

The Path of Transforming Excellent Retired Athletes into Physical Education Teachers

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Abstract: With the vigorous development of sports in our country, many excellent athletes have been trained over the years, achieving brilliant feats on the field. However, after retirement, they face new challenges—transformation and development. In the new era of the integration of sports and education, the “retired athletes re-employment problem” and “solving the problem of the shortage of primary and secondary school sports teachers” are organically linked. This linkage aims to realize the complementarity of social supply and demand, which the entire Chinese sports industry is actively exploring and addressing ^[1]. The integration of retired athletes into the education system will not only help improve the quality of physical education and broaden employment channels but, more importantly, address the shortage of physical education teachers in schools. Sports teachers transitioning from athlete roles possess unique advantages. However, due to the shift in professional roles and distinct occupational requirements, they need a bridge and path for successful transformation.

Keywords: Retired athletes; Physical education teacher; Transformational development

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1. Research purpose

In recent years, an increasing number of elite retired athletes have chosen to become physical education teachers. These retired athletes have achieved significant success in the sports arena and possess abundant sports experience, professional knowledge, and skills. Introducing these outstanding athletes into the education system will not only enhance the quality and standard of physical education but also provide students with better learning resources and role models ^[2]. The purpose of this paper is to explore the journey of exceptional retired athletes transitioning into physical education teachers and to analyze the impact and significance of this transformation on physical education. It represents an important and emblematic topic, as outstanding retired athletes transition from the “field” to the workplace as physical education teachers. This study aims to shed light on the current situation and challenges faced by retired athletes in their transition to physical education teaching roles, and to propose targeted solutions and suggestions. By doing so, it aims to offer guidance and support for the transformation of exceptional retired athletes, which holds profound significance for the continuous

enhancement of the quality and standard of physical education in China.

2. Research methods

2.1. Literature method

Relevant journal papers were searched and consulted via the CNKI database, Wanfang database, and VIP database. The paper systematically presents the research question regarding the transition from retired elite athletes to physical education teachers and establishes the research framework and content. This process furnishes comprehensive and detailed reference materials and a theoretical basis for the paper's composition ^[3].

2.2. Case analysis method

This study selected the 2023 general vocational skills training class for retired athletes as a typical case (Tables 1 and 2). On-site or telephone interviews were conducted with retired athletes to discuss the pathway for transforming outstanding retired athletes into physical education teachers. According to information released on the public account of the Hebei Sports Industry, there are 119 retired athletes in Hebei Province. Among them, 86% have pursued further education, 46.15% prefer employment in Shijiazhuang, and 16.66% hold teacher qualification certificates (Tables 3 and 4) ^[4]. This training program assists retired athletes in acquiring the necessary vocational skills for sports training and teaching in schools. It enables them to meet the basic requirements for primary and secondary school physical education teachers and facilitates a successful career transition, contributing to the integrated development of physical education.

Table 1. General vocational skills training class all participants sports results

Sports achievements	Number of people	Percentage
Internationals	1	0.8
Athletic	27	21.6
Division I athletes and above	52	41.6

Table 2. Age proportion of all participants in general vocational skills training courses

Age	Number of people	Percentage
18–20	23	27.7
21–25	45	54.3
26–31	15	18

Table 3. Employment intention of all participants in the general vocational skills training course

Career development direction	Number of people	Percentage
People already in school	64	86
Hold a teaching license	14	16.66
Employed people	8	10.8
Starting businesses	2	3.2
Have a clear career direction	27	33.8
No clear career direction	53	66.2

Table 4. The employment intention of all participants in the general vocational skills training course

Employment region	Number of people	Percentage
Shijiazhuang	30	46.15
Tangshan	6	9.23
Handan	5	7.69
Baoding	5	7.69
Pekin	4	6.15
Qinhuangdao	2	3.08
Zhangjiakou	2	3.08
Canton	2	3.08
Liaoning	2	3.08
Tianjin	2	3.08
Taiyuan	1	1.54
Cangzhou	1	1.54
Langfang	1	1.5
Hangzhou	1	1.54
Hengshui	1	1.54

3. Results and analysis

3.1. Overcoming the “barriers” for outstanding retired athletes transitioning into physical education teachers

According to the State General Administration of Sport, there are approximately 50,000 registered professional athletes in China, and about 3,000 to 4,000 athletes retire every year. With such a large number of retired athletes, it would be a significant waste of talent if their advantages and roles were not utilized effectively. However, with the official implementation of the new sports law, retired athletes are receiving strong support from the state to teach on campus, gradually breaking down the “barriers” hindering their transition into physical education teachers ^[5].

- (1) Impact of the “double reduction” policy: The importance of campus sports is increasing, with physical education classes transitioning from supplementary to primary. The frequency of physical education classes has also increased, with daily sessions replacing weekly ones. The mandate of “an hour of exercise in school every day” has become a strict rule, resulting in a sudden scarcity of physical education teachers ^[6].
- (2) Opportunities for athletes with state honors: Athletes who have received relevant awards or honors from the state are provided with opportunities to continue their education. They are sent to universities to pursue degrees and obtain the necessary qualification certificates.
- (3) Addressing athletes’ educational needs: Enhancing athletes’ cultural education should be approached through policy interventions. The education system ought to offer specialized training courses and degree programs tailored to athletes’ needs, including subjects like sports pedagogy and related disciplines. It’s imperative to elevate athletes’ overall cultural and educational proficiency, aiming for the attainment of at least a bachelor’s degree or higher ^[7]. Athletes currently in service can be assigned

to schools, where they can attend remedial and evening classes during their spare time to augment their education. For instance, gymnasts and art athletes could commence university studies at the age of 22, participate in sports teams before retirement, and continue their education at universities or abroad post-retirement.

- (4) Resolving teacher qualification issues: Athletes in schools can register for teacher certification, and those with long athletic careers, such as in shooting, can obtain qualifications through social registration or school application.
- (5) Overcoming professional grade limitations: Generally, colleges and universities tend to recruit athletes with sports achievements at the national level or above. However, the requirements for positions as primary and secondary school physical education teachers are more varied, and some institutions may consider athletes with lower-level qualifications.

When recruiting retired athletes as physical education teachers, schools should not adopt a one-size-fits-all approach. For instance, retired rhythmic gymnasts may excel in teaching modern dance, ballet, and gymnastics classes, but they may lack proficiency in sports like track and field or basketball. Years of specialized training may limit their adaptability to other sports, and the absence of early childhood training in these disciplines may leave them as amateurs ^[8]. Therefore, training programs should be comprehensive, covering areas such as education, teaching methods, and overall teacher quality, to ensure that every retired athlete aspiring to become a physical education teacher is not only capable of fulfilling the teaching role but also excels as a role model ^[9].

3.2. Role and professional requirements of physical education teachers

3.2.1. Professional requirements of PE teachers

Physical education teachers are expected to possess a strong foundation in physical education theory and extensive sports experience. They should demonstrate proficiency in sports science, exercise physiology, exercise psychology, and other relevant disciplines. Additionally, they should exhibit effective teaching and organizational skills to design and deliver tailored physical education programs and manage student sports activities ^[10]. Excellent communication skills and a collaborative spirit are essential, enabling them to build positive relationships with students, parents, and colleagues, and actively contribute to teamwork.

3.2.2. Educational background requirements for PE teachers

PE teachers must hold relevant educational qualifications and certifications. They should have obtained degrees in physical education or related fields and completed coursework in pedagogy and physical education. Practical experience and participation in educational qualification examinations are also necessary to obtain teacher certification ^[11]. Retired athletes transitioning directly to university-level teaching positions can specialize in specific sports or related areas, provided they hold a master's degree or higher, possess teacher certification, and have achieved a national-level sports ranking. Admission typically involves written tests, interviews, and political and physical evaluations.

3.3. Advantages of excellent retired athletes in the transformation of physical education teachers

3.3.1. Professional knowledge and technical expertise of athletes

Having undergone extensive training and competitive experiences, professional athletes possess a comprehensive understanding of sports rules, techniques, and tactics. During teaching, they can effectively convey accurate movements and skills to students, providing practical guidance on tactics ^[12]. Furthermore, they can systematically impart their professional knowledge to students, enabling them to better grasp sports skills.

3.3.2. Competitive experience and leadership skills of high-level athletes

Outstanding athletes have garnered substantial competitive experience and leadership qualities throughout their careers^[13]. They excel in teamwork coordination, communication, and maintaining a positive attitude amid challenges and setbacks. Their ability to persevere and motivate themselves and their team members equips them to guide students effectively, instilling resilience and fostering teamwork.

3.3.3. Role model effect and educational influence of athletes

Elite athletes serve as idols and role models for students, inspiring them with tales of dedication and hard work^[14]. By demonstrating a positive outlook on life and values, they motivate students to pursue their aspirations, kindling their interest in learning and fostering a commitment to excellence. Through the dissemination of values and positive energy, they nurture students' self-confidence and determination.

3.4. Challenges and difficulties in transforming outstanding retired athletes into physical education teachers

Athletes represent a distinguished and unique profession^[15]. After years of rigorous training, they shine brightly on the field, but like fireworks, their brilliance cannot last a lifetime. Contemplating how to navigate the latter part of life becomes an inevitable challenge. Behind the glory lies a formidable set of challenges and difficulties, prompting them to consider how to chart their future course.

3.4.1. Lack of educational background and fundamental theoretical knowledge

While retired athletes excel in competitive arenas, they may lack formal educational backgrounds and basic theoretical knowledge. Compared to typical graduates, they may lack a systematic understanding of fundamental theories and teaching methodologies. This gap in educational preparation may hinder their ability to design and implement effective teaching plans and address the diverse learning needs and challenges of their students.

3.4.2. Role transition and classroom management adaptation

Elite retired athletes often serve as the heart and decision-makers of their teams. As physical education teachers, they must adapt to new roles and responsibilities, and familiarize themselves with students, parents, and school management requirements. Building trust and fostering partnerships with students becomes essential. Effective classroom management entails learning to maintain discipline, control classroom dynamics, address diverse student behaviors and needs, and ensure a conducive learning environment and effective teaching outcomes.

3.4.3. Striking a balance between teaching and competition

Retired athletes transitioning into physical education teaching also grapple with the challenge of balancing teaching and their competitive instincts. In their competitive careers, individual success and victory are paramount, whereas teaching demands a focus on student development and overall teaching quality. Therefore, they must find a balance between imparting their sporting expertise and nurturing students' individual growth and overall well-being. Recognizing the unique needs and potentials of each student, they must adapt their teaching methods to provide tailored guidance and support to every learner.

3.5. Training content for elite retired athletes transitioning into physical education teachers

3.5.1. Comprehensive training plan and curriculum development

The comprehensive training plan and curriculum encompass three key aspects: foundational theoretical

knowledge, professional attributes, and practical skill development. Theoretical courses cover a wide array of topics, including sports training, athlete selection, sports nutrition and physiology, adolescent physiological and psychological development, sports competition regulations and judging criteria, sports injury prevention, health and physical fitness, coaching professionalism, educational principles, and school physical education. Practical training includes daily coaching sessions and hands-on practice in common physical education activities such as gymnastics, track and field, and various ball sports. Additionally, courses on educational psychology, learning theories, and evaluation methods are integrated into the curriculum.

3.5.2. Mentorship and guidance from professional tutors

Industry experts and scholars are invited to provide personalized guidance to athletes, offering participation in academic seminars, educational research workshops, and professional development programs. Access to learning resources such as teaching materials, instructional videos, and case studies helps athletes interpret policy documents, stay updated on educational research findings and teaching methodologies, and address challenges encountered during the transition process. Practical teaching guidance is provided through the sharing of teaching experiences and methods, along with regular assessments and feedback to identify areas for improvement in teaching practice. Athletes are encouraged to engage in knowledge-sharing and problem-solving through mentorship platforms, fostering collaboration and support among peers to enhance teaching effectiveness.

3.5.3. Encouragement of teaching practice and collaboration with teaching teams

Athletes are encouraged to actively participate in teaching practice and collaborate with teaching teams. Through joint lesson planning, teaching, and assessment with professional tutors, athletes receive daily “one-on-one” guidance and support. Special communication platforms such as teacher communities and teaching research groups facilitate knowledge sharing and cooperation among teachers. Gradual exposure to the teaching environment and processes helps athletes become familiar with teaching practices and enhances their teaching abilities. Expert teams conduct regular inspections and guide teaching practice, addressing any identified challenges and enhancing teaching and training competencies.

4. Conclusion and recommendations

4.1. Conclusion on the transformation path from elite retired athletes to physical education teachers

Firstly, elite retired athletes possess distinct advantages in transitioning to physical education teachers. Their extensive training experience grants them unique insights into specific sports, enabling them not only to demonstrate techniques effectively but also to manage unforeseen situations promptly.

Secondly, a notable disadvantage faced by retired athletes in becoming physical education teachers lies in their limited academic qualifications and cultural literacy. Years of focused training may result in difficulties in pursuing professional courses and examinations at colleges and universities, hindering further academic pursuits such as postgraduate studies.

Thirdly, retired athletes bring significant strengths to their transition, including familiarity with professional skills and competitive environments, resilience to setbacks, innovative thinking, and a wide network within the sports community. These attributes allow them to enrich campus sports activities and leverage additional resources.

Lastly, to facilitate athletes’ smooth transition, each province organizes annual retirement training

programs. These initiatives mobilize top educators domestically and internationally, draw from global best practices, and collaborate with reputable domestic and international enterprises to advance the integration of sports and education.

4.2. Recommendations for facilitating the transition of elite retired athletes into physical education teachers

Firstly, government agencies should adopt a policy-oriented approach and offer support mechanisms to aid outstanding retired athletes in transitioning into physical education teaching roles. This includes providing professional training and social security to support athletes in their new career paths.

Secondly, efforts should focus on enhancing the design of athletes' career pathways, encouraging them to pursue higher education at colleges and universities. This would bolster their knowledge base in sports-related fields and improve their practical skills.

Thirdly, active participation in professional skills training programs and practical teaching activities should be promoted among retired athletes. Establishing a comprehensive training regimen encompassing both pre- and post-service training, along with fostering a lifelong learning ethos, is essential.

Lastly, there should be an emphasis on improving the cultural education system within sports teams. This involves fostering athletes' enthusiasm for continuous learning, enhancing their professional skills, and nurturing their cultural literacy to better prepare them for their roles as physical education teachers.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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