

What's the best way to combine sports and school?

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Some youth go all in to excel at a sport. But having a backup plan is a smart move. One day your athletic career will probably end, no matter how good you are. You'll have done yourself a favor by acquiring an

education as well.

"We looked at how ambitious young Norwegian footballers experience the pros and cons of combining [school](#) and [sports](#)," says Stig Arve Sæther, an associate professor of sports science at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology's (NTNU) Department of Sociology and Political Science.

Regardless of the option, you pay a price. The school you choose if you want to do school and sports makes a difference, and finding one that is positively inclined toward combining them is key.

"Elite sports schools and other schools that enable students to combine education with sports offer a balance. The programs are intended to provide success both in the sport of choice and in [academic work](#), although some prioritize the former over the latter," says Sæther.

Easier to integrate elite sports at special schools

The researchers from NTNU and the Norwegian School of Sport Sciences (NIH) spoke with eight [football players](#) and five coaches from two schools with elite sports programs and two regular secondary schools with a sports focus.

They then analyzed the student-athletes' responses to find out how the programs at the elite sports schools and at public sport schools compared.

They found some differences.

"The elite sports programs closely integrate school and [sports clubs](#), and enable the coaches and athletes to plan and manage the total workload more easily. This arrangement can lead to better development in both

areas," says Sæther.

Students who attend the elite sports schools seem to have an easier schedule than those who go to public sport schools. But attending a sports-friendly regular school does not only have disadvantages.

More independence outside the special schools

"Athletes who attend the less structured, but still sports-friendly regular secondary programs are more concerned about the total workload of this option. But they also have more responsibility for their own decision making," says Sæther.

The different environments offer different advantages, risks and development opportunities for students who want to combine studies and sports at a high level.

The increased responsibility offers more self-determination for those who want it. At the same time, the risk of injury due to overtraining increases.

"Our results show how the different environments offer different advantages, risks and development opportunities for those who want to combine studies with sports at a high level," says Sæther.

Admission linked to early achievements

The basis for admission to elite sport programs is often linked to sporting achievements and club affiliation. The athletes' achievements at a relatively young age can thus affect the degree of support they receive in upper secondary school.

However, research shows that strong performance at a young age is not necessarily a good indicator of achievement at the senior level.

"This situation can quickly become an additional challenge. Certain athletes may receive less support compared to others, even though their difference in [skill level](#), and the basis for program admission, is not necessarily that great," says Sæther.

The research was published in the *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*.

More information: Stig Arve Sæther et al, Balancing sport and academic development: Perceptions of football players and coaches in two types of Norwegian school-based dual career development environments, *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching* (2022). [DOI: 10.1177/17479541221111462](https://doi.org/10.1177/17479541221111462)

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