to sport,” she said.

“I would also like to extend my study to an analysis of athlete development and high performance sport programs in African, Asian, and South-American nations.”

Provided by University of Queensland

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