

Athlete Dropout in Pune Competitive Sports: Reasons, Age, and Recommended Prevention Strategies

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ABSTRACT

This research looked into why athletes in Pune, India, were quitting competitive sports, at what ages they were most likely to stop, and what could be done to help them stay involved. We surveyed 50 former athletes and interviewed 5 coaches who had experience with district, state, or national-level competitions between 2014 and 2024. We found that most athletes stopped playing around the ages of 21 and 22. The main reasons they gave for quitting were injuries, lack of money, needing to focus on their jobs, and pressure from school. To help keep athletes playing longer, people suggested things like more financial help from the government and sponsors, better coaching that includes injury prevention, improved sports facilities, mental support for athletes, fair selection processes, career advice, and support from parents and schools. In conclusion, many athletes in Pune leave competitive sports in their early twenties because of different pressures. To fix this, we need to work on providing more support in areas like money, training, and mental well-being, as well as making the sports environment fairer and more encouraging.

Keywords : Dropouts, Competitive Sports.

Introduction

The growing trend of athletes leaving competitive sports across the globe is a significant issue that has far-reaching consequences beyond just the realm of athletics, impacting the broader fabric of our communities. Competitive sports, spanning from the foundational levels of children's leagues to the elite stages of professional competitions, serve as vital platforms for nurturing not only physical well-being but

also the development of crucial mental resilience and essential social competencies. These activities, in their essence, offer a wealth of advantages that contribute positively to an individual's overall growth and societal integration. Despite these numerous benefits, a substantial number of athletes choose to discontinue their participation prematurely. This early departure represents a loss of potential, not only in terms of athletic achievement but also in the development of well-rounded individuals. Therefore, it becomes critically important to thoroughly investigate and understand the underlying reasons that contribute to this phenomenon. By gaining a deeper insight into the factors that lead athletes to quit, we can then begin to formulate effective strategies and interventions aimed at fostering continued engagement and maximizing the considerable benefits that competitive sports offer. Sports, defined as structured physical activities governed by rules, driven by specific goals, and often involving elements of competition and contests, have consistently demonstrated their positive influence on the physical, cognitive, and social development of children and young adults. Engaging in sports from an early age and maintaining this involvement throughout adolescence and beyond has been consistently linked to tangible health benefits. These include the promotion of a healthier cardiovascular system and the development of stronger musculature, improved motor coordination and agility, a greater propensity for overall physical activity coupled with a reduction in sedentary behaviors like excessive television viewing, the maintenance of a healthier body weight, and a decreased risk of developing various health complications. Competitive sports, encompassing a diverse range of activities from collaborative team endeavors such as football and basketball to individual pursuits like tennis and gymnastics, have held a central and enduring place within human culture for centuries. Their significance extends beyond mere physical exertion, providing invaluable opportunities for personal growth through challenges and triumphs, fostering meaningful interactions and the development of teamwork skills, and cultivating crucial mental attributes such as discipline, perseverance, and strategic thinking. However, a pressing concern within the global sports landscape is the notable rate at which athletes, across various ages and skill levels, decide to discontinue their involvement. This comprehensive analysis seeks to delve deeply into the multifaceted reasons that contribute to this widespread attrition. It will meticulously examine the intricate interplay of mental, social, and physical factors that collectively contribute to this complex problem. Recognizing and understanding these underlying causes is the fundamental first step towards identifying and implementing effective strategies to provide better support for athletes and actively encourage their sustained participation in sports for a longer duration. This extended involvement will allow them to continue reaping the numerous individual and communal benefits that sports offer. By carefully considering these interconnected elements, we can aspire to develop more informed and impactful

approaches to keep athletes engaged, motivated, and ultimately thriving within the dynamic world of competitive sports.

Research Methodology

A descriptive survey research design was employed for this research to find out why athletes dropout from competitive sports, at what age and to recommend preventive strategies. This means we wanted to get a detailed picture of the situation as it naturally is, without trying to change anything or prove cause and effect. We looked at athletes who had stopped competing at district, state, or national levels in the period 2014-2024 in different sports in Pune. We also talked to some of their coaches. We chose 50 athletes from various sports clubs in Pune and 5 coaches from different sports. To pick these participants, we used convenience sampling, which means we selected people who were easy for us to reach. We collected information in two main ways: questionnaires for the athletes to understand the reasons they quit, and interviews with the coaches to get their views on why athletes drop out and to get ideas on how to prevent it. By using both questionnaires and interviews, we aimed to get a complete understanding of why athletes leave competitive sports in Pune.

Procedure: The research process began with creating a detailed plan outlining the study's goals, methods, and ethical guidelines, followed by securing necessary permissions. The study then identified the group of interest, including coaches and former athletes, from whom informed consent was obtained before participation. Data was collected through questionnaires distributed to the athletes and interviews conducted with the coaches. The collected information was analyzed and based on the findings, a summary of results and suggestions for improvement were created. A comprehensive research report was then prepared to share these findings and recommendations with relevant individuals and organizations involved in competitive sports.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1 : Analysis of Dropout Age

Response Options (Age)	Percentage (%)
21	14.29%
22	14.29%
24	10.71%
25	8.93%
23	7.14%

The provided table shows the percentage of athletes who dropped out of competitive sports at different ages. The highest dropout rates occur at ages 21 and 22, both at 14.29%, suggesting a significant number of athletes discontinue their participation around the transition into early adulthood. Following this, a notable percentage (10.71%) also stop competing at age 24. The dropout rate then slightly decreases at age 25 (8.93%), with the lowest percentage observed at age 23 (7.14%) within this specific dataset. Overall, the data indicates a trend of higher attrition among athletes in their early twenties, particularly between the ages of 21 and 22, before a slight decline in later mid-twenties.

Table 2 : Analysis of Reasons for Dropout

Response Options (Reasons)	Percentage (%)
Injuries	14.29%
Lack of financial support	7.14%
Job commitments	7.14%
Academic pressure	5.36%

The provided table outlines several reasons why athletes stop participating in competitive sports and the corresponding percentage of athletes citing each reason. Injuries are the most significant factor contributing to dropout, accounting for 14.29% of athletes. Following this, both a lack of financial support and job commitments are cited by 7.14% of athletes as reasons for discontinuation. Academic pressure appears to be a less prominent factor in this dataset, with 5.36% of athletes indicating it as a reason for stopping competitive sports. Overall, the data suggests that physical setbacks due to injuries are the primary driver for athletes leaving competitive sports, with financial constraints and career obligations also playing a notable role.

Preventive Strategies

The suggestions for preventing athlete dropouts in Pune were varied, but several key themes emerged. A significant number of respondents (around 10%) emphasized the critical need for increased financial support through government programs, sponsorships, and sports-related job opportunities to alleviate economic pressures. Improving coaching and training (approximately 7%) was also frequently mentioned, including the adoption of scientific methods, better guidance, and the integration of physiotherapy and injury prevention education. The lack of adequate infrastructure and resources (around 5%), particularly in rural areas, was identified as a barrier. Mental and motivational support (around 7%), encompassing mental skills training, encouragement, and counseling, was deemed essential for maintaining athlete

commitment. Concerns about fair selection processes and reducing political influence (around 3%) were raised. Furthermore, providing career guidance and exploring future planning options within and beyond sports (around 5%), alongside fostering parental and educational support through flexible academic schedules (around 4%), were highlighted as crucial strategies to encourage athletes to remain in competitive sports.

Conclusion

the analysis of athlete dropout in competitive sports in Pune reveals a critical period of attrition in early adulthood, primarily between the ages of 21 and 22, driven by the competing demands of higher education, career commencement, and the need for financial independence. The primary reasons for this dropout are multifaceted, with injuries, job commitments, lack of financial support, and academic pressures being the most significant barriers. To effectively address this issue and foster greater athlete retention, a multi-pronged approach is necessary. This includes bolstering financial support through government initiatives and sponsorships, enhancing coaching and training methodologies with a focus on injury prevention, developing robust sports infrastructure, providing comprehensive mental and motivational support, ensuring fair and transparent selection processes, offering career guidance and academic flexibility, and strengthening parental and institutional encouragement. By strategically implementing these recommendations, stakeholders in Pune's sports ecosystem can work towards creating a more supportive and sustainable environment that encourages athletes to remain engaged in competitive sports throughout their young adult lives and beyond.

Recommendation

To significantly reduce dropout rates and foster a more sustainable sports ecosystem in Pune and across India, sports authorities, educational institutions, and policymakers should prioritize the implementation of strategies focusing on key areas of improvement. This includes establishing robust financial support mechanisms and securing sponsorships to alleviate athletes' economic burdens, investing in enhanced coaching and scientific training programs with an emphasis on injury prevention, developing comprehensive sports infrastructure to ensure equitable access for all athletes, providing dedicated mental health support and motivational resources to help athletes manage pressure, enforcing fair and transparent selection processes to eliminate favoritism, offering comprehensive career planning guidance and flexible academic options to promote long-term engagement in sports, and actively cultivating strong parental and institutional support for young athletes. By collaboratively

addressing these critical factors, a more supportive and conducive environment can be created, encouraging athletes to remain actively involved in competitive sports for longer durations.

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