



SAFEGUARDING YOUTH SPORT

STIMULATING THE INDIVIDUAL EMPOWERMENT OF ELITE YOUNG ATHLETES
AND A POSITIVE ETHICAL CLIMATE IN SPORT ORGANISATIONS

Project lead



Project partners



PREFACE

This booklet marks the end of the European project **Safeguarding Youth Sport (SYS)**, managed by the International Centre Ethics in Sport in close collaboration with ten partners from eight EU Member States. It ran for 18 months from 1 January 2014 until 30 June 2015 and received funding through the 2013 Preparatory Actions in the Field of Sport of the European Commission. Its aim was to safeguard elite young athletes from integrity threats by improving training and competition conditions.

The project consortium met for 4 European Meetings and gathered together a broad range of elite sport stakeholders during a Final Conference in Brussels.

- ▶ **Kick-off meeting: 4-6 March, 2014 - Ghent, Belgium**
- ▶ **Second meeting: 2-4 September, 2014 - Zagreb, Croatia**
- ▶ **Third meeting: 13-15 January, 2014 - Cologne, Germany**
- ▶ **Closing meeting: 11-13 May, 2014 - Brussels, Belgium**

- ▶ **Final Conference: 13 May, 2015 - Brussels, Belgium**

This publication reflects the results of all the hard work done by the SYS project consortium, which consisted of: the project lead (International Centre Ethics in Sport – BE), 1 expert centre (Child Protection in Sport Unit – UK), 5 universities (German Sport University Cologne – DE; Lithuanian Sports University – LT; University of Oradea – RO; University of Southern Denmark – DK; Vrije Universiteit Brussel – BE), 2 Olympic Committees (NOC*NSF – NL; NOC Croatia – HR) and 2 umbrella organisations (ENGSO Youth; Panathlon International).

“ Child athletes are
children first:
Let them play! ”

Gella Vandecaveye, Olympic silver and bronze medallist

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INTRODUCTION

Athletes at all levels of sport deserve to train and compete in a safe, healthy and stimulating sport environment. **Elite young athletes** need to invest tremendously in their sport in order to reach the ultimate performance excellence. The road towards sport success is paved with endless challenges and excitement.



Our understanding of an **elite young athlete** is one who is under 18, is active at least at regional level, has an identified sports talent, aims to perform at the highest level, is part of a talent pathway and for whom their sports activity consumes a significant amount of time, energy and resources.

Even the most talented athletes are unlikely to realise their full potential without years of sustained commitment and arduous training. Therefore, it is in everybody's interest that elite young athletes are offered the best possible training and competition conditions to fulfil their sporting aspirations.

Informed by a growing body of research, showing that the higher athletes progress up the sporting talent ladder, the greater the risk of their **integrity** being compromised, this project focussed specifically on young athletes performing at **elite level**.



Integrity threats are here understood as actions or omissions by individuals or organisations, either overtly or covertly, potentially or actually, intentionally or unintentionally, significant or insignificant, immediate or over time, which undermine the personal integrity of an elite young athlete and contravene the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Sexual harassment and abuse was the first area of attention in research and practice but, increasingly, studies are appearing on other forms of non-accidental violence and on related health and well-being issues, all posing a threat to the personal integrity of the athlete. In addition, new integrity threats are evident, linked to cheating and organised crime (such as trafficking, illegal betting, match-fixing, bogus scouts and gene doping) but are not included in this project. We thus identify two areas of integrity threats to elite young athletes:

- 1** All forms of **violence against elite young athletes** such as physical and psychological violence, sexual harassment and abuse, neglect and bullying.
- 2** **Related health and well-being issues** such as body image, eating disorders, mental well-being and self-harm.

We took on this challenge with a pronounced **athlete-centred approach** – putting the athlete’s well-being and performance at the centre of all the project work – and call for a holistic and solution-focused approach in **safeguarding** of elite young athletes.



Safeguarding is here understood as the promotion of the well-being of an athlete and protection against all forms of integrity threats.

In doing so, we focused on two concepts. Since it’s known that the prevailing **ethical climate** in sport organisations has implications for both an athlete’s performance and his/her experience of well-being, and **empowerment** gives an athlete the necessary skills to set his/her own boundaries, the project assessed their value in contributing to safeguarding.

The **project work** included: reviewing literature to clearly delineate the problem and identify possible solutions; drafting status quo reports for the eight project countries; gathering relevant practices to learn from other countries; carrying out focus groups with elite athletes and coaches to include their voices; and drafting recommendations to improve training and competition conditions.

The following chapters are informed by all this project work and are intended to raise awareness of this important topic among European elite

sport stakeholders and to stimulate them to act accordingly!

- ▶ **Setting the Challenge** - sheds light on both some elite sport factors that may explain the increased risk at that level, and different forms of integrity threats and how these are manifested.
- ▶ **Status Quo** - gives an overview of trends and differences in approaches to safeguarding elite young athletes in eight selected European countries.
- ▶ **Tackling the Challenge** - presents a solution-focussed holistic approach, including insights into athlete empowerment and positive ethical climate together with twelve relevant practices.
- ▶ **Recommendations** - provides helpful and concrete recommendations tailored for five target groups: policy-makers, coaches, athletes, event and competition organisers, and developers of educational programmes.



SETTING THE CHALLENGE:

Integrity threats in elite sport

Serious physical and mental efforts are inherent to elite sport. This can make it hard for athletes, coaches and all members of the entourage to make a clear distinction between 'hard training' and 'activities that are out-of-line or harmful'. An overriding concern is to define young athletes in a way that is appropriate to their needs, as children first and athletes second. Too often, children with significant athletic potential are treated as adults. This has serious consequences for realisation of their rights and their access to legal and sport processes that can protect them.

This chapter sheds light on some elite sport risk factors, different forms of integrity threats and how these are manifested at elite level.

Elite sport risk factors

Elite sport culture is characterised by a **win-at-all-costs** approach. This approach emerges from the inherently competitive nature of elite sport and the bumpy road towards sport success that is paved with all kinds of setbacks and challenges. The immense dream to reach the ultimate goal, manifested in a total dedication and sacrifice for the game, can sometimes make it hard for an athlete, coach and/or his/her entourage to accept obstacles along the way. It has been suggested that this total adherence can lead to a normalisation of integrity risks, uncritical acceptance of negative behaviour 'for the greater good' and willingness to do 'whatever it takes'.

Although there are differences between sport disciplines, elite young athletes are often children by age but adults by way-of-life. This is referred to as **status confusion**. Alongside competing at a high level come a lot of requirements and demands that are usually associated with adult life: frequent travel trips and being abroad for long periods of time, resulting in separation from family and community support, often from a young age; money





issues like sponsorship deals or contracts; coping with negative media coverage; balancing intense sport activity with private life and schooling. Athletes can become absorbed by the adult ethos prevailing in elite sport and are often treated accordingly by their peers, coaches, parents and members of the entourage. In addition, this may lead to a situation where the athlete's life is determined by their environment, resulting in lack of control over many aspects of their own life.

A major feature within elite sport is the great intensity of the **coach-athlete relationship**. It is sometimes described as a critical relationship: one that has significant influence over an athlete's sense of safety, trust, and fulfilment of needs. A talented young athlete relies heavily on his/her coach for many aspects of life, not only sporting ones. Coaches' decisions are key to progressing in a sport career and reaching goals, for example team selection. Traditionally, it is a coach who sets goals, measures progress and evaluates outcomes, which makes them a

crucial factor in the sport life of a young athlete. Given the tremendous investment that is needed in elite sport, the coach - and by extension the whole entourage - also intervenes in private life issues like school-leisure-sport balance, eating regimes, etc. In addition, the athlete spends a huge amount of time together with their coach, often more so than with their parents, siblings or friends, not only during training but also while living abroad or on trips. This leads to greater intimacy between coach and athlete which can potentially, in combination with the great dependence described above, develop into a blurry or unhealthy coach-athlete relationship. If, in addition, the coach is well-respected and ascribed with a good reputation based on prior sport successes, this may silence the athlete, preventing them complaining or generating denial or blaming of whistle-blowers.

On a more personal level, and fed by total dedication for the game, elite young athletes may link their **self-image** very closely with performance excellence. Given the tremendous (mental) pressure and expectations placed upon an elite athlete, a failure to reach sport goals can cause their self-esteem to crumble. In a highly competitive environment like elite sport - where possible gains and losses are the greatest and stakes are high - this may make the young athlete vulnerable to all kinds of harmful behaviours from themselves, their coach, parents or members of the entourage.

Forms of integrity threats

Several forms of integrity threats to elite young athletes were identified by a literature review for this project. They are discussed here and illustrated with quotes from seven focus groups held with elite athletes and coaches in five EU countries: Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Germany and Romania.

The focus here is on integrity threats that are linked to all forms of violence against elite young athletes and related health and well-being issues. They are not mutually exclusive but linked through the prevailing culture of sport in society. What they have in common is that they result in harm, negative impacts or consequences for the athlete's well-being and sport performance, including: physical and/or mental health issues, lowered confidence, decreased motivation to train or compete, burnout, dropout ...

- 1 Violence against elite young athletes** refers to non-accidental violence as defined in article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: "... all forms of physical or mental violence, injury and abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse." In the context of sport, this may be expressed in several ways:

Physical integrity threats are actions or omissions that threaten, attempt or actually inflict harm to

an individual's physical health and well-being. Of the three outlined here, this is the most visible and more identifiable form of integrity threat.

Some examples include:

- ▶ Young people training or being forced to train through injury, pain or exhaustion, sometimes being unaware of the effect of overtraining despite coach warnings (self-harm or through peer pressure) or unable to speak up to their entourage
- ▶ Overtraining and forced exertion as a deliberate training practice as a way of 'toughening them up'
- ▶ Physical harm inflicted punitively as a result of poor performance
- ▶ Physical violence, bullying and neglect, and the use of performance-enhancing doping, drugs or alcohol under pressure from the self, peers or entourage



Quotes from focus groups

Female athlete – PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

"The coach got really drunk during a Christmas party and tried to hit one of the girls."

Male athlete – SELF-HARM

"I was injured in the right foot but I had to perform even though I had big pain because a world title was at stake. If I quit I no longer had a world champion title." He accepted for his own satisfaction and country pride.



Male athlete – FORCED TO TRAIN THROUGH INJURY

“I was injured in the spine but they forced me to fight ... and I finished with a bad injury. Out for 6 months. The majority of coaches doing the same. They do not think of the athletes’ risks but only of the sport results.”



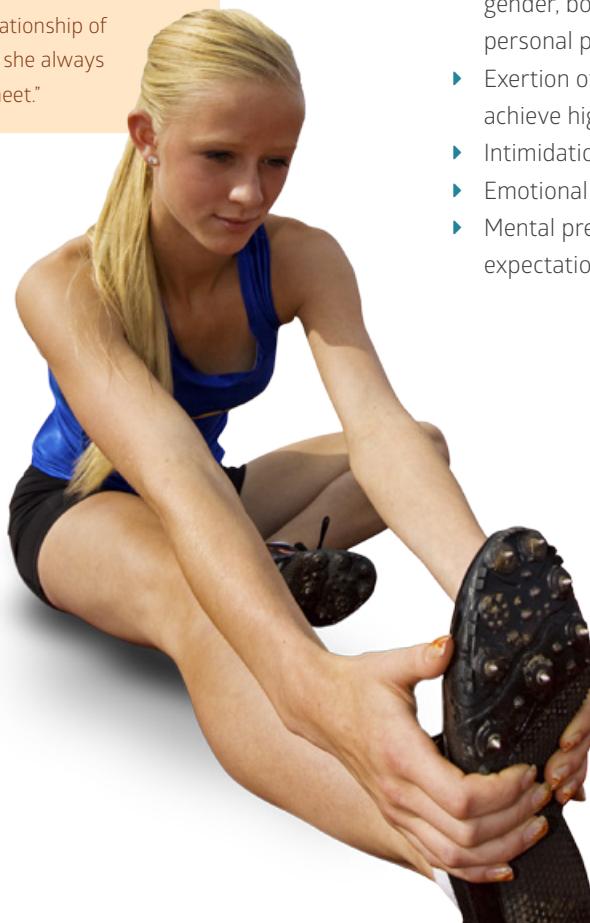
Female athlete – PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

“An athlete told one of her secrets to a fellow athlete whom she thought she could trust. The be-friended athlete blazed abroad this secret to all of her friends. Ever since then the relationship of trust between them is broken and she always punches and hits her when they meet.”

Psychological integrity threats are actions or omissions that threaten, attempt or actually inflict harm to an individual’s emotional health and well-being. This form occurs mostly in elite sport where it is often believed to be a necessary part of training, coaching and competing at high level. It underpins all other forms of integrity threats and is often a gateway to them.

Some examples include:

- ▶ Humiliation or bullying based on gender, body, shape, performance, personal preference
- ▶ Exertion of undue pressure to achieve high performance
- ▶ Intimidation
- ▶ Emotional neglect
- ▶ Mental pressure from too high expectations





Quotes from focus groups

Male coach – BULLYING BASED ON PERFORMANCE

“The best results may require advanced equipment, whilst others are provided with inferior quality material that could negatively influence the mental health in preparing the athletes and also friendships.”

Female athlete - BULLYING BASED ON PERSONAL PREFERENCE

“Inside the club / team there is constant discrimination felt by athletes due to the relationship between the coach and some of the team leaders; when the personal opinion of the athlete is not the same as the coach they are not given the same support and attention.”

Female athlete - BULLYING

“An athlete was in a period of intense fatigue and was advised to not expose herself to stress. During a training camp abroad she shared a room with two fellow athletes from another country. They always came into the bedroom late, so she couldn't get good quality sleep.”

Sexual integrity threats are sexual actions or omissions that may result in psychological or even physical harm to the athlete. This form was the first to attract attention from the media, research and policy. An important distinction is made between sexual harassment (unwanted sexual attention) and sexual abuse (groomed or coerced involvement in sexual acts).

Some examples include:

- ▶ Unwanted staring and intimate questions relating to body, clothes or one's private life, “jokes” with a sexual innuendo, and proposals or demands for sexual services or sexual relationships
- ▶ Unwanted telephone calls, text messages or letters with a sexual content, or showing pictures of objects with sexual allusions
- ▶ Unwanted or unnecessary physical contact of a sexual nature, such as “pinching”, pressing oneself onto the body of others or attempting to kiss or caress another person
- ▶ Sexually degrading initiation (hazing) rituals
- ▶ Requiring sex as a prerequisite for team selection or privileges



Quotes from focus groups

Female athlete – UNWANTED SEXUAL ATTENTION

“An athlete had left the shower area, which is hidden by walls, and was now standing naked between the benches, as the coach appears. The coach briefly stops and they get eye contact. Laura, obviously shy, tries to grab her towel.”

2 Related health and well-being issues. This refers to failure to recognise and respond to issues such as body image, eating disorders, mental well-being, depression and self-harm, all of which can have negative consequences for health.

Some examples include:

- ▶ Nutrition and weight loss regimes leading to eating disorders such as anorexia or bulimia
- ▶ Mental health issues linked to coping with pressure coming from media intrusion, fame, publicity, negative media coverage, high expectations, suddenly being dropped from the team or withdrawn from funding due to poor performances, or approaching retirement from elite level
- ▶ Self-harm, which may be directly attributable to participation in sport and can be linked to perceived poor performance, body image pressures (exacerbated by coach behaviour or peer pressure), or sport-acquired eating disorders

In conclusion, awareness of risk factors and pitfalls in the prevailing elite sport culture, and of different forms of integrity threats and ways they are expressed in reality, is essential to influence the ethical climate in a positive direction.

“ The coach is the most important person to maintain a healthy sport environment ! ”

*Gerben Wiersma,
Dutch national women's coach, KNGU*

STATUS QUO of safeguarding elite young athletes in 8 selected European countries

Based on eight status quo reports made for this project, the aim of this chapter is to identify trends and differences in approaches to safeguarding elite young athletes in the following European countries: Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Germany, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Romania and the United Kingdom. Due to many cultural and organisational differences in and outside sport, this is a challenging task. Elite sport is organised in different ways, and under different welfare provisions and legislative structures. Whilst all European countries have taken steps to develop laws and legal repercussions regarding child abuse in society at large, only very few countries' national sport federations have developed safeguarding policies or action plans.

It is not yet possible to measure the impact of legislation, organisational initiatives, procedures, and actions where sport is delivered to young athletes. Therefore, this chapter primarily aims to raise some comparative issues, rather than attempt a qualitative assessment of the status quo in the eight European countries involved in this project.

Elite sport structure in general

Elite sport structures differ from country to country. Athletes, with the aspiration to participate in national and international championships and tournaments, need to be enrolled in an organisational structure. In general, athletes are members of sport clubs or an elite sport unit with a direct or indirect link to a national sport federation. National sport federations have to organise national competitions and select national representatives for participation in international competitions. In most European countries, the National Olympic and Paralympic Committees set the qualification criteria and nominate athletes for participation in the Olympic or Paralympic Games. Most European countries have a tax-driven funding structure for elite sport, managed by the national sport confederations and/or National Olympic Committees. Almost all countries invest in elite sport schools, facility upgrades, sport infrastructure, elite coach education programmes and talent identification schemes. Due to the increasing level of competition, a growing number of countries channel their resources into those sports in which they have the

potential to win medals (e.g. Belgium, Denmark, Lithuania, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom).

Conventions, laws and (elite) sport regulations

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989), which has been ratified by all selected European countries, clearly stipulates that every child has the right to be kept safe from physical, emotional and sexual abuse. In addition, all 47 Council of Europe member states have signed the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (2010). The Panathlon Declaration on Ethics in Youth Sport is recognised as a universal code of ethics on the protection of children's rights in the specific context of sport and has been signed by hundreds of national and international sports organisations. However, only a few countries have set up specific policies for child protection or safeguarding in sport. Thus, measures should be taken to safeguard every child in every setting, including elite sport.

Sport structures (NOC, EOC, IOC & national, European and international sport federations) and governmental bodies (national, European and international level) are interconnected in systems that range from the highest organisational and international level through to club

level. The structures of sport are responsible for the sporting process and environment. Across all participating nations, national governments play an important role providing funding for sport and for establishing elite sport systems for youth that provide age-appropriate training and competition opportunities as well as education opportunities. Over recent decades additional stakeholders, such as private investors, have gained more influence on elite sport by investing large sums in specific clubs or athletes: here, governmental influence is limited. The organisational structures that can affect safeguarding approaches may therefore vary from country to country. Some countries have a governmental/public authority-driven approach (Croatia), either targeted at society in general (Lithuania and Romania) or sport specifically (Belgium). Others have adopted distinct sport-driven policy-making in safeguarding (Denmark and the Netherlands), or a combined approach where welfare policy-makers work together with actors in sports (the United Kingdom).

Number and categorisation of elite young athletes

Since there are differences in defining and classifying elite young athletes within the countries involved in this project, it is challenging to assess the exact number of people affected. Furthermore, the categorisations of athletes in an elite sport



career pathway are different. Most countries divide their elite athletes in 3 to 5 categories. The lowest category, where the youngest athletes are classified, is often described as promising or potential. Financial resources support and facilitate young athletes from the beginning of their pathway (Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom).

Elite athletes and school

Countries take different initiatives to harmonise education with the elite youth sport career. In some countries, special efforts have been made to create opportunities for elite young athletes to combine school with an international sporting career. Other countries (such as Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Romania) have opted to establish elite sport schools in which elite young athletes from different sport disciplines follow an adapted school programme that allows more time for training and competition. In Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands some sport schools focus on only one or two sports.

Recruiting procedures and criminal record checks

Findings from the eight European countries demonstrate that safeguarding issues are often only vaguely tied to obligations or rules regarding recruitment procedures for coaches and other

member of the sport entourage. Because performance is the main goal when hiring a coach, aspects such as past successes and sports and technical knowledge prevail. The Netherlands and the United Kingdom encourage sport clubs to invest in a qualitative screening of new sports personnel, by checking their background, asking for a reference, organising an introductory interview or signing of a code of conduct or a formal contract. In Belgium, Croatia, Germany, Lithuania and Romania it is possible to request a criminal record check. In the Netherlands sport organisations are actively encouraged to ask for a criminal record check from coaches. Denmark and the United Kingdom have made it obligatory for sport organisations to request a criminal record check before employing a coach. It is perhaps wise to express some caution about such checks. Criminal record checks only have a small effect size, as they only prevent 're-offenders' from entering sport. Secondly, they cannot solve the problem of reoffending coaches crossing national borders.

Response procedures

How response procedures are set up varies from country to country. Some, like the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, have specified initiatives for sport. In others, one must rely on the generic structures for all settings (Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Germany, Lithuania, and Romania). The Netherlands and the United Kingdom systems

identify problems through helplines specially set up for sport. In other countries (Belgium, Denmark, Lithuania, and Romania) problems are reported through a general helpline for abuse or through direct reports to the social welfare and police authorities. In some countries, a professional structure of welfare officers and counsellors is established (the Netherlands and the United Kingdom), who can rely on an overall disciplinary law for all national sport organisations which allows them the opportunity to provide an integrated approach.

Support to sport organisations in establishing safeguarding policy

Governments realise that the implementation of safeguarding is not an easy job. Therefore, in some countries, they ensure that sports organisations can rely on dedicated support. In Belgium and the United Kingdom there is an external organisation that informs, encourages and supports sport organisations to establish safeguarding policies at qualitative, preventive and responsive level. In Croatia, Germany, the Netherlands, Lithuania and Romania guidance is provided by the NOC and/or umbrella organisation of sport federations and/or the ministry of sport. Depending on the supporting authority, counselling mostly includes: information gathering and dissemination, training, promotion, themed working groups, learning networks,

reporting needs to government, commissioning of scientific research, preparation and implementation of tools and campaigns, actions to raise awareness and so on.

Conclusion



We can conclude that safeguarding in sport is an active topic in EU countries. There are, however, a lot of different approaches and stages to safeguarding elite young athletes, due to the many

cultural and organisational differences in and outside sport. Therefore, we can learn from each other. The next chapter attempts to address this by presenting a holistic approach together with twelve relevant practices.

“ There is an
absolute argument
that safeguarding
does serve winning ”

Em. Prof. Celia Brackenridge, OBE - Brunel University London



TACKLING THE CHALLENGE:

Empowerment and ethical climate

Together with the description of twelve relevant practices, this chapter presents a solution-focused holistic approach to tackle integrity threats in elite youth sport. The heart of this chapter is informed by **three main actors** in elite youth sport: athletes, coaches and entourage; and **three policy levels**: quality, prevention and response.

We also dig more deeply into **two concepts** and their contribution value in safeguarding elite young athletes: establishing a positive ethical climate, mainly on the quality level, and stimulating empowerment of athletes in relation to the other actors, mainly on the prevention level.

The aspiration to excel is at the heart of sport. Coaches and staff have the responsibility to share the athletes' aspirations. That inevitably means that young athletes are challenged to move beyond their comfort zone. In a positive **ethical climate** all stakeholders know and act according to their responsibilities so that performance goals and athlete well-being are mutually reinforcing.



An **ethical climate** reflects the persistent moral atmosphere in an organization on policy, principles and handling, characterised by mutual perceptions of right and wrong, as well as common assumptions about how moral concerns should be addressed.

Empowerment of young athletes helps them to use their own talents and abilities and give meaning to their own actions and their will to perform.



Empowerment is here understood as the process by which athletes gain insight and expectations and develop skills and abilities to gain control over their own lives and bodies and to act in a self-determined and autonomous way.

Actors involved in safeguarding

As well as individual talent and expert coaching, the development of athletic giftedness to its fullest potential requires comprehensive support aimed at minimising risks and maximising results. Once young athletes have entered the competitive arena, and depending on the level of competition,

significant others play an increasingly central role in their lives. This is a challenging job for the athlete's entourage. Efforts to safeguard elite youth sport are done most efficiently and effectively by focussing on all actors involved, highlighting the importance of multidisciplinary teamwork. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) established an 'Entourage Commission' which developed Guidelines for the Conduct of Athletes' Entourage. They identified a range of actors surrounding athletes in an effort to provide them with a general understanding of expectations and the role each play in the athlete's so-called 'performance system'. From our perspective, safeguarding is an integral part of this system, not separate from it.

Because so many different actors influence elite sport athletes, all of whom can be critical to the overall long-term success of the athlete, we distinguish **three main actors**:

(I) **ELITE YOUNG ATHLETES**: anyone who is under 18, active on a performance pathway, has an identified sports talent, aims to perform at the highest level, is part of a talent pathway and for whom their sports activity consumes a significant amount of time, energy and resources. These athletes share responsibility for safeguarding both themselves and their peers.

(II) **COACH(ES)**: the role of coaches is significant since they need to blend technical competences with characteristics related to coach/team interactions (such as communication, cohesion and role modelling). Coaches have a crucial responsibility for the holistic development of athletes, striving for performance excellence through personal excellence. Often the coach is in direct or indirect contact with several actors in the entourage thus able influencing the process of athlete empowerment through them.

(III) **ENTOURAGE**: this comprises all stakeholders or authority figures - including (a) primary authority figures or professional support staff, such as elite coaches supported by one or more assistant coaches, and specialist/scientific support staff (e.g. strength and fitness specialists, psychologists, nutritionists, biomechanical experts, physiotherapists, doctors) (b) secondary authority figures, such as at those at policy level (government, federations, associations), management level (clubs, management, lawyers), and commercial level (sponsors, agents, media, event organisers , spectators). and (c) private relations, such as family (parents, siblings), intimate partners, friends and peer athletes.

SAFE SPORTS EVENTS MANAGEMENT TOOL

The NSPCC Child Protection in Sport Unit (UK) Safe Sports Event Management Tool helps event organisers to ensure that they meet the safeguarding responsibilities for their event and to take steps to promote the well-being of all participants and other young people involved, for example as volunteers or officials. An online interactive version of the tool is available which allows event organisers to work through all elements of planning an event at any level: it also provides supporting resources to further assist. | <http://thecpsu.org.uk/event-management/>

Safeguarding policy

Besides these three stakeholder groups interacting with each other, there are three levels of policy to take into account: quality, prevention and response (Fig. 1).

The broadest level, a **quality policy**, can be situated in the theoretical framework of Total Quality Management (TQM) that is used to evaluate quality management in sports clubs. In this framework, quality is sought through the participation of all organisational members, by aiming at long-term success through consumer

satisfaction and benefits to all members: this is a proactive approach. A quality policy looks at the overall requirements of well-being so that the sport activities are done in a professional, sound way. It is also on this fundamental level that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child applies as the foundation for any guidance and policy in youth sport. This foundation, then, creates the broad ethical climate which facilitates safeguarding. The policy level sets the prevailing conditions for the other two levels.

A **prevention policy** builds further on the quality policy but focusses on mitigating the various risk

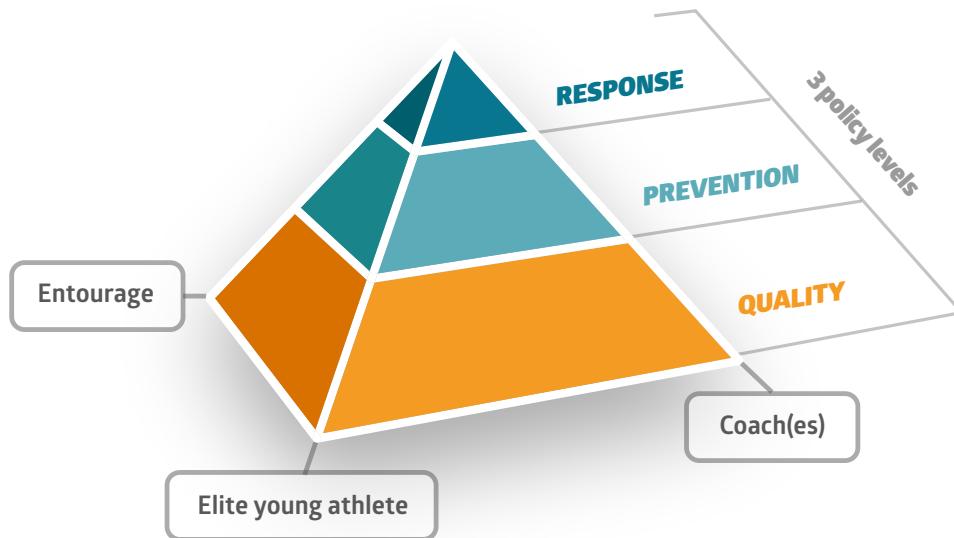


Fig. 1: The safeguarding pyramid: interaction between actors at three policy levels

factors. The premise here is that it is not necessary to wait until a (serious) problem arises but is better, instead, to act preventively. The empowerment of elite young athletes is an example of a prevention policy because it helps youngsters to stand up for themselves which can, in turn, reduce the risk of harm. 

EATING DISORDERS IN FLEMISH HIGH LEVEL ATHLETES

Informed by research on eating disorders in elite athletes, Flemish sport policy-makers took action to inform athletes, staff and peers on this subject: a website with resources was launched with an awareness raising campaign and a flyer. The online platform provides general information on eating disorders, tailored information for elite athletes, staff, peers and parents (recognizing signals, testimonials, guidelines for handling dining, prevention ...) and contact details for professional experts who can help.
www.eetproblemenindesport.be

A **response policy** builds on the prevention policy and determines how an incident should be handled. It is important to note that the more effort is put in on the quality- and prevention levels, the less work will be needed on the response level. Processes and practices used when handling an integrity threat are situated at the response policy level.

Each actor has his or her expectations, rights and responsibilities and duties in relation to the two other (group of) actors, tangible in specific relationships. In the context of safeguarding elite young athletes from integrity threats, it is very important to inform all members of the entourage

about their specific responsibilities and possible roles through which they can contribute.

Building a positive ethical climate

Elite young athletes need to be stimulated and motivated over a long period of time in order to be able to train frequently and intensively. We know that youth athletes striving for elite sport achievements are influenced by the people who most closely surround them (mostly their coaches, and entourage). A central question thus arises: "What can these actors do to influence the elite youth athletes in a positive way?" Further, "What should these actors do?" This question about the responsibilities and duties of actors surrounding the athlete brings us to the core goal of this project – establishing a robust and positive ethical climate.

In order to make it possible for a talented athlete to develop his/her potential, a sound environment is needed to minimize threats and maximize performance and well-being. These two aims are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, there is a strong performance rationale for safeguarding elite young athletes. Many studies have shown that a safe and healthy sport environment, preventing the athlete from all forms of integrity threats, is actually advantageous for the attainment of performance excellence, which remains the end product of elite sport..

Operationalising a positive ethical climate

Ethical policies, practices and procedures have emerged in the field of (competitive) sport (among others: Panathlon Declaration on Ethics in Youth Sport; Code of Ethics from the Council of Europe; Guidelines for the Conduct of the Athletes' Entourage from the IOC). Several codes of conduct are in place, defining goals and related codes of behaviour for coaches, athletes and all members of the entourage. Such policies generally include statements of principles and values along with mandatory and optional behavioural guidelines. Whatever form of policy is used, the main goal is to inform all members of an athlete's entourage about their roles and responsibilities in safeguarding elite youth athletes from integrity threats. +

In the literature, the coach is assumed to be a major contributor to the ethical climate in place during training and competition events. A coach's attitudes, behaviours, and characteristics are associated with athletes' moral and non-moral behaviours *. By means of (formal moral) education, coaches can acquire knowledge on the subject and be sensitised about the role they have in a sporting ethical climate. Several authors explicitly discuss the need for ethics education. For example, it is a common practice that the entourage members are given a code of professional conduct that may simply state, 'avoid sexual intimacy with athletes'. Given the complex, emotionally intimate relationships that evolve in the

+ PANATHLON DECLARATION ON ETHICS IN YOUTH SPORT

Panathlon International was founded in 1951 to promote positive values in youth sport. The Panathlon Declaration provides an operational definition of ethics in youth sports. It is a commitment, for those who endorse it, to go beyond discussion and to establish clear rules of conduct in the pursuit of positive values in youth sport. The Declaration, which has been signed by hundreds of national and international sports organizations, emphasizes equity, fair play and ethics. www.panathlon.net

+ ETHICAL MANAGEMENT BOOKLET

Informed by research from Ghent University (BE) commissioned by the Flemish government, the International Centre Ethics in Sport collaborated with the researchers to develop an Ethical Management Booklet. Its purpose is to inform, sensitize and support sport organisations in establishing a positive ethical climate. In addition to general information on ethics in sport, the booklet presents organisations with an ethical decision-making model and an action plan to get started. www.ethicsandsport.com/nl/x/560/ethisch-managementbrochure

* STAY COOL UNDER PRESSURE

Stay Cool Under Pressure is one of many products available in the Netherlands under the Towards a Safer Sports Climate programme at NOC*NSF. This two-day resilience course provides coaches from various sports with tools - based on insights from martial arts - to develop the competency to handle conflicts, threats and pressure in an adequate and conscious manner. The course is unique in focussing on multiple competences: physical, social, emotional and cognitive. www.academievoorsportkader.nl/cms/showpage.aspx?id=15256

EMPOWER+

Empower+ is a 4-hour workshop from The Coaching Association of Canada that teaches coaches how to enhance the well-being of athletes in their care and be a positive role model. In an interactive and dynamic learning environment, expert facilitators guide participants through how to enhance athlete welfare by: recognizing the potential for, and presence of maltreatment in sport; and, learning when and how to intervene when observing or suspecting maltreatment. <http://coach.ca/multi-sport-training-p150105>

ACTION PROGRAM GENE TECHNOLOGY IN COMPETITIVE SPORT (AGICS)

AGICS is a project aiming for the education, qualification and sensitization of students, teenagers and young adults in the field of gene doping, gene technology and other doping-related domains. The project consists of a website and a text-book which provides comprehensive information covering gene doping from ethical, juridical and scientific perspectives. The target group is instructed in how to reflect systematically on norms, worthiness and rules within the contexts of both society and high performance sport. www.gentechnologie-im-sport.de/startseite/

SPORT WITH BOUNDARIES: FLAG SYSTEM

The Flag System from the International Centre Ethics in Sport (BE) helps coaches and all entourage members to identify and aptly respond to inappropriate behaviour between adults and underage athletes, and among peers. The system relies on six criteria – consent, equality, free will, age and developmental appropriateness, context, and self-respect – to assess 30 illustrative cases. A four-flag scale ranging from green (innocent) over yellow and red, to black (totally out-of-line) is proposed to 'judge' these cases. www.sportmetgrenzen.be

TRAINING FOR MORE EMPOWERING COACHING™

The theoretically-grounded and evidence-based Empowering Coaching™ training programme helps coaches (recreational through elite) understand the importance of autonomous motivation for sport engagement, learn the 'what', the 'why' and differential implications of empowering versus disempowering coach behaviours, and develop strategies for creating more healthy environments for their participants. As delivered by trained tutors, further support for the impact of Empowering Coaching™ emerged from the 'PAPA' project conducted across 5 European countries. A version of the training has been customised for parents of elite young athletes (Empowering Parents™). www.empoweringcoaching.co.uk
www.projectpapa.org

high-pressure field of elite sport, such staff need more guidance and training than is provided by these simple declarative statements. Ethics education needs to address the definition of an ethical relationship, how relationships become exploitive, the meaning of harm in relationship terms and how relational errors of judgment can occur .

A crucial factor for positive effects, such as cooperation, team spirit and fair play, is the emotional and motivational climate in which the sport activity is offered. Sports coaches usually set the motivational climate. The quality of the relationship between the coach and the athlete indisputably affects the behaviour of the athlete .

Research on well-being has commonly adopted a 'basic psychological needs' perspective, focussing on how the context, in particular the coach, can support autonomous motivation.  Whilst research affirms the importance of autonomy support from the environment other studies also describe the importance of an inner ability to self-regulate in adverse situations. Several common examples in the specific elite context (e.g. rigid body weight norms, unquestioned imperatives to succeed, unspoken group norms) put demands on the young athlete's ability to rely on their own judgements and values and to resist social pressure.

Athlete-centred coaching is effective in coping with these issues. Athlete-centred sport is developmentally appropriate for the youth age group and is based on strong values (inclusion, fairness etc.). It is both a philosophy and a practical method to deliver

sport programmes and procedures that recognise athletes as active agents in the sport experience. The basic principle here is that sport should contribute to the overall development and well-being of the person: physically, psychologically, and socially. The developmental outcomes of the athlete thus go hand in hand with performance outcomes. In this way, sport is a vehicle for achieving personal development, teaching life skills and pursuing ethical conduct and citizenship without losing sight of performance goals.

Empowerment as a means of safeguarding the elite young athlete

Empowerment redistributes or shares power among the sport actors involved so that youth athletes gain access to this important aspect of their human capital. One of the potential developmental features of the empowerment process is resilience, whereby the adolescent learns to deal with negative influences or integrity threats. Resilience is the process of effectively negotiating, adapting to, or managing significant sources of stress or trauma. The assets and resources of individual athletes, their lives and environments facilitate this capacity for adaptation and 'bouncing back' in the face of adversity 🌪️. However, and crucially, a child victim can never be assigned guilt for harms perpetrated on them by others.

➕ MASTER COACH IN SPORTS

Master Coach in Sports is a three-year programme provided by NOC*NSF within the elite sport structure in the Netherlands. It serves as a platform for elite coaches to share information together in order to raise their own coaching skills. The programme revolves around 4 competencies - leadership, management, training and coaching - and is renowned for its use of self-reflection and a tailored approach to the individual needs of participants.

www.nocnsf.nl/mastercoach

➕ PSYCHOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE AND TOOLS IN SPORT PRACTICE

Psychological Knowledge and Tools in Sport Practice is a twenty-month workshop cycle within the Zagreb Sport Federation (HR) in collaboration with the Croatian Association of Sport Psychologists. Its aim is to get coaches started in thinking more about sport psychology as an important factor in the athlete's well-being. The sessions are practice-oriented and follow-up home assignments encourage coaches to implement their newly acquired knowledge in their everyday coaching practice.

www.hasp-psihologijasporta.hr/

✳️ FOOTBALL DIARY: AN EFFECTIVE TOOL TO ENHANCE SELF-REGULATION OF YOUNG FOOTBALL PLAYERS

Research shows that players who practise self-regulation skills like reflecting, planning and monitoring performance tend to develop faster than other players. The football diary used in the football elite school program in Flanders guides young players (age 14-18) through this process, inviting them to take control of their own development and facilitating communication with their teachers and coaches. Questionnaires that map physical and mental fatigue are included to help the players manage the pressure of a dual career of football and study. Consistent use of the diary helps to monitor the well-being of these young footballers, enhancing a safer sport environment.

www.maenhoutperquy.be

www.partnersinsports.be

Empowerment ought to help athletes:

- ▶ gain a critical understanding of themselves and their environments, along with the power and authority, services, supports and resources they need and may offer to others;
- ▶ enhance individual and collective capacities to sustain their individual achievements and collective goals;
- ▶ develop collective identities and social solidarity, enabling them to mobilise for collective action;
- ▶ achieve greater equity as they acquire and use their new power and resources;
- ▶ take initiative and find space for creativity and innovation.

Empowering others is called the paradox of empowerment because one cannot in practice empower others: people can only empower themselves. However, the young athlete can contribute to the empowerment of others by facilitating access to support resources and demonstrating empathy. Each athlete should have the chance to work in an 'empowerment-friendly' environment and, as such, have the opportunity to develop into an autonomous and resilient adult.

In conclusion, from a holistic point of view, coaches and the entourage are responsible for safeguarding youth sport through the realisation of a positive ethical climate in sport. Through empowerment, elite young athletes themselves may also contribute to safeguarding. Therefore, tailor-made recommendations for many stakeholders are needed.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on

- ▶ insights from the literature reviews and relevant practices discussed in this project
- ▶ discussions with the SYS project consortium during the 4 European meetings
- ▶ feedback from the ENGSO Youth Committee, serving as the project's Youth Advisory Council
- ▶ feedback from participants at the Final Conference in Brussel

and following the International Safeguards for Children in Sport, published by the International Working Group on Safeguarding Children in Sport (<https://thecpsu.org.uk/resource-library/2014/international-safeguards-for-children-in-sport>)

these recommendations can help elite sport stakeholders to take action.

The recommendations are tailored for 5 target groups:

1. Policy-makers
2. Coaches
3. Athletes
4. Event and competition organisers
5. Developers of educational programmes

For policy-makers

In order to create and maintain an athlete-centred culture for elite sport, policy-makers from international to local level need to develop safeguarding plans which:

- ▶ Require the values and principles of safeguarding to be embedded across organisational culture and policy plans and practice
- ▶ Are informed by youth voices and children's rights
- ▶ Are embedded in a continuous cycle of improvement

- ▶ Are subject to transparent good governance
- ▶ Define roles and responsibilities for safeguarding for all levels in the organisation
- ▶ Put in place codes of ethics and codes of conduct for the whole athlete entourage
- ▶ Ensure that everyone has access to safeguarding learning opportunities to enable them to fulfil their respective roles
- ▶ Include the provision of coach development programmes that embed safeguarding ethics, knowledge and skills
- ▶ Establish policy procedures and support systems to respond to concerns about integrity threats
- ▶ Ensure that information about who athletes and adults can turn to if they have concerns is available in relevant formats and media
- ▶ Are underpinned by an inter-disciplinary and multi-agency approach to safeguarding
- ▶ Are informed by a commitment to inclusive non-discriminatory practice that challenges racism, sexism, ableism, LGBT and gender-based discrimination
- ▶ Are monitored, evaluated and reviewed
- ▶ Are underpinned by relevant legislation, government guidance and international conventions/declarations
- ▶ Are supported by the allocation of resources to implement the plan being agreed

For coaches

The role and responsibilities of an elite coach include being a role-model, at all times, who reflects the values and principles of safeguarding in their practice. This requires:

- ▶ The creation of a culture and climate where safeguarding is embedded as a cornerstone of performance
- ▶ Coaches to adopt their organisation's code of ethics and codes of conduct
- ▶ A commitment to reflective practice and an athlete-empowerment approach to coaching which enables the athlete to reach their full potential
- ▶ A commitment to continuous professional development
- ▶ Coach development programmes to address the physical and psychological developmental needs of young athletes
- ▶ Building relevant professional relationships across the athlete entourage which enable the coach to have a holistic approach to supporting and developing the athlete

- ▶ Coaches to be aware of and know how to respond to integrity threats to talented and elite athlete well-being
- ▶ Coaches to respect the need for athlete education plans and understand the added value of dual career support programs to the wellbeing of a young athlete
- ▶ Working in partnership with professionals from other disciplines to address emerging issues, such as over-training, mental health, eating disorders, self-harm, online safety

For athletes

It must be clear that creating the overall safeguarding framework is the responsibility of those who run the sport. Abuse of young athletes by adults is never the athlete's fault or responsibility. However, by their behaviour and by being involved in the development of policies and procedures that affect them, they may help to promote safeguarding values by:

- ▶ Being aware of their own rights and responsibilities
- ▶ Commitment to the athletes' code of conduct
- ▶ Being familiar with the organisation's policy and with information provided by it about what they can expect the organisation to do to look after their well-being and what the organisation expects of them
- ▶ Getting involved in developing anti-bullying policies and procedures.
- ▶ Knowing who to turn to if they have any concerns and the ways in which to raise these.

For event and competition organisers

Organisers need to ensure that they develop, implement, monitor and review safeguarding requirements for their event or competition. They need to:

- ▶ Have a safe recruitment process in place for all staff and volunteers involved in the event which is underpinned by clear roles and responsibilities for safeguarding being embedded in job descriptions
- ▶ Develop codes of conduct which describe the expected behaviour of adults, children and young people
- ▶ Develop registration and consents processes for registering participants
- ▶ Appoint an event manager with overall responsibility for safeguarding at the event
- ▶ Appoint an event safeguarding lead with responsibility for safeguarding for the event and make sure everyone is aware who they are

- ▶ Have clear processes in place for reporting and responding to concerns arising at the event including arrangements for working with statutory agencies and emergency services
- ▶ Ensure access to safeguarding information, advice, guidance and training for everyone
- ▶ Ensure that venue and accommodation risk assessments are undertaken prior to the event and risk controls put in place
- ▶ Make a plan that recognizes and addresses the needs of all participants, including those with additional vulnerabilities
- ▶ If applicable, make a plan with guidance for travel and / or overnight stays with the participant organisations
- ▶ Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of all aspects of the event safeguarding plan

For developers of educational programmes

When developing educational programmes with regard to safeguarding the following methodology is recommended:

- ▶ Use a no-blame approach with positive messages, open communication and an emphasis on long term benefits for all stakeholders
- ▶ Let the learning progress take precedence over results
- ▶ Facilitate peer learning where participants can learn from/with peers
- ▶ Focus on the cognitive knowledge component as well as on the behavioural component
- ▶ Make use of creative means (cartoons, drawings, role-play, simulation of stress peak moments...) and take into account the importance of visualization (easy to read / understand, attractive tools...)
- ▶ Use 'what-if' scenarios or dilemma-based approaches to reflect real-life situations
- ▶ Make the programmes obligatory for all stakeholders, including already-qualified members of the entourage and provide follow-up events for (self-)evaluation and (self-)reflection
- ▶ Provide follow-up online support where participants can get in touch with each other and get more in-depth information on the topic
- ▶ Use internet/social media to provide information for young people 'in their world', accompanied by clear policies and procedures to ensure that communication with young athletes is not misused for 'grooming for abuse' or bullying



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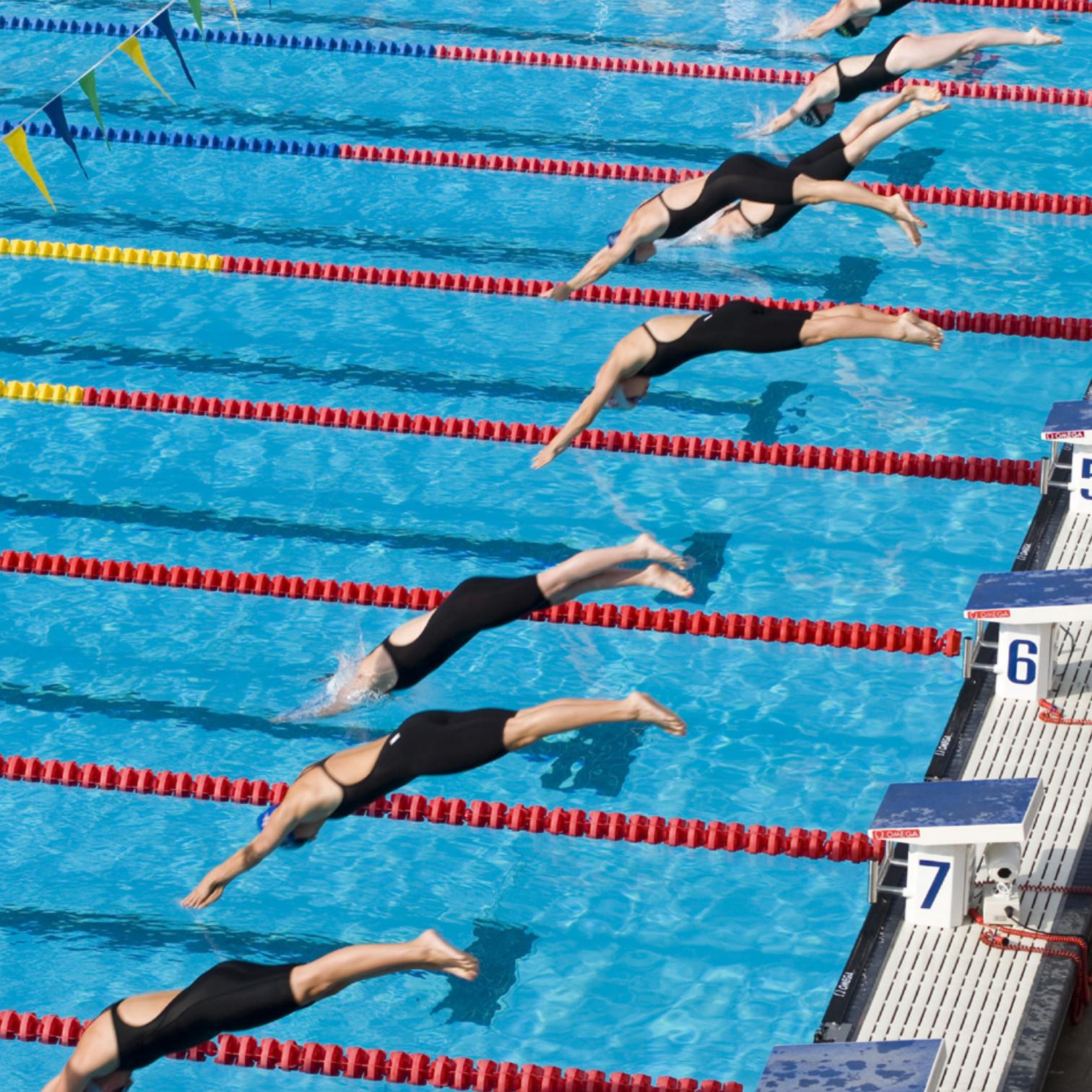
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