



香港教育大學

The Education University
of Hong Kong

Capstone Report

A Project entitled

Effective Talent Development: Student-athletes' perspectives on HK Sports

Submitted by

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1. Capstone Product

YouTube Link:

https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLhyaaDSIw55JbCRpbbmiVkmvq_qRQz3AA&si=R_R2Q27N4mUQDGVz

2. Abstract:

Introduction: Research is limited on the design and implementation of effective talent development environments (TDEs) in Hong Kong. TDE refers to the coaching and development environment that nurtures and guides young athletes to reach their full athletic potential, particularly goals and systems related to student-athletes. The Athletic Talent Development Environment (ATDE) model describes how athletes' micro- and macro-environments interact to support or hinder talent development. **Purposes:** This study qualitatively explored the micro-environment of the talent development environments (TDEs) in Hong Kong using the Athletic Talent Development Environment (ATDE) model from Hong Kong female student-athletes' perspective, using the walk-along method. **Methodology:** Six representative female student-athletes joined the study. They were from 6 different Hong Kong team sports supported by the "Team Sports Development Plan" by the Hong Kong Sports Institute, including volleyball, softball, basketball, football, handball, and hockey. All participants video recorded their athlete's entire day's schedule and the standardised interview guide of ATDE model was used in the walk-along interview. **Results:** 6 video clips showed how Hong Kong female student-athletes are facing an underdeveloped talent development environment. Even though there are some success factors, including "strong support from coaches and family", "persistence and hard work", and "structured development", they are facing persistence challenges such as "limited resources", "academic pressure" and "lack of popularity". **Conclusion:** Hong Kong's

talent development structure and environment are improving, however, substantial improvements are still needed to enhance the overall talent development environment for student-athletes in Hong Kong.

Keywords: athletic talent development environment, student-athletes, walk-along interview

3. Description of project outputs

The characteristics and roles of elite coaches in Talent Development Environments (TDEs) have been extensively studied. However, the deeper, subjective experiences of athletes themselves—especially how they interact with and interpret their development environments—remain underexplored. This project seeks to fill that gap by providing a practical, research-based resource that captures the voices and lived experiences of student-athletes in Hong Kong, thereby offering a bottom-up perspective on what makes a TDE effective.

A deliberate decision was made to focus on female student-athletes from team sports—a group that is often underrepresented in both academic research and policy discourse. Team sports in Hong Kong, particularly those beyond rugby, receive less structural support compared to individual sports (HKSI, 2024), and female athletes face additional gender-related challenges such as limited visibility, stereotypical expectations, and unequal resource allocation. This focus allows the project to contribute toward the discourse on gender equity and inclusiveness in sport development.

Furthermore, this study positions Hong Kong's current TDE efforts within a broader international context. While the Hong Kong Sports Institute (HKSI) has initiated targeted

support plans such as the "Team Sports Development Plan", these remain limited in scope when compared to more comprehensive systems in countries like the UK and Australia, where academic flexibility, mental health support, and early talent tracking are integrated into TDE frameworks (Baker et al., 2013). By highlighting these disparities, this project underscores the potential for localized improvement through global learning.

To ensure a rigorous and consistent exploration of student-athletes' perceptions, each participant was asked the same set of guiding questions based on the Athletic Talent Development Environment (ATDE) model (Figure 1). The project outputs are designed not only to inform academic discourse, but also to support coaches, educators, policymakers, and sport development officers in refining current practices.

Firstly, high-quality video interviews were recorded with each student-athlete to document their day-to-day experiences, reflections, and interactions with their respective TDEs. These recordings serve both as qualitative data and as visual case studies, offering rich, contextual insights into how TDEs function at the ground level in Hong Kong. The use of video also enhances accessibility and engagement, making the findings more relatable and usable for non-academic audiences.

Secondly, these insights are disseminated digitally through a curated YouTube playlist titled “【 香港學生運動員日常揭秘！？】” (Figure 2), and shared across social media platforms to reach a wider public. The aim is to raise awareness and stimulate community-level dialogue on how to build more supportive and equitable environments for student-athletes.

Lastly, by employing the walk-along interview method, this project captures the real-time, lived experiences of athletes within their daily environments—offering a more holistic understanding

of their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement with their development journey (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2020).

Together, these outputs bridge the gap between theory and practice, translating abstract TDE concepts into tangible, real-world narratives. They also serve as a call to action for systemic change, particularly in making TDEs more inclusive, sustainable, and tailored to the needs of underrepresented athlete populations.

4. Analysis and discussion of the finding outputs

This project utilized qualitative walk-along interviews to examine the micro-level interactions within the Talent Development Environments (TDEs) of female student-athletes in Hong Kong. Through video-recorded narratives of six athletes from diverse team sports—volleyball, softball, basketball, football, handball, and hockey—the study identified key enabling and inhibiting factors shaping their athletic development.

4.1 Strong Social Support Systems

All participants consistently emphasized the vital role of support systems, particularly coaches and family members. Coaches were not only providers of technical training but also served as mentors, career advisors, and emotional anchors. Family members, especially parents, played critical roles in logistics, emotional encouragement, and daily routine management.

“My parents acted as good listeners and were very willing to support me in participating in volleyball.” (VB)

“The coaches I met were all very attentive. They provided a lot of guidance throughout my hockey career and even helped me choose the club, which made my journey in this sport smoother.” (H)

Why this matters: According to Martindale et al. (2022), social support is one of the core pillars of sustainable TDEs, directly impacting athletes’ motivation, identity development, and retention in sport. Without such relational scaffolding, even the most talented athletes may disengage due to burnout or emotional fatigue.

4.2 Persistence and Consistent Training

Perseverance emerged as a shared trait among participants. Despite facing various setbacks such as injuries, time constraints, or lack of institutional support, these athletes remained committed to long-term training goals.

“Keep going, and you will achieve your goal.” (BB)

“Persistence allows me to experience more.” (FB)

Why this matters: This aligns with Gagné’s (2017) Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT), which emphasizes "intrapersonal catalysts" such as grit and self-regulation as critical components in transforming potential into achievement. Therefore, TDEs must be designed to sustain and reinforce these psychological traits through stable pathways and targeted interventions.

4.3 Structured and Developmental Pathways

Participants commonly cited school-based sports programs or coach referrals as the starting point of their athletic journey. Structured training schedules, age-tiered progression, and access to quality coaching were highlighted as crucial in developing from novice to elite level.

“I participated in youth training programs, from the U15 and U18 teams to the current senior team.” (FB)

“I started joining the Hong Kong Youth Team (U18, U19) in 2018 and began participating in the adult team training at the age of 20 to 21.” (HB)

Why this matters: A longitudinal study by Johnson et al. (2021) found that clear developmental pathways are positively correlated with retention and peak performance age. In contrast, fragmented or ambiguous progression plans often result in early dropouts or plateaued growth.

Emerging Challenges in the Hong Kong Context

4.5 Limited Resources and Inequity in Funding

Several athletes expressed frustration with the disproportionate allocation of resources across sports. Sports like softball and hockey face challenges such as limited access to coaching, incomplete equipment sets, and minimal financial support.

“A goalkeeper does not have a complete set of goalkeeper gear.” (H)

“The development of sports in Hong Kong is concentrated on individual sports.

Volleyball is a team sport, and resources are thinly distributed.” (VB)

So what? As of 2024, the HKSI supports 20 elite sports at Tier A level, of which only one is a team sport (rugby), and 7 at Tier B level, with just one more team sport (dragon boating). This

data clearly demonstrates the structural disadvantage faced by team sports (HKSI, 2024), calling for a shift in public funding priorities.

4.5 Academic Pressure

Participants unanimously described challenges in balancing academic obligations with athletic commitments. The rigid school schedule and lack of academic flexibility hindered training consistency and recovery.

“Academics are a hindrance. Homework and exams hinder training time...” (VB)

“The education system makes us feel that we must continue studying in order to secure a job in the future.” (FB)

So what? Without coordinated dual-career support, student-athletes may face chronic stress and eventual dropout (Garcia et al., 2020). In contrast, countries like Denmark and Australia have implemented dual-career pathways that include academic scheduling flexibility and tutoring support, resulting in improved retention and performance.

4.6 Lack of Exposure and Popularity for Team Sports

A recurring issue was the minimal media coverage and social recognition for team sports, particularly handball and hockey. This invisibility affects public engagement, talent recruitment, and private sponsorship.

“The (Hockey) promotion is not strong enough. You won’t see any information about it in the news or on social media platforms.” (H)

So what? Without media visibility, even successful athletes struggle to inspire the next generation or secure sponsorship (Wilson et al., 2022). Strategic promotion and media partnerships are essential to normalize and valorize participation in underrepresented sports.

In summary, while this study affirms the presence of foundational strengths in Hong Kong's TDE—such as support systems, athlete resilience, and structured programming—it also reveals systemic weaknesses that require urgent policy attention. These include resource inequity, academic inflexibility, and the undervaluation of team sports, especially for female athletes. A comprehensive reform that integrates international best practices into localized strategies is necessary to build a more inclusive and effective TDE in Hong Kong.

5. Limitations of the Project and Suggested Improvements

5.1 Small and Homogeneous Sample Size

This study only included six female student-athletes from team sports supported by the HKSI. While their input is valuable, it does not reflect the wider population, such as male athletes or those in individual or less-funded sports.

Suggestion: Future studies can include more diverse participants from different genders, sports types, and backgrounds to improve the generalizability of the findings.

5.2 Focus on Micro-Level Environments Only

The project mainly looked at athletes' daily lives and close relationships, but not broader issues like sport policies or funding systems.

Suggestion: Future research should explore macro-level factors, such as government policies and school structures, to better understand the full talent development system.

5.3 Subjectivity of Qualitative Data

The interviews relied on participants' personal sharing, which could be influenced by memory or social pressure.

Suggestion: To balance this, researchers could use other methods like diary studies or coach observations for cross-checking and richer data.

5.4 Time Constraints of Data Collection

Each interview only captured one day of the athlete's routine. This might miss long-term challenges or changes in their development.

Suggestion: Future projects could collect data over a longer period, using tools like reflective journals or follow-up interviews.

5.5 Limited Generalizability

As the study focused on a specific group in Hong Kong, the results may not apply to athletes in other countries or contexts.

Suggestion: Comparative studies across regions (e.g., Hong Kong vs. Singapore) can help identify which issues are universal and which are location-specific.

5.6 Video Recording and Editing Bias

Participants may act differently on camera, and video editing might unintentionally highlight certain perspectives over others.

Suggestion: Researchers could invite athletes to review and comment on their own footage to ensure the findings truly reflect their experiences.

Policy Recommendation: Schools and training institutions should consider setting up a *student-athlete support coordinator* role to help balance academic and training needs. This can provide more structured and personalized support, based on real athlete feedback.

6. Results of the Outputs

6.1 Empirical Insights into TDE

The walk-along interviews captured real-time, authentic narratives from six female student-athletes, providing in-depth insights into the actual functioning of Talent Development Environments (TDEs) in Hong Kong. These narratives illuminated both positive factors—such as strong support networks and structured pathways—and systemic challenges, including unequal funding and academic pressure. Collectively, they reveal the complexity and diversity of student-athlete development in Hong Kong.

6.2 Visual Case Studies (Video Interviews)

Each athlete's daily routine, challenges, and reflections were recorded and edited into short video case studies. These serve as an accessible educational tool for a wide range of stakeholders, such as educators, policymakers, coaches, and sport development officers. The video format not only increases engagement but also facilitates knowledge sharing beyond academic audiences.

6.3 Evidence-Based Recommendations

Based on the qualitative findings, the following actionable recommendations are proposed:

- Ensure more equitable resource allocation, particularly for team and less-publicized sports.
- Introduce flexible academic arrangements for student-athletes in schools and universities.
- Increase promotion of underrepresented sports via media, community campaigns, and school outreach.
- Establish regular review mechanisms that integrate athlete feedback into policy and program refinement.

7. Reflection and Self-Assessment

This project was not only a research experience but also a deeply personal learning journey. One of the biggest challenges was coordinating with student-athletes' busy schedules, especially when planning and conducting walk-along interviews. I learned to be adaptable, communicative, and patient—skills that are also essential in sport coaching and leadership.

Another challenge was learning how to interpret qualitative data effectively. Unlike quantitative studies, the insights were often subtle and context-dependent. Through continuous reading, discussions with my supervisor, and reviewing literature such as Hennink et al. (2020), I developed a stronger sense of how to draw meaning from narrative evidence and present it in a coherent and academic way.

This process also shifted my understanding of talent development in sport. Previously, I focused more on physical training and performance outcomes. Now, I see the social, psychological, and

structural aspects—like academic pressure and resource distribution—as equally important. I’ve gained greater respect for the invisible work that goes into supporting young athletes.

If I were to redo this study, I would consider using diary studies or longitudinal interviews to capture a more complete picture of athletes’ experiences over time. I would also explore including voices from coaches and parents to triangulate perspectives and increase the depth of the findings.

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9. Appendix

Background of the Athletes –

1. Tell me about yourself and your association to this environment
2. How long have you been in the club/team?
3. How did it come about, that you started in this club?
4. How do you feel about being a part of this environment?
5. What do you think are the keys to your personal success?
6. Do you think the environment is a successful talent development environment?
7. What tells you that it is successful?
8. What do you consider the secrets of its success?

Description of the environment based on the ATDE model –

9. Who helps you in your efforts to make it to the elite level?
10. Who hinders you?
11. How would you describe your coach/parents?
12. What is his role and tasks?
13. What are his values?
14. What do you think about the older elite athletes in the club?
15. Do you have contact with them?
16. What characterizes this contact?
17. In terms of your daily sporting life, what can be said of the role of:
 - Younger athletes in the club?
 - School
 - Your family
 - Experts in the club [such as physiotherapist and sport psychologist]
 - Your friends inside and outside sport?
18. Are there persons, inside or outside sport that you look up to?
 - How would you describe youth culture?
 - What do you feel are predominant values among youth in general?
 - How do you feel youth culture influences your daily sporting life?
19. How do you see the way in which the club interacts with the environment around it?
 - Please provide examples of the club's working relations with:
 - School
 - Your parents
 - Other clubs and teams
20. How would you describe the club or team's main resources?
21. In daily training, do you feel the club/team has sufficient resources in terms of money and coaches, for example?
22. Please, describe daily life in this team
 - Training – how much do you train? How is it organized?
 - Competitions
 - Camps
 - Do you have social events outside sport? Provide examples.
 - Other?
23. Tell me about what you learn in this environment
 - What attitudes or values are appreciated in this environment?
 - When is the coach, for example, satisfied with your efforts in training?
 - And in competition?
 - What values do you take with you from this environment?
 - Do you learn anything that could be of use for you outside your sport?

(figure 1)



(figure 2)