

SUMMER OYMPICS GAMES AND THE SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF THE INTERNATIONAL ATHLETES UNDER THE UMBRELLA OF THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS

PhD thesis

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Budapest, 2012

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

COC: Cyprus Olympic Committee

CSO: Cyprus Sport Organization

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

FISA International Rowing Federation

IOS: International Olympic Committee

NOBs: National Olympic Committees

PE: Physical Education

USA: United States of America

UEFA: Union of European Football Associations

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Reasons for the choice of the topic

Elite sport has enormously changed during the last decades, from playful leisure time activity it became hard work (Donnelly, 1997). Top athletes who used to participate in games and sports just for fun became employees while training and competing (Digel, 1988). Even young elite athletes are regarded first as athletes and secondly as children (Brackenridge and Kirby, 1997). These days sporting activity is a special kind of work for high level athletes. It is considered to be their profession. For the majority of them it is the source of their income (Digel, 1988).

The Olympic Games are still the greatest event, it is considered to be the biggest celebration of sports, and on the one hand it is the absolute desire for the athletes to participate worldwide. On the other hand many young people are excluded from high level sporting activity because of the huge amount of money that is needed for preparation and many of them became reluctant because of the certain time they have to spend and sacrifice, and because of the high health risk they have to take.

The Olympic Games became an important subject for television and other mass media. The endless cycle of consumerism of this “modern and advanced” society, as well as the vast commercialization involving the media, the famous sponsor companies, even the governmental interests, harass today’s society without excluding the primary sport values. Nobody is at a disadvantage because sport organizations receive more money, TV networks earn more money, sponsor companies advertise their products, fans can watch their famous sports at home on television, and the athletes become famous because of the TV promotion (Lobmeyer and Weidinger, 1992).

There is an important difference between *Olympism* and Olympics. "Olympism is a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and mind. Blending sport with culture and education, Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy found in effort, the educational value of good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles."

<https://sites.google.com/a/olympismproject.org/olympism-project/>.

The *Olympic Movement* is a movement to contribute to the global unification of Olympism and the *Olympics* which is a spectacular event that humankind is able to enjoy every four years (Liponski, 2003).

The Movement and the Games have become globalized. The globalization and commercialization of the Olympic movement changed the pure amateur status of the Olympians to prolympic status which means that Olympic athletes also have the right to earn money for their sporting activity. In most countries doing sports at international level is the basic source of their income. This might happen in a direct or indirect way. The direct way is when the athletes receive money for their performances and the indirect way of their income is when elite athletes receive money from sponsors because they are good at popularizing different products and promote consumption. According to the Olympic Charter, originally only true amateur athletes were allowed to participate in the Olympic Games. Answering to the challenges of the changing situation, in 1971 the IOC eliminated the term “amateur” from the article 26 of the Olympic charter and defined athletes’ status in terms of eligibility (Foldesi, 2004). The Olympic Ideal started to become out of date and to rust in the mercy of time. In 1981 the IOC shifted the emphasis away from defining an amateur to defining a professional, and recommended the athletes to determine their status. The IOC reconsidered the meaning of amateurism and permitted Olympians to earn money legally by their sport performances. Olympic athletes were legally defined as employees and they were regarded as “Olympic professionals” (Foldesi, 2004).

The Cypriot sport heritage dates back many centuries. Various evidences can be found in many archaeological places in Cyprus. Cypriots’ love of sport expanded also in Greece with their participation in ancient times in Pan-Hellenic competitions and Olympics. In the ancient times and until the Byzantine period Cyprus had its own stadia at Curium, Salamina, Pafos, Kitium, and Lapithos where the competitions were established and the people could join to enjoy them. Until the middle ages sports were a leisure time activity that Cypriots could enjoy, watch, and take part in.

<http://www.cyprus.gov.cy/portal/portal.nsf/0/d9146624e8d75dc3c225720200223bc5?OpenDocument>

Actually sport remained a leisure time activity following the rise of modern sport in Cyprus, that is, following the time when the country had got its independence.

Modern Cypriot sport took a terrible shock in the year of 1974 during the Turkish invasion in the Island with the outcome of the Turkish occupation of 37% of the Island. Due to this fact many sport facilities and equipments were destroyed or stood under the Turkish troops. Cypriot sport began to overcome this crisis a year later and slowly stood up to face the new expectations in the area of sport (Terezopoulos, 2009).

Over the last decades the classical values of Olympism were devaluated in sport to such a great extent, that it is not anymore about sportsmanship, fair play, honesty, etc, but it is about winning at any price. According to the author's personal experiences who spent a great part of his life as an elite athlete in Cyprus, this general tendency could not be observed in Cypriot top sport. He believes that the Olympic movement has developed in a different way. In the Cypriot sport culture the philosophy of winning at any price has not gained ground to such an extent as in many countries which are known as sport nations, such as USA, Russia, China, and Hungary where he has been studying for a decade. He supposes that the Cypriot athletes' sporting career have some similarities with the big sporting nations' athletes' but he also has the feeling that they are also significant differences. It can also be assumed that the differences are rooted in the fact that Cyprus is a very small country with less than three decades in the world of high level sporting activity and its size determines her position in world sport. However, there have been only everyday experiences about this issue and not scientifically based knowledge. It was the major reason which motivated the author to deal with this topic and to carry out a research concerning the Cypriot Olympians sporting career from the time they get involved in sport activities until the time they withdraw from their sport from a sociological perspective.

1.2 Review of the related literature

There is rich international literature about the sporting career of elite athletes from a sociological perspective. These findings can be grouped in several ways. In this thesis the author uses literature about some relevant issues related to the top athletes' sporting career, such as children in top-sport, social background of elite athletes, athletic disorders in top-sport, social problems in top-sport social background and retirement of elite athletes. The literature was grouped in this way in order to help

identify the social background of the Cypriot Olympians from their sport specialization until their retirement.

1.2.1 Children in top sport

In older times sporting career used to start much later in top level sports, than it does in these days. In the last decades young girls and boys have competed in sports on an elite level in the international arena. Therefore, social scientists put the problem related to children's participation in sport on the agenda.

Brackenridge and Kirby (1997) call the attention to the legal, civil, and human rights of children and to the duty of sport organizations to protect elite children-athletes from physiological, psychological, and sexual abuses. The authors emphasize that the social phenomenon of sexual abuse in sport used to happen also in the past but then it was ignored or denied. They make proposals and suggest that young elite athletes in selected sports should be protected.

Sport sociologists and psychologists express certain concerns about the early involvement of children in high performance sport. Donnelly (1997) compares child labour with sport labour and recommends applying child labour laws into sport. Sport specialization in early age might cause many problems for children. Specialized intensive training and high-level competition in early childhood are neither advantageous nor necessary and may determine the future athletic potential and performance. For example, a child specialized in tennis in a very young age has high chances to develop scoliosis, or in weight lifting a child could have degenerated bones etc. Many other problems can appear as a result of early specialization due to the long trainings, such as competitive stress, anxiety, increased aggression, and high drop outs (Donnelly, 1997). Psychological pressure which can be put by parents, coaches, agents, peers, media or by health care providers is also a factor that could have negative effect during early specialization (Weber, 2009). Some authors discussing this phenomenon try to protect children and recommend changes in the international and national regulations about the limit of working age ((Donnelly, 1997, Weber, 2009). Donnelly analyses the problems of children's involvement in high performance in sport and he wonders if it has any relation with child labour. He states that child labour turns to "sport labour" and can be considered as a dilemma. Although child labour and sport

labour do not have the same meaning and they do not have the same serious problems, they have several common characteristics.

Donnelly (1997) said that social scientists are against children's work in sport but they admit that sport might be to the children's advantage and benefit and offer a kind of preparation for their further career in social life. Children learn to win, play correctly and fair. They also draw the attention to the fact that the most important of all is the "fair play" because without that sport is not sport, and it is losing its real meaning. Youngsters have to put fair play above the winning in all sport activities. The problem is that within youth programs there are adults who manage and guide them, so winning does not always depend on the athletes, and as a result, there might be dysfunctional elements in the youth sport programs (Donnelly, 1997).

Knoppers et al. (1988) refer to a research carried out by Webb who asked his subjects to rank fair play, winning and playing well. Winning was more frequently in the first place in the answers of older children and males than younger and female subjects. The conclusion was that youngsters learn to give priority to winning instead of fair play because of their professional orientation. So the authors stated that this is the result of socialization through which the attitudes of athletes became professionalized. He emphasized that youngsters with game orientation become athletes but those with play orientation do not. Webb said that athletes having the thought to win and to reach personal successes showed professional attitude in the field but at the same time they were highly valued and stressed in the social world. Males' orientation showed more professionalization in that sector than that of females. Men put the stress more on winning, but women are more interested in fair play and fun.

According to Webb's findings the relation between game orientation and the degree of successes can be found mostly among finalist players. The relation between winning orientation and successes can be found firstly with adult players but also in younger athletes. Regarding the game orientation of competitive and non competitive junior tennis players, it can be stated that both groups have significant high level game orientation, but it is on higher level with competitors. The greater the involvement is, of youngsters in tennis, the greater the degree of their professionalization (Webb cited by Knoppers et al., 1988).

1.2.2 Social background of elite athletes

Top athletes' social background has been discussed from several perspectives in the related literature. The following researches are considered to be the most useful in connection with the topic of the thesis.

Some authors (e.g. Suomalainen et al., 1987) deal with the lifestyle of athletes attending ordinary high schools and special sport high schools in the 1980s. They talk about the difficulties of the seventeen and eighteen years old athletes to have a sport career and parallel to be successful in school. They make a comparison between top athletes studying in special sport schools and athletes studying in regular schools. In the special sport schools the core of the lessons is also covered. The athletes have the opportunity to have more time for training, more time for resting and less time for schooling and homework than in ordinary schools. According to the authors' conclusion, in the special sport schools athletes have better opportunities for good and effective trainings and they have more advantage to become top level athletes.

The issues of status crystallization, social class, integration and sport are discussed by Luschen. He shows that athletes have lower status crystallization than people who are not involved in sports. According to his results the high level athletes' status crystallization is even lower. Sport and high sport performance compensate for status inconsistency. People with high level of status crystallization have more social contacts and social integration and enjoy higher prestige (Luschen, 1984).

Several authors focused their work on the social status and mobility of elite athletes. Foldesi (1984, 1999) investigated the social mobility and the social stratification of Hungarian elite athletes participating at the Olympics from late 1940s until the year of 2000. She gives a picture on the position of the athletes during the changes in the political system and the advantageous and the disadvantageous elements of the athletes' social status between 1948 and 2000. She compares the athletes' occupation, income, educational level, social prestige, satisfaction with their income and prestige, and their position in the social stratification during and after disengagement from elite sport, and the nature of their status in sport regarding amateurism and professionalism in different periods. She found that despite the differences in the political, economic, and social conditions during their careers, their position in sport had been always unsettled, unregulated, unclear and sometimes in a chaotic position.

Following the changes of the political system, Hungary wanted to benefit from elite sport as before, but at the same time the government reduced the support and the promotion of sports. Sport authorities tried to support sport to solve the everyday problem instead of creating/developing new concepts: they won many battles but lost the war (Földesi, 2004).

The social stratification and mobility of elite athletes were also studied in Nigeria. A research that took place there proved that Nigerian athletes can have upward social mobility. More precisely, Nigerian top athletes coming from low socioeconomic status had high chances to step up the social ladder by their achievements in sport (Sohi and Yusuff, 1987).

Laakso (cited by Sohi and Yusuff, 1987) noted that Finnish top athletes in track and field and in baseball originated from working class. Several other examples illustrate that participation in elite sport has to do with the social origin and background of the individuals. However, sport participation has compensatory function since top athletes are lead to social mobility by their participation. After their retirement they have opportunities for receiving better jobs and other benefits which give them the chance to improve their social position in society.

Zeiler (2000) discussed the case of Canadian athletes who participated at the Olympics from the early 1990s until 2000. He dealt mostly with athletes in individual sports and described their commitment, their courage, their dedication, their accomplishment, and the risk in the life of elite sportsmen and sportswomen. Like in many other countries, in Canada the Olympic Games are the highest point in the athletes' sporting career. Zieler presented many stories about the extraordinary physical and mental efforts that athletes achieved to accomplish their personal success. He also mentioned the political involvement and the technical complications that athletes faced, he analyzed how they found the courage and the strength to overcome and continue. He gave the example of the serious injury on the leg of Silken Laumann due to the fact that the athlete gave his heart to win the second place in rowing. Another example was about the yachting athlete Larry Lemieux who stopped in the middle of the competition despite the fact that he was near to winning a medal, to rescue the Singapore crew which was drowning.

Equality/inequality of chances for becoming elite has been in the focus of research from the rise of sport sociology. A great number of researches were carried out on the topic in various countries, but not in the very small ones. Another aspect of the social background is the sport migration. Maguire and Falcous (2010) talked about the tendencies of social and economic globalization that lead to migration of the athletes either because they are talents or they do it because they are looking for a job as professionals. The world economy and the global society that nowadays exist can easily lead to sport migration (Maguire and Falcous, 2010). Consequently, migration in sports could be an upward social mobility for the athletes. As an outcome, the athletes, through their sport, have the opportunity to improve their socio-economic level and parallel have higher social status.

1.2.3 Athletic disorders in top sport

In high level sport athletic disorders were present from the beginning but it is a fact that nowadays this phenomenon occurs more frequently. The big achievements require greater devotion, greater efforts, strong belief and the strength to overcome oneself. Elite athletes reach a high level, but most of the time, the ways to it are not so smooth and easy. With the hard trainings and efforts the athletes have to face injuries which can be small or big, psychological or physiological, and they have to be prepared for them.

Jones et al. (2005) deal with the slim bodies, eating disorders, and the coach-athlete relationship. The main subject is an elite female swimmer who finally disengaged from her sporting career because of a serious health problem, more precisely because of eating disorder. Jones believes that hard training cannot be the only factor to prevent someone from becoming an elite athlete. Major factors can influence the career of an athlete like in the case of the female swimmer. He emphasizes the importance of the family support, proper food and especially the coach involvement in several dimensions such as his/her behaviour, attitude, approach towards the athletes and their knowledge about the specific sport. Jones points out to the bond between an athlete and a coach and the consequences of that bond in the training and in the everyday life. He interprets the catastrophic consequences of a “wrong speech” by the coach that had stigmatized the life of the female swimmer even after her disengagement from the elite

sporting activity. The coach plays an important role in the development of his/her athlete not only in the training area but in other fields of life, too. The coach has to provide athletes with confidence and help them to overcome dysfunctional athletic identities.

Pike (2005) refers to the injuries of athletes where doctors just say rest and take ibuprofen, which is a critical “non-orthodox” health care in women’s sport. Pike points out the insufficient and inadequate medical support. Despite the fact that the research took place among two hundred women rowers and two hundred men rowers, she particularly focuses on the case of the women rowers. Pike wrote about the injuries of the women rowers, the unorthodox way of their treatment, and the healing time they had. There were situations where the injury was not correctly observed by the doctor, the observation was happening by their own teammates or by themselves. Sometimes the treatment of the injury could happen in the wrong ways, like using other medicine, using alternative way of treatment or not using any treatment at all. Another big problem was the short time they had for healing process because they were afraid of losing their place in the boat. The author also mentioned the behaviour of their sport club towards the female athletes. When the injury was not visible, on the skin of the female athletes, the club management did not believe that the athletes were injured and they thought that the rowers were trying to cheat and avoid the training. These factors challenge the athletes’ identities when they have an injury or illness (Pike, 2005).

1.2.4 Social problems in top sport

There are also social problems and obstacles the elite athletes have to face. Digel (1988) refers to the problems of top performance in sport. He wonders if modern competitive sport will last for long in this current form and how long it will survive. He remarks that elite sport is in the final stage since all efforts to survive fall into an empty space. Until this period there were no solutions to important problems, like involvement of politics in sports, economic interests, the way in which the media is interested in covering the area of sport, the demand of the public for better results and records, the athletes’ health deterioration, the expenses that someone needs to be involved in sport, the bureaucracy of the federations etc. Digel says that it is the half true the audience sees in fancy competitions and stadiums, but the reality is that top athletes are preparing

themselves for every competition under modest conditions and under the umbrella of various persons, groups and organizations, such as coaches, managers, sponsors, federations etc. Top sport improved so much during the years that now athletes work in a professional way. Modern competitive sports cover the needs of the industries and the mass media, the satisfaction of the public, and focus less on promoting health and active life style. He compares top sport with society, saying that with their achievement people contribute to opportunities and they are rewarded. He claims that top sport is worth being promoted but it must be recognized that within it there are significant problems and risks. For instance elite athletes might become one-sided due to the fact that they invest and sacrifice too much effort and time to reach top performance. Moreover the athletes might be manipulated by the interference of state, business interests, and media.

Digel discusses social security concerning the top athletes in several areas. Some of the athletes think about their disengagement, about the professional way that they have within the sport, the years of engagement into a sport. He compares the difficulty of being a professional top athlete with the professional coaches, managers and full time official notifying that it is much more dangerous for the competitive athletes and is safe for the rest. He points out that the income for an athlete, most of the time, stops when an athlete decides to disengage from the sporting career and consequently is worthless from economic point of view and financial perspectives. Top athletes have to think of the rest of the athletes and not only of themselves and must be united with all the athletes which might be a very interesting and worthy factor for saving top sport (Digel, 1988).

Digel says that top sport will not survive if only the successful athletes get huge rewards and the rest of the top athletes get moderate income or nothing. He also states that not all sport disciplines are suitable for professionalization because of the lack of potential commercialization. By this the author means that certain sports are not attractive to the public, to big sponsor companies, and to the media, and for the time being this fact cannot be explained.

Digel remarks that top sport depends upon individual motivation and achievement. Sport ethics is a key that determines the prospects of top sport. The problems that competitive top sport has to face are the application and the enforcement of ethical and humanitarian ideals which are challenges for the athletes (Digel, 1988).

Allison and Butler (1984) referred to the dilemmas and role conflict elite female athletes face from time to time. Based on empirical findings the authors try to explain the phenomenon being a female athlete. From a feministic aspect a woman is characterized by grace, beauty, and passivity, and from an athletic point of view she is characterized by strength, toughness, aggressiveness, and dominance.

The authors refer to a study that had been made by Sage and Loudermilk (cited in Allison and Butler, 1984) about collegiate female athletes representing socially approved and socially not approved sports. They found that athletes participating in socially not approved sports had greater conflict than those participating in socially approved sports. A similar research with school athletes was carried out by Anthrop and Allison (1983). They had similar results and patterns. About 30% of the examined school athletes perceived and experienced role conflict in a great or very great degree. Sage and Loudermilk suggested two types of conflict: internal and external role conflict. The internal role conflict referred to the physical and psychological self-concept. The external role conflict referred to the external pressure that female athletes had, such as support and recognition by the media.

The result of an empirical study carried out by Allison and Butler proved that female athletes perceived and experienced low level conflicts. In their study young females identified role conflict as a problem which does not exist or if it is, only on a very low level because of the character of social acceptance.

Black (1996) deals with drug use in sports and talks about its forbiddance in sports. He points out two major justifications for the ban of drugs from sports. The first one refers to the fairness of the competitions and the second refers to the protection of the athletes' health. The use of drugs is harmful to the health of the athletes because most of the time athletes refuse medical treatment and medical advice and in those cases there is a high chance for risking the athletes' health. He also says that the majority of the athletes' unexpected deaths are caused by the use of prohibited substances. Black emphasizes that drugs do not improve societal welfare and they do also move actual outcomes away from the social optimum. The result of forbiddance might lead to the improvement of societal welfare and might reduce the health risks faced by the athletes (Black, 1996).

1.2.5 Retirement of elite athletes

This issue is discussed frequently in the literature. Vuolle and Heikkala (1987) talked about the life cycle of athletes referring to competitive sport as a life cycle phenomenon. They believe that competitive sport is a phenomenon in the different stages of the athletes' life cycle. They give a description of the life cycle of top athletes who are intensively engaged in high level sport. The authors' analysis is based on empirical data; they collected by interviews made with male and female elite athletes from the years 1956-1984. They call the attention to the fact that top athletes make a lot of sacrifices for their sports, such as reducing or excluding leisure time activities, vacations, family life, dating, education, and vocation. When their sport careers arrive at the end, they have to take this decision regardless of being prepared for it or not (Vuolle and Heikkala, 1987).

Foldesi (2000) deals with the retirement of top athletes who participated in the Olympic Games and with the athletes who have completed their sporting careers under different political and economic circumstances (Foldesi, 1994). She gathered information about the length of the athletes' sporting careers, the age when they stopped practising sport at high level as well as about the most important reason that influenced their disengagement from top sports.

She analyzes why many athletes from top sports stopped every sporting activity and became "regular people" and why many of them feel losers after the change of political system in 1989-1990. She also examined how the retired top athletes started their "civil" life, why many of them were disappointed by the new way of life, and how their health status influenced the quality of their life (Foldesi, 1999).

Pawlak (1984) revealed the social status and the life style of Polish Olympians after the completion of their sport careers. He studied the private and professional lives of Polish athletes who participated in the Olympic Games from 1948 until 1972. She noted that there were differences between the athletes regarding their educational advancements and their career in sports. Former top athletes managed to stay in high social status and also engaged in noble activities in social and cultural life. The author arrived to the conclusion that most of the former Polish Olympians achieved well in all spheres of life, something that we cannot see with all Olympians in many other countries.

Shippi (2006) compared the social background of retired and active gymnasts from Cyprus and Hungary. He studied the life course of the Cypriot and Hungarian gymnasts from the time they started practicing their sport, through the course they followed to reach a high level career, until their retirement from sport. He studied their social background, their education, occupation. Moreover, after they ended their sporting career, Shippi discovered in what age they disengaged from top sport activity and what were the reasons that lead gymnasts from Cyprus and Hungary to end their sporting career (Shippi, 2006).

Schaefer (1992) was concerned about the retired athletes' adjustment from top sport activity to the "civil" way of life. The author explains the attitudes and the behaviours of the top athletes in the retirement period and the transition process from athlete's role to ex-athlete's role. Based on his empirical investigation among Israeli elite athletes important findings came up concerning the factors that influenced the athletes to make the decision for ending their sporting career, namely he dealt with their socio-economic status, health status as well as their role in the society after their retirement from top career.

1.3 Theoretical framework

In order to analyse the topics discussed in this thesis the author studied theoretical issues in connection with factors determining national and international sporting success, social equalities/inequalities, amateurism/professionalism, and Olympism/Olympics. Analyzing those theoretical issues that are strongly related to the subject, can provide a solid basis for the research itself.

1.3.1 Factors determining national and international sporting success

Over the last decades several attempts were made to elaborate theoretical models of factors determining national and international sporting success. Most of them distinguished three levels to classify the different factors: macro-, meso-, and micro-levels. In this study the model by De Bosscher et al. (2009) was used. Their concept was considered as a theoretical framework and the results are analyzed with the help of their theoretical model. According to the authors mentioned above the macro-level refers to

“the social and cultural context people live in” (De Bosscher et al., 2009, 17.) and they cannot be controlled by political systems and policy-makers. The meso-level includes sport politics and policy which, in principle, can be easily influenced. Certain elements at the micro-level, that is which are connected to the individual athletes and their close environment, can also be controlled.

The common sense suggests that small countries are in a special situation. There are several criteria for assessing a country's size out of which population, geographic area, and economy are discussed the most frequently. A state which is small on one criterion is not always small on another one. According to relevant literature, population is generally considered as the main indicator of a country's size but the ways of grouping the population sizes may differ from each other. A widely accepted concept assesses the states as small which have population below 1.5 million (Bray, 1992). According to statistics, more than half of the world's sovereign states have population below five million, and the population in fifty three of them is below 1.5 million.

This thesis also regards population as the principal criterion of size but at the same time it looks at the other areas and features. It takes the example of a country, Cyprus, with population below 1 million.

Like in their political, economic, and cultural features, small states are also diverse in their sport. Notwithstanding their sport systems also share common features out of which their chances for international sporting successes are discussed in this paper. Small countries' athletes cannot be rivals in big international sporting events to the athletes from the majority of the other countries. To ensure a relative equality of chances for their athletes in international competition, in the mid-1980s, the representatives of eight small states of Europe decided to establish an own system of competition, called the Games of the Small States of Europe, within the framework of the International, the European and their national Olympic Committees. The multi-sport competition designed for the size of their countries induced mixed emotions with the athletes; in part they were satisfied with the new opportunity; in part they retained the desire to compete with the most famous athletes in their sport. At the same time the obvious fact that they are not among the probable winners in the Olympic Games and in other mega sport events might discourage the decision makers to support their participation there and the development of sporting excellence in general. Consequently,

the youth's chances for becoming elite athlete in such small countries might be jeopardized in a double way. Firstly, sport policy might not be in favour of promoting elite sport. Secondly, like worldwide, low socioeconomic status can limit youngsters' chances for reaching high level in a specific sport they are really talented in.

The literature shows a somewhat inconsistent picture on the factors leading to international sporting success. On the one hand, research findings suggest that the big and rich countries are considerably in an advantageous position in the Olympic Games and in other international competitions (Stamm and Lemprecht, 2001), and this statement could be easily illustrated by their dominance on the medal tables. On the other hand, scientific evidence proves that there is not always significant correlation between the population size, the level of economic development and success in elite sport. For instance, the number of the inhabitants in Hungary has been around ten million in the last fifty years and in the same period she always finished in the fore-part of the official rank at the summer the Olympic Games (Rózsaligeti, 2009). For instance according to the medal tally of the Olympic Games held in London in 2012 Hungary won the 9th place and preceded such nations like Australia and Japan. Another example refers to countries which participated in the Beijing Olympic Games, in 2008. One third of the 18 countries with delegations consisting of one or two members were not small, more athletes from these countries were not qualified because of other reasons. Notwithstanding, small countries are in a special situation. However, no data concerning the situation in small countries in this respect were found in the available literature. National sport policies, together with other factors determining national and international sporting success have been in the centre of interest for 10-15 years. Several comparative studies were undertaken with the participation of states with different size (Houlihan and Green, 2008; Humphrey et al., 2010). However, no relevant literature can be found in this respect concerning small countries.

1.3.2 Equality of chances in sport

Equality in sport has a twofold meaning: equal conditions of the competitions and social equality, that is, equal chances for participation in sport and/or becoming elite athletes.

Equality of conditions is one of the fundamental principles of sport, particularly in high level sport. In principle competition and measuring performance are valid only if all the competitors start from similar level/point and with similar resources. This is a philosophical principle, but at the same time, a necessity for the maintenance of one of the attractions of sport: not knowing the result. Indeed, if there are too many differences between the competitors and the results are a predetermined conclusion, this essential element of sporting competition disappears.

However, absolute equality does not exist. It is only the hope to reduce the crudest differences between individuals, and sport organisations have been concerned with this for a quite a long time. To ensure equal conditions in sport has a long history. Already in Egypt, in the fourth or fifth centuries B.C., there was a codification system for a sport that is wrestling. Its aim was to define which holds were permitted, to allow for a fair fight. The creators of modern sport set up similar requirements to diminish illegal actions and promote fair play. Another example, the International Rowing Federation (FISA), one of the oldest of all the international sports federations, in 1892, facilitated fair competitions among rowers from different countries by defining the types of boat used, a sea skiff naturally being slower than a more streamlined boat.

The quest for equality of chances has always been taken into serious consideration by every international sporting organisation. This is why competitors are separated into different categories, according to criteria which are generally recognised as sources of inequality. Firstly, the splitting is related to gender, because, for most kinds of physical exercise, men have a higher potential than women. Although, the rule which separates competitions for men and women is very generally accepted, its application can sometimes confront certain problems. This is why gender testing was introduced for a long time. Nevertheless, the separation of athletes by gender sometimes derives unexpected problems. Some federations have recently had to determine how to treat athletes who, after having taken part in men's competitions over decades after their retirement from sport had gender reassignment surgery and became women. It is

necessary to be fair not only to the athletes by recognising their inner feelings and aspirations, but also to any other competitors who have the right to a fair contest. From medical aspect, this operation does not take away these athletes' male strength along with certain other attributes.

However, there are some sports where competition is mixed, such as equestrian sports. Noteworthy to mention that in shooting, women competed together with men until a Chinese woman, Zhang Shan became Olympic skeet champion in Seoul. Since then nobody was claiming that women were better liable to shooting than men, or that men's chances needed to be defended by separating the sexes. In sports where women are reputed to be weaker than men, they can sometimes get permission to compete against men. A strong example is that, the world's best female ice hockey player, Canadian Hayley Wickenheiser, obtained recently a permission to take part in the Finnish men's second division professional championship.

Another element that directs towards inequality seems to be the physical maturity. For example a junior cannot compete against an adult. It is also probable that in a junior football competition with the players divided according to age groups, equality is entirely relative. Two 15 year-old boys can have a height difference of several centimetres and a different level of physical development, making them unequal with the intermixing of various populations nowadays. Young people of the same age, but belonging to different ethnic groups vary in different levels of development. Certain sports organisations have already looked into this problem and reached the conclusion that age divisions represented the least incompatible solution for maintaining relative equality of chances.

It is worth taking into consideration the physical characteristics of the athletes, like their weight or height that can be a determining factor in sporting performance among various sports. Therefore, certain federations have established categories based on biometric criteria. For example, all Combat sports have been divided into weight categories. The reason of this categorisation was not only to pass the equality of the chances and try to bring to the surface a certain justice that is found in the nature, but also to protect the physical integrity of the athletes. An example here is that, in weightlifting, a 55kg athlete could never lift the same bar as a 100kg one, even with the most painstaking training. One more example concerning the weight and the height

comes from sailing and its International Federation (ISAF) which also classified boats competitions for the Olympics from the lightest to the heaviest (www.physicaleducation.co.uk/gcsefiles/AmateurismandProfessionalism%20in%20Sport.htm).

The IOC is very proud that about 200 recognised NOCs participate in the Olympic Games and established rules to facilitate this universal participation. It is well known that universality often goes against the principle of equality of chances. The number of places in big competitions is limited and the quest for universality implies athletes to compete who are not as good as some others who may find themselves excluded. For example, in athletics no country is allowed to have more than three competitors in the same event. The irony is that the fourth best American 100m runner would certainly be much faster than many sprinters who can be qualified from several other countries.

Money is also a determining factor and has an important role in connection with the sporting career of the athletes. Not every country has financial means to develop elite sport, to ensure adequate sporting facilities, to employ outstanding coaches, and to offer high income to her elite athletes. Although there is no linear correlation between the level of national economy and the national athletes' sporting successes, in principle rich countries are in an advantageous position in this area as well. Efforts have been made by international sporting organisations to set up development programmes such as the Olympic Solidarity programme with the aim to help developing countries to attain higher standard in sport. Many sport organisations have financial adjustment regulations in an attempt to control equality among their members considering the economic level. This way strong and less strong countries could come closer to some kind of balance and to a level of equality.

Another important problem in the world of sport today is the use of doping. The athletes who use prohibited substances violate severally the principle of equal chances in sport and might harm their health as well.

1.3.3 Amateurism and professionalism

Since the research deals with the athletes who participated in the Olympics it is necessary to clarify whether an athlete who participates in the Olympic Games can be

regarded as amateur or professional. What are the criteria on the basis of which athletes are put in these two categories? First the definitions of amateurism and professionalism are given.

- “Amateur: Sportsmen and women take part in sport because of the enjoyment and satisfaction gained from the activity. They train and compete in their own time, usually after work or at weekends. Moreover, an amateur person is the one who practises something, especially an art or game, only as a pastime. They are not paid.”

www.physicaleducation.co.uk/gcsefiles/AmateurismandProfessionalism%20in%20Sport.htm).

- “Professional: Sportsmen and women are paid to compete in sport. Winning is all important. The more successful they are, the more money they earn. They usually train full-time and devote themselves to their sport. Sport is their work. They sign contracts and must take part in competitions.”

www.physicaleducation.co.uk/gcsefiles/AmateurismandProfessionalism%20in%20Sport.htm).

The international governing bodies of each sport draw up rules to decide who is amateur and who is professional in their sport. They decide if professionals may compete with amateurs. Nevertheless, the moral and philosophical meaning of amateurism remains fundamental in the definition of sport, and must still apply to professional sport, if it is to survive into the 21st century.

In the early days of modern sport (beginning of 19th century) in Britain, prizes were offered to all who took part and won. Betting was often part of sport. There was nothing wrong with making money out of sport in this way. Since the popularity of sports grew after the second half of the nineteenth century, many people from middle and working classes wanted to take part, compete and play sport. By 1890 sportsmen and women were called amateurs as long as they did not receive payment or reward from their sport. In some sports people had been professionals for a long time e.g. cricket, golf etc. They were controlled by the Sports Governing Body which made the rules for everyone involved in their sport and sometimes these bodies decided to have nothing to do with professionals, e.g. rugby union. However, these governing bodies faced many problems because of the rash development of sports, such as the payments

and the rewards which needed control. It was obvious that rules and regulations were needed and had to be established (www.multimedia.olympic.org/pdf/enreport700.pdf).

Amateur sport exists in sport for all because people enjoy taking part in sport as a leisure time activity breaking the routine of normal working activity and becoming players in a different dimension out of the usual time. Professional sportsmen and women will only exist as long as people are willing to pay them for their services (money consumption sources). These services include playing their sport for the satisfaction of the public. Moreover, companies are willing to pay the professionals certain amount of money to use them and their sport to promote their companies and their products by advertising.

In some sports professionals are available to coach for a fee, e.g. golf club professionals. Coaches are also employed to improve teams in professional sport. Their living depends on the success of the teams they coach. If their team fails they may need a new job or stay unemployed. In several amateur sports professional coaches are engaged to be responsible for the best performers. Many companies are willing to pay successful players and teams to advertise their goods. The amount of money earned through sponsorship is linked directly to the amount of success of those players involved. Today amateurs take part in sport freely, at their own level. The professionals must always chase success to be able to survive.

Several international examples concerning amateurism and professionalism could be mentioned. The Hungarian athletes' status from the late 1940s until 1970s was defined as a strict amateur status because in the so called socialist system professional sport was not allowed (Foldesi, 2004). On the other hand, they were financially rewarded by the power holders who wanted the country to be ranked among the sporting nations. Until the late 1970s the athletes were employed by firms, companies, factories, etc, and they received salaries without working there (Foldesi, 2004). Many Hungarian elite athletes of that time can be considered as semi-amateurs or semi-professionals. The Hungarian athletes in boxing and football became professionals after the 1989-1990 political system change (Foldesi, 2004).

In the USA, most elite athletes in team sports such as football, basketball, baseball, ice-hockey and soccer, as well as in individual sports such as boxing, bowling, golf, tennis and horse racing are professionals since 1980 (Lobmeyer and Weidinger,

1992). At the same time track and field was identified there as an amateur sport, despite the fact that several athletes reached the status of professionals. According to Lobmeyer and Weidinger (1992), a similar situation existed, in gymnastics and swimming, in the USA at that time.

1.3.4 Social mobility

Social mobility refers to the movement of individuals or groups between different positions within the system of social stratification. More specifically, social mobility is the changes in an individual's social position which involve significant alterations in his/her social environment and life conditions (Spaaij, 2009). Sorokin (1959) discussed two principal types of social mobility; horizontal and vertical. Horizontal social mobility refers to the transition of an individual from one social group to another situated on the same level. Vertical social mobility concerns the changes that involve significant improvement or deterioration of the social position of an individual and as a consequence it leads to an upward or downward social mobility. Another relevant distinction is between intergenerational and intragenerational mobility. Intergenerational mobility refers to the difference between the social positions of the individuals at a particular point in their adult life and that of their parents. On the other hand, intragenerational mobility involves a short-term mobility within a single generation. Social mobility can be measured in terms of "hard" indicators such as changes in the level of education, occupation, income or social prestige. These indicators can be viewed as the objective dimensions of social mobility (Spaaij, 2009).

The avenues of social mobility facilitated through sport are to a large extent dependent on social conditions whose origins lie outside the realm of sport (Spaaij, 2009). Social mobility is affected by a range of factors that act in combination with one another in a mutually reinforcing way.

Cultural capital can easily affect social mobility. Cultural capital is strongly connected with the educational qualification of the individual which can be influenced by their families or from school. So the education of the individuals can change their social mobility (Bourdieu, 1984).

Elite sport serves as a good example to all kinds of social mobility. For instance American Olympic athletes experience a much steeper rise in their socioeconomic status

than either their parents or the general public at large. The Olympic participation of the American athletes raised their social prestige, and led them to an upward social economic and social mobility (thirty seven in upper/middle and fifty three percent upper categories respectively). The American athletes enjoyed an overall improvement in their occupational mobility by comparing their jobs at the time of their Olympic participation to their occupations after their retirement. Only 5% of them reported downward mobility, 33% remained at the same level and 62% improved their social status. Parallel, with the occupational mobility between athletes and parents, the Olympians enjoyed a rise over their parents in almost all categories. Concerning education, all athletes finished high school and possessed some college education. 79% of the Olympians completed an undergraduate college degree, while only 21% of their fathers and 16% of their mothers had college degrees (Eisen and Turner, 1992). Similar trends could be observed among Hungarian athletes who participated at the Games between 1948 and 1976. 55% of Hungarian male and 42% of female Olympians completed some form of college degrees. The comparison between the parents and the Hungarian Olympians according the educational level shows that the athletes had significantly higher level. It was also discovered that elite athletes' income were much higher than their parents' or their peer groups with a university degree. Because of the privileged position of state amateur athletes in Hungary, Olympic sports provided career opportunities and were regarded as an important source of social mobility under communism. Nevertheless, sport was one of the most open institutions in Hungarian society, and elite sports participation was a mobility escalator for many young people coming from working-class families (Foldesi, 2004).

1.3.5 The Olympic Idea

After the establishment of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 1894, the IOC created rules about amateurism that sportsmen and women should not use their sport to make a living or any kind of form to gain profit. Moreover, the Olympic Idea's picture is a competition between unpaid sportsmen and women competing purely for enjoyment. At the beginning the IOC allowed governing sporting bodies to check and confirm whether their athletes were amateurs or not, but while the time was passing it was almost clear that different sports had different ideas about rules for amateurs. This

tendency resulted that some athletes had unfair advantage over others. Over the years many rules have been written down and changed. Consequently, no set of rules has yet been found which is acceptable, fair and equal concerning all countries and all sports. The Olympic Idea is becoming out of date and rusting in the mercy of time. Finally, the most important object became winning at the highest level. The Olympic athletes are not anymore true amateurs (www.multimedia.olympic.org/pdf/enreport700.pdf).

2. OBJECTIVES

The major objectives of this thesis are:

- to examine the major social, cultural, and political factors **determining sporting successes** in very small countries at **macro- meso-, and micro-levels** and to reveal the relationship **between these factors** through the example of Cyprus.
- to discover the equality of chances for becoming top athletes through the example of the Cypriot elite athletes who participated in the Olympic Games under the umbrella of the Republic of Cyprus between the periods 1980 (the first time that Cypriot athletes participated in the Games) and 2008.
- to reveal the entire life-course of the athletes, from sport specialization to retirement including their social status, social mobility, and social role.

2.1 Research questions

In order to achieve the above mentioned goals an empirical research was carried out by the author with the purpose to give answers to the following questions:

- To which degree do macro-and meso-level factors determine the international success of Cypriots in elite sport?
- What are the determinants of sporting success at micro-level? Is there **equality of chances for becoming elite athletes in Cyprus?**
- What kind of factors are the best predictors of nations' performance in elite sport in small countries like Cyprus?
- What similarities and differences can be observed in the social status, social role and social mobility of the Cypriot Olympians competing in different periods?
- What were the main similarities and differences between the Cypriot Olympians' status concerning amateurism and professionalism and the status of elite athletes living and competing in countries with long traditions in sport?

2.2. Hypotheses

- H1 It is assumed that since Cyprus is a very small country the major social, cultural, and political factors determine sporting successes there on macro- and meso-level in a special way.
- H2 It is assumed that Cypriot children and young people have no equal chances to become top athletes. Children coming from families with low income and low education background or coming from rural areas have unequal opportunities.
- H3 It is supposed that although the Cypriot society does not give too much attention to it, the social status and social role of the Cypriot Olympians changed due to their participation in the Olympic Games. The mechanism of intragenerational and intergenerational social mobility with Olympians competing in different periods occurred differently.
- H4 It is assumed that most Cypriot elite athletes are not professionals in the same way as the Olympians living and competing in countries with long sporting traditions are. Money does not play a crucial role in their sporting career and most of them do not earn their living exclusively from sport.

3. METHODS

During the investigation three methods were used:

- survey method
- in-depth interviews
- and analysis of documents.

3.1 Survey method

3.1.1 Population

The research was designated to the total population, that is to each members of the Cypriot Olympic teams participating in the summer Olympic Games between 1980 and 2008 in 11 sports: tennis, rhythmic gymnastics, archery, wrestling, cycling, weightlifting, shooting, swimming, sailing, judo, and athletics (N=93, males= 66; females= 27). However, if the Cypriot Olympians summarized by Olympic years the number of the participants is 124 (Table 1), because several athletes competed not only in one Games but in two or three.

Table 1 Participations in the summer Olympics from the Republic of Cyprus (in numbers) (N=124)

1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008
Moscow	L.A.	Seoul	Barcelona	Atlanta	Sidney	Athens	Beijing
14	11	9	16	17	22	18	17

Olympic Results/Places the Athletes Succeeded

3rd, 4th, 5th, 7th, 8th, 3×9th, 10th, 11th, 2×12th, 4×13th, 2×14th, 16th, 17th, 2×18th, 3×20th, 3×21st, 22nd, 4×23rd, 3×24th, et.al.

The number of the Cypriot Olympians is not so high due to the fact that Cyprus is a small island with a small population, with relatively short sport history and little high level sporting activity. Cypriot athletes participated in Olympic Games for the first time in 1980, in Moscow, and they always competed in individual sports. Until 2012 no athlete had the opportunity to win a medal at any of the Olympic Games. In 2012 the ice

was broken and Cyprus made a historical success winning the first medal, a bronze one, in sailing.

3.1.2 Data collection

Data were collected by interviews, that is, by standardized questionnaires (appendix A) personally. The address of nine Olympians could not be found, eight of them stayed abroad for a longer period, and two athletes refused to answer. The number of responses was 74 (males 52; females 22). The answering rate is 79.56% compared to the total population. The number of the research population (N= 74) and the total population (N=93) according to the athletes' sport can be seen in Figure 1.

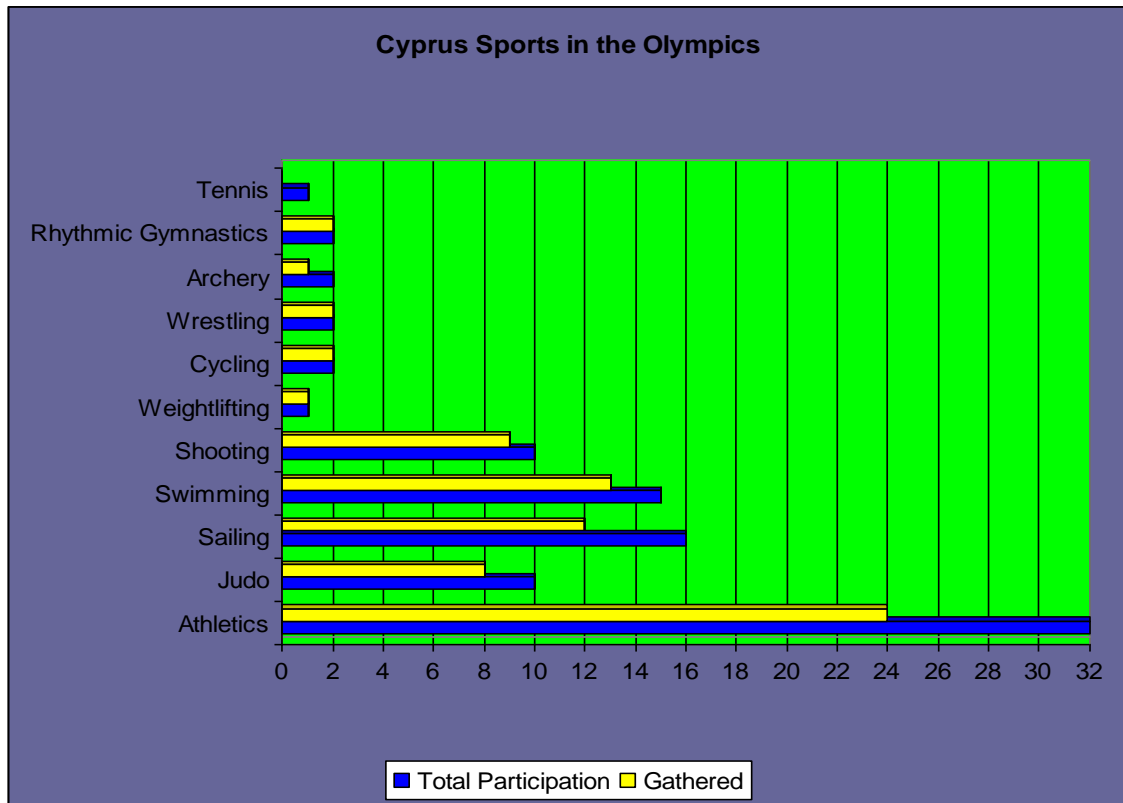


Figure 1 The research population (N= 74) and the total population (N=93) according to the athletes' sport

The data of Figure 1 show that Cyprus participated with one athlete in tennis, two athletes in rhythmic gymnastics, two in archery, two in wrestling, two in cycling, one in weightlifting, ten in shooting, fifteen in swimming, sixteen in sailing, ten in judo, and thirty two athletes in track and field. The author managed to gather information by standardized interviews from two athletes from rhythmic gymnastics, wrestling and cycling, one athlete from archery and weightlifting. Moreover, nine athletes from shooting, thirteen athletes from swimming, twelve from sailing, eight from judo and twenty four athletes from track and field, the so called classical sport, were interviewed.

Regarding some major characteristics (age, gender, sport) the research population represents the total population. Although almost 80% of the total population was involved in the investigation, the size of the research population was relatively low; therefore results can be only generalized with reservation.

3.1.3 Data processing

The quantitative data were summarized by Microsoft Excel 2003/07 program.

The quantitative data obtained were nominal and ordinal. Therefore, during their analysis descriptive statistics were used.

3.2 In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews were made with active and retired athletes (n=9), coaches (n=7), key actors in the decision making process (n=4), a television reporter, and a newspaper reporter. The in-depth interviews were recorded on tape. Information gained by the in-depth interviews was very useful to interpret the quantitative findings. The guideline of the in-depth interviews is presented in appendix B.

Qualitative information was analyzed according to special criteria to help the author to identify whether or not the opinions of the athletes keep pace with the sayings of coaches, sport actors, and media.

3.3 Analysis of documents

Two groups of documents were analyzed. The one comprised the biggest Cyprus newspaper on its field. Its aim was to discover whether the articles published in the newspaper were supportive or not, and if yes, in which way. The other document analysis concerned the web page of the Cyprus Sport Organization (CSO) to find out elite sport policy and the way of categorizing the athletes in different ages of their career. The list of documents is presented in appendix C.

4. RESULTS

In this chapter the author introduces the results of his investigation in two major parts. Firstly the major social, cultural, and political factors determining sporting successes in very small countries on macro- and meso-level are presented. Secondly, according to the chronological order of the athletes' sporting career, their socioeconomic background is analysed from the time they selected their first sporting activity and their own sport which drove them to the Olympics, through the active and most successful periods of their career, until their disengagement from top sporting activity. The equality of chances for becoming elite athletes is given special attention.

4.1. Major social, cultural, and political factors **determining sporting success**

4.1.1 Macro-level determinants: population, economy, geography, sport culture, and tradition

Although researchers agree that bigger and economically stronger countries are at considerable advantage in international sport, in these days, they attribute relatively less importance to macro-level factors in elite sport success than they did historically. They argue that the awareness of the high value of elite sport performance has been increasing among more and more governments who invest more and more money into the development of their elite sport system, and their efforts are crowned by success. It is estimated that in contemporary Olympic sport the macro-level determinants account only 50% for success or failure (De Bosscher, 2007).

Analyzing the social and cultural context people have been living in Cyprus it seems that macro-level factors are responsible here for elite sport successes, more exactly for the lack of them, to a higher degree. Cyprus is not only a small country (9.251 km²) but more than one third (32.2%) of this territory is occupied by Turkey. Consequently the small population (803.200) is also divided, only three quarter (75,5%) is Cypriot Greek, the rest consists of Cypriot Turks (10.0%) foreign citizens and guest workers (4,5%) (www.cyprus.gov.cy).

The Turkish invasion in 1974 did not prevent the Cypriot economy from developing. Over the last decades the macroeconomic situation proved to be stable, the average yearly growth and the GDP growth rate in real term had been quite good;

inflation and unemployment had been low. The standard of living has also been good enough; the life expectancy has been quite acceptable (82.4 years with women, 77.9 with men). So, the economic performance would have made it possible to promote sport to a higher degree in general and elite sport in particular. One of the most significant reasons that it did not happen was the low level of sport culture in the island, together with poor sporting tradition which are factors between the macro- and the meso-levels. Cyprus had a turbulent past, it changed foreign hand several times even in her modern history (since 1878), and it gained its sovereignty from British Colonial rule as late as 1960. During the colonial period Cypriot athletes did not have the opportunity to participate at international sporting events independently from the rulers, and after the liberation there was no particular motivation for it. Promotion of elite sport was not at all among the political priorities of the new state for many years following its liberation.

The geographical conditions and the climate have not been in the favour of sport competition either. In the lack of supportive sport policy, countryside without rivers, with bleak mountains, the dry, hot summers did not promote the people's ambition, not even the desire to be involved in competitive sport. For example track and field athletes or swimmers have no inside facilities for training, so during summer time in Cyprus when the temperature can reach even 45 degrees centigrade during day time no one can train properly or even train. Seas around the inland were not regarded for long as sporting scenes. So some of the water sports were and are difficult to be trained in the sea, consequently some water sports do not exist on a competitive level in Cyprus, e.g. rowing. Sport culture has been changing slowly; according to recent research finding, today only 6% of the Cypriot population participates in sport daily or at least frequently (Humphreys et al., 2010). Since not only the size of the population but also the rate of sporting people might have an influence on a nation's sporting success, the chances of the otherwise small Cypriot nation diminished further on. According the Special Eurobarometer No 213 (2004) the percentage of the physical activity concerning the European community is almost five times bigger than in Cyprus (29%). It is obvious that Cypriot population lacks from sport culture in general and this European result could be a motivation for the beginning of new perspectives.

4.1.2 Meso-level factors: sport policy, sport politics

The terms of sport policy and sport politics have several meanings. Since the intention was to use them in this paper in a general sense their definitions was borrowed from Foldesi who clarified them in a simple way, in one of her recent publications as follows: “policy means statements, ideals, strategies, plans, and politics denotes their accomplishment (Foldesi, 2009, 149.).

Since out of the various factors leading to international sporting success only the meso-level ones can be unambiguously influenced and changed, national sport organizations in many countries focus on having effective impact on elite sport in this respect. According to the research findings outstanding sport performance had not been seen by Cypriot sport policies and politics as a resource valuable to help achieve a wide range of non-sportive objectives. The decision-makers had not assumed that the Cypriot athletes’ modest results in international competition could generate social and/or political benefits and acted accordingly. Analyzing the Cypriot case, Houlihan and Green’s model (2008) was used, who studied elite sport policy in four areas:

- developing elite level sports facilities
- supporting the emergence of “full time” athletes
- developing in coaching, sports science and sports medicine
- promoting competition opportunities for elite athletes.

The development of sports facilities adequate for elite athletes started later in Cyprus than the emergence of competitors with ambitions to participate in international sporting events. For instance there is one Olympic size swimming pool which is often used by foreign national squads and also by tourists. Generally little investment has been made in building elite level facilities also in other sport. As elite athletes put it:

“We need proper facilities for training and the improvement of the old ones because our level can be higher” (Female Olympian in the 2000s)

“Even with the existed facilities we did not have the adequate equipment to work properly.” (Male elite athlete in the 1980s)

Even less investment has been made in training coaches, supporting sport science and in developing sport medicine. Most Cypriot coaches and PE teachers got their degree abroad earlier; they could graduate in Cyprus only recently. Several coaches complained about the lack of opportunity for their further training as follows.

“There are too few seminars and meetings for coaches, it would be good if the sport organizations and the federations started organizing and developing seminars by themselves for enlightening, improving, and developing the coaches for better future and results.” (Male coach in the 2000s)

“Due to the lack of money they do not give us the adequate opportunity to participate in international trainings to enrich our knowledge and parallel to work with our athletes among others.” (Male coach in the late 1990s)

Scientific results in various disciplines were used rather individually by enthusiastic athletes and coaches; they have been generally neglected by sporting institutions which are not really interested to improve the athletes' performance and or to protect their health. Even when the training of future sport experts was introduced recently at the Cypriot higher education, very few research laboratory or research centres were established. Young sport experts returning from foreign universities were hardly offered the possibility for carrying out research. Similarly, young Cypriots who graduated in medical sciences abroad have not received any attractive alternative to be specialized in sport medicine in Cyprus.

Sport in Cyprus was institutionalized in the late 1960s. A semi public, semi civil organization, called Cyprus Sports Organization (CSO) was founded in 1969 which focused its activity for long mostly on the development of Sport for All. Participation in large scale international athletic events was initiated more by individuals than by organizations. At the rise of Cypriot elite sport many of the best athletes with ambitions to reach higher standard did not exercise within the framework of sport clubs, several of them had no coaches and were specialized in their sport much later than the majority of their rivals in international competitions. They hardly received organized support to their sporting activity. All of them had pure amateur status in sport.

The Cyprus Olympic Committee (COC) was established in 1974, but it was recognized by the International Olympic Committee only in 1979. Therefore Cypriot athletes had the right to participate in the Olympic Games for the first time as late as in 1980. The foundation of the national Olympic Committee and its involvement in the Olympic movement produced organizational framework to the Cypriot elite athletes, however their situation changed very slowly. Between 1980-2008 roughly 13% of the Olympians had no coaches, more than 10% chose the sport in which they became

member of the Olympic team at the age of 16 or more (Shippi, 2010). The majority of athletes in various sports, with the exception of soccer, had limited competition opportunities, their participation in international meetings were not promoted. In the 1980s and 1990s most of them had a job; just a few of them became “part-time athletes”. Even in the years of 2000s very few “full-time” Cypriot athletes emerged, and only in a few sports, such as tennis and football.

The COC and the CSO started preparing national plans concerning the promotion of elite sport several years later than the Cypriot athletes’ first participation in the Olympic Games. They were useful, but they seem to be not effective enough, a few of them came to an end without good results. For instance from 1992 until the 2006 there was a plan for “professional settlement” which could not exist anymore, because, according to the sport authorities, it could not include any more athletes and provide them with professional settlement.

4.2 Socioeconomic background throughout the athletes’ sporting career

4.2.1 At the start

It is largely accepted that it is important for the children to start practicing physical activity in very young age. Many countries have organized activities for different ages and levels, such in kindergartens, in sport clubs, in schools during after school hours. Knoppers et al. (1988) referred to the works of Berlage and Miller, saying that many Americans believe that the participation of children in sporting activities will help them to learn and understand values and at the same time they gain physical skills. Sport is a free-time activity for the children (Weber, 2009). Children should get involved in sport activities through games and play for their own benefit. Through play, children learn social and physical skills, such as discipline, respect for the others, and at the same time, they train and improve (Brackenridge, 2008). Weber (2009) referred to the work of Telama who said that sport can be exercised under different conditions.

More than the half of the Cypriot Olympians began regular exercise out of school at a young age. One tenth of them started early, at the age of five. Almost half of them started between the ages of six and ten. It is surprising that a large number of

Cypriot Olympians started sporting activity between the ages of eleven and fifteen. One tenth of them started even later: between the ages of sixteen and twenty (Figure 2).

These days it seldom happens that young children aged over eleven years start exercise and then become members of their national teams (Shippi, 2006). It is, of course, rarer that youngsters get involved in sport activity for first time at the age of sixteen years (Foldesi, 1999). On the web-page of the Cyprus Sport Organization it can be read that:

“CSO promoted for first time in Cypriot population the Sport for All program in 1985. Up to day many children, youngsters and people of the third age are involved in sport. The main concept of the program is to train for good health with no boundaries in age and gender.” (<http://www.ago.org.cy/english/ago2009/history.shtm>)

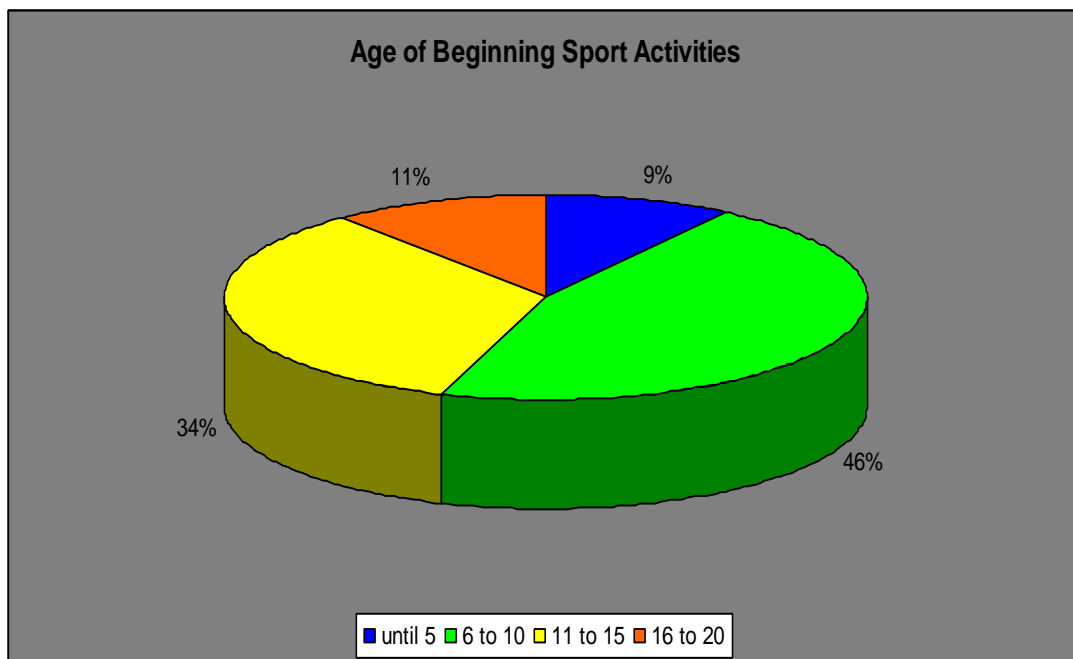


Figure 2 The athletes' age at their involvement in sport activities (%) (N=74)

Some Cypriot athletes changed their sport a few times at the beginning of their career, and others chose at the start in which they became Olympians.

The results of this research also show that the athletes started their sporting career without financial support. They even bought their sports clothing and equipment themselves. Only 2% of them said that they were sponsored during the first steps of their career.

Age at specialization

Some decades ago, the athletes had the opportunity to choose more than just one sport, and they had the opportunity to choose any sport to specialize in a relatively later period in their youth. For instance, during the Olympic Games in London (1948) there were athletes competing not only in one sport but also in several others. Such a phenomenon can no longer be seen due to the gigantic competitiveness and high expectations of today's sport. Over the past decades the age of specialization decreased. The selection of the sport nowadays does not follow the same procedure as seen in older times. The sport specialization is particular and special (Brackenridge and Kirby, 1997). The age of specialization depends on the sport, and there are big differences between sports in this respect. It is a common knowledge, for instance, that swimmers and gymnasts specialize much earlier than players in various sport games.

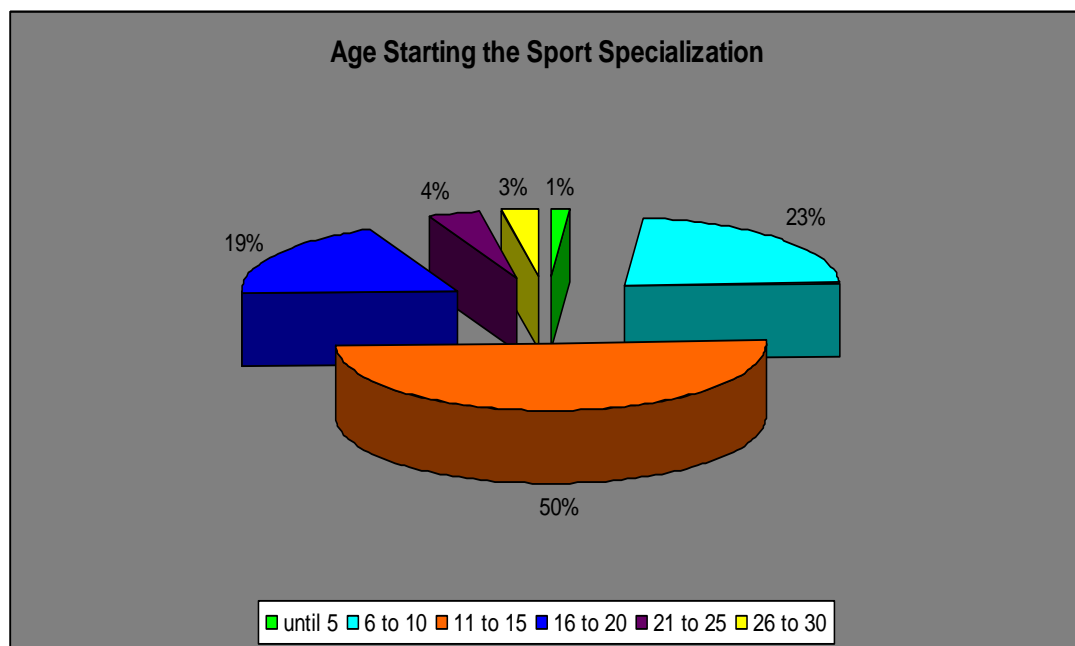


Figure 3 The athletes' age at their specialization into their sport (%) (N=74)

In Cyprus half of the Olympians do not seem to be specialized into sports at an early age. Only one per cent of them were under the age of five, immediately after their sport involvement, in sports such as rhythmic gymnastics and swimming. One-quarter of them were specialized in their sport between the ages of six to ten (in track and field,

judo, swimming, wrestling, and in tennis). On the other hand, it is more than surprising that one-fifth of them chose the sport in which they became member of the Olympic team after the age of sixteen years, half of them in the age of eleven to fifteen years, and it is unbelievable that almost one in ten Cypriot Olympian chose his/her sport over the age of twenty one year (Figure 3). Late specialization occurred frequently in the 1980s and in the early 1990s. The athletes at those periods did not have the appropriate knowledge to understand the meaning of choosing their sport at an early age, some other were accidentally involved in high level sporting activity. Couple of athletes said:

“I was a hunter and because of that, I was excellent in moving targets so I tried the sport of shooting and I was successful.” (Male Olympian in 1980s)

“All my life I was raised in the sea with the boats, so I and my friend decided to participate in the Olympics Games and the funny thing was that we did not know all the rules of the competition and for that we had a lot of penalty points.” (Male Olympians in 1980 and 1984)

The situation in Cypriot sport is not the same nowadays than two-three decades ago. For instance, the first shooters were specialized in sport later because they used to be hunters. Since they were excellent hunters, they were asked or they decided themselves to get involved in shooting when this sport was on the Olympic agenda.

Parents’ sporting experiences

Similar to the international trend seen in the 2000s, specialization started earlier in Cyprus in all the sports (including shooting) but not as early as was observed in the international arena, where parents encourage their children to become heavily involved in professional and prolympic sports at early ages and where parents used to be athletes (Donnelly, 1997). Many of them also believed that supporting a child to become a sportsman/woman at elite levels can be financially beneficial to them and to their families (Weber, 2009). Moreover, there were some parents who were athletes, then maybe lost their dreams, and they expressed their own former ambitions through their children (Donnelly, 1997). This situation does not exist in the same form in Cyprus; the Cypriot parents’ case is different. Two thirds of the parents of the Olympians never were athletes, 10.8% of them participated in recreational sport and the rest were competitive athletes (17.5%) mostly at lower levels (Figure 4). Some parents expressed

their wish to see their children as winners, at least in the local or regional competitions. They believed that it would not be necessary for their children to become international champions but it was enough to be good at national level. Some athletes said:

“My father told me to give the best of myself to win the national championship because I deserved it.” (Male Olympian in late 1990s)

“My parents supported me in every national competition and I was the champion from young age despite the fact that I was not able to become a champion in the international arena.” (Female Olympian in 1990s)

In addition, in Cyprus role expectations towards women were rather traditional thirty years ago. A great number of mothers were never active in sport. In the last fifteen years this situation changed due to migration and to the spread of satellite television. As a result, the role models for women have changed. Women in Cyprus gradually started to get involved in sporting activities both at a recreational and at a competitive level.

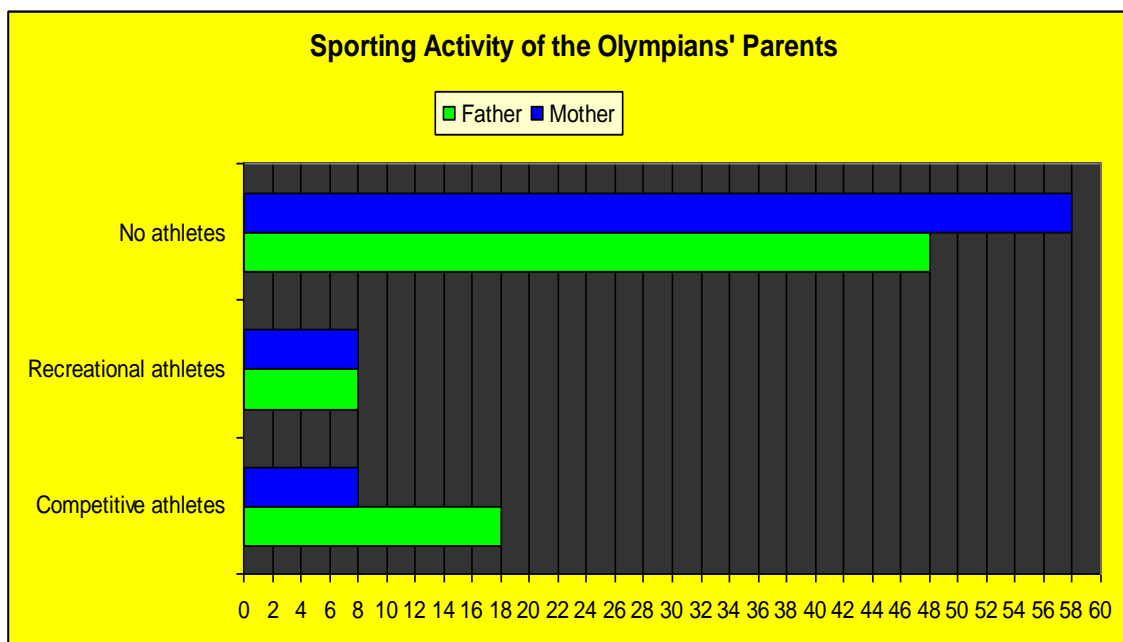


Figure 4 The sporting activity of the Olympians' parents (in numbers) (N=148)

Socializing Agents

As it is known not only the parents can promote their children's specialization in sports, there are many other socializing agencies, such as teachers, coaches, peer groups, the media and the health care providers (Weber, 2009). In India, for instance, in

addition to their family, female students are encouraged by their coaches and teachers to participate in sports (Gupta, 1987).

The answer to the question, who might be the most probable socializing agent, depends on the sport in which a child is involved. For example, in gymnastics and in swimming most frequently it is the parents who motivate their children to participate. In other sports, such as sailing, judo and shooting, other socializing agents play a more important role in the young athletes' specialization.

In this research the socializing agents in sport are categorized in five groups. More than one-quarter of the athletes were invited by coaches, and about 20% of them were advised equally by their families, their teachers and their friends to choose their sport. The media influenced the 10% of the sport specialization of the Cypriot athletes (Table 2).

The data presented in Table 2 are somewhat surprising. Since the age of sport specialization became lower, the role of the families increased and the influence of sport clubs decreased in this area worldwide. This is not the case in Cyprus. Although it looks like that the sport system in Cyprus is not active enough to invite young children into sport and appears to be very poor at offering open opportunities, coaches are the number one socializing agents. They do not play a more radical or important part in the athletes' early sport socialization than the other agents, but they take precedence over all of them. The relatively considerable contributions of physical education (PE) teachers and other teachers to the children's choice of sport are equally amazing. All the more so because PE teachers in Cyprus are not employed in primary schools, teachers who are not qualified for the PE lessons assess this important subject to the children in primary schools.

Table 2 The socializing agencies that recommended the athletes to chose their sport (%) (N=74)

SOCIALIZING AGENTS	% of the athletes
Sport (coaches)	27%
Peers (friends)	22%
School (teachers, PE teachers)	21%
Family (father, mother)	20%
Media	10%

In principle one of the major links that could connect children to sport clubs would be the P.E. teachers who are actually missing from primary schools. The Cypriot government does not help to solve this problem and the sport organizations' hands are tied. Elementary school teachers do not agree with inviting P.E. teachers to their schools; they believe they are able to teach PE, despite the fact they do not have the appropriate education for that (Christodoulou, 2011). The government pays their expenses to attend 3-6 months courses about school games while the training to become a physical education teacher lasts three-four years. As a consequence, children until the age of thirteen do not have teachers holding degrees in physical education in schools, and the prestige of PE classes is low. Under these circumstances it is really unexpected that one-fifth of the Cypriot Olympians was advised to become athletes and was helped to select their sport at school. Even school teachers without proper qualification in PE seem to have felt responsibility for children when they identified their gift for sport and they oriented them toward the kind of sport they supposed would be suitable to them.

There are no research findings from earlier periods for comparison; therefore it is not an objective way to state whether the parents' role in their children's choice of sport has been changed over the last decades or not. The size of the research population is not big enough for that either. However, it can be ascertained that the impact of the fathers and mothers on their children's selection of sport is low, especially in the mirror of international tendencies. Even the peer groups exert a somewhat higher impact on the orientation in sport of their friends. The major reason of this phenomenon can be rooted in traditional value system of the Cypriot-Greek families, in which sport has had a peripheral place, if any. Although the family ties had been very strong, the majority of the parents did not direct their children towards (elite) sport because they were hardly familiar with it or they were not really interested in it.

The importance of the media in the athletes' choice of sport also appears to be lower than in many other countries. This situation can be explained by the fact that there are relatively few internationally successful Cypriot elite athletes who are present in the mass communication as magnetic patterns to be followed. The achievements of other nations' sport heroes are too far from the Cypriot reality. They rather push young children away from elite sport instead of attracting them since they appear too difficult or even impossible to reach such extremely high performances.

There is no division among the athletes' gender concerning the socializing agents but there are differences between the athletes' ages concerning the socializing agents. Younger athletes were influenced mostly by their families and school and less by their friends. The older athletes were influenced mostly by their coaches and their friends and rarely by the media.

Motivations

The below results are not completely consistent with the information given by the research subjects about their motivations for choosing their sport (Figure 5.).

There are, of course, several reasons that have inspired Cypriot elite athletes to be involved and choose their sports. It can be observed that the majority of the athletes answered that they were interested in the particular sport or they wanted to become champions one day. A little less than one-third of them wanted to become famous and about one-third wished to have good body shape. Almost one-fifth of them confessed to not having own motivations, instead, their parents selected the sport for them. Moreover, several athletes were inspired by the fact that one of their parents was also an athlete.

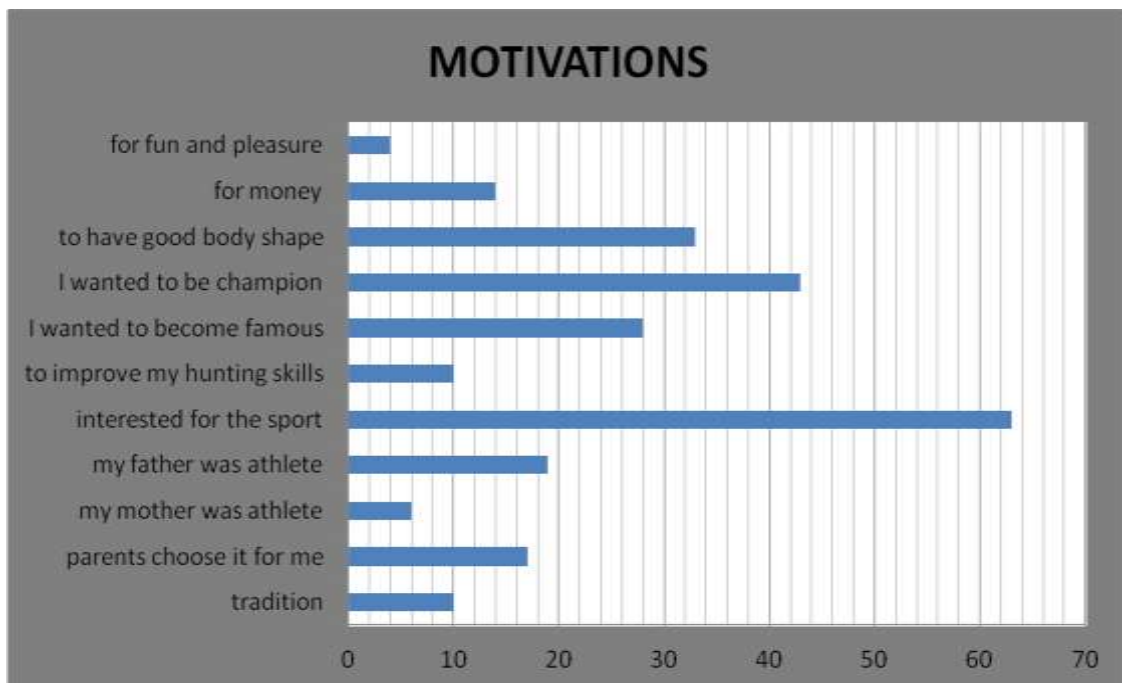


Figure 5 Reasons that motivated the athletes to choose their sport (in numbers) (N=74)

It is quite characteristic that the majority of the motives of the Cypriot athletes were connected mainly to sport or to personal ambitions. It has to be admitted that it was not only their merit that very few of the athletes were motivated to start sporting activity for money and those athletes participated in the last four Olympic Games. In the 1980s, when the desire to become famous and champions was the most important motivation, the athletes were exclusively interested in sports because it was out of question to receive money for their sporting performance. An athlete said:

“Back in 1984, when I was elite there was no money so it was out of question to even think about money.” (Male Olympian)

The Olympic movement in Cyprus was truly amateur longer than in most other members in the Olympic family. The majority of the Olympic sports in Cyprus still operate in a different way than in many other countries.

At the beginning of 1990s there was a turn in Cypriot sport: money slowly started to become a part of sports. Consequently, money became a motivating factor for some sportsmen/women. However, Cypriot Olympic athletes do not earn high amounts of money, not even today. A sport key actor said:

“The CSO from 1992 until 2006 established a professional settlement plan for the elite athletes who were able to reach high results in the international sport arena. Unfortunately this system very soon collapsed due to the inappropriate structure and due to the lack of strong bases.”

According to the relevant literature one of the most important inspirations can be the family in general and towards sports in particular. The parents can influence the behavior, habits and values of their children to the right direction, when they themselves live rational lives and take care of their health, fitness and appearance (Fialova, 2004). More precisely the father and the mother play important role in their children's involvement in sports. The children consider their mothers and their fathers as role models. The role model of the mother in today's society has been reformulated but less so the father's. . In the past women regarded their bodies as instruments of survival: they maintained the house and raised the children. Today's woman regards her body as an object that others evaluate and which she can form and influence (Fialova, 2004). In Cyprus this phenomenon could be also observed in connection with sport but to a lesser extent. Not many Cypriot athletes stated that they were inspired to start their sport

because their mothers and their fathers were athletes but those who did belong to all periods. It seems that the effect of the parents exist even in low level. At this point only male athletes imposed that they were inspired by their parents and no females.

4.2.2 Equality of chances for becoming top athletes

There is scientific evidence that children do not have equal chances for becoming top level athletes. Their sporting career is influenced by their socio-economic background, such as educational level, income and occupational prestige of their families (Spaaij, 2009). There are inequalities within countries and between countries. There are huge differences between sports in this respect, young people who have low socio-economic family background, more frequently get into sports such as boxing, wrestling, football, weightlifting, which are not expensive (Foldesi, 2004).

On the other hand, parents with high income and high socioeconomic status send their children to sports which are prestigious and expensive or to sports where the children will be able to earn money, such as tennis, sailing, polo, etc. Foldesi (2004) discovered that the Hungarian elite athletes in fencing, yachting, swimming, water polo and rowing came from families with high incomes and high educational level.

The socioeconomic background of the Cypriot Olympians in their childhood was very favourable. Like in other countries with similar conditions inequalities to become a top athlete also exist in Cyprus. Children coming from families with different educational and economic background have different chances and consequently different access to sports. This statement was proved by the findings of this research. Out of the various factors which can be found at micro level, that is related to the individual athletes and their personal environment, this thesis put a particular emphasis on the equality of chances for becoming elite athletes. Inequalities can be found from the time of their socialization into sports, through their sporting environment, such as facilities and equipment, their relation with media, coaches and sport clubs, their relation with the sport organizations to their recognition from the various people and organizations. Inequalities can also be found in the way of their retirement. According to a newly coined definition “*Sports equality is about fairness on sport, equality of access, recognizing inequalities and taking steps to address them. It is about changing the culture and structure of sport to ensure that it becomes equally accessible to all*

members of society, whatever their age, race, ethnicity, sexuality or socioeconomic status.” (Hudson and Barlow, 2005, 3.).

Equal access to all areas of sport, including elite sport constitutes a fundamental right for every person. It is regarded as an essential value, and it is legally recognized in all democratic states. However, many forms/aspects of social inequalities can be found in sport, especially at the start of sporting careers. The study of social equality/inequality in term of performing their best in sport has a long history There is a large volume of international literature on economic, social, and cultural factors which prevent young athletes from achieving their right (e.g. Foldesi, 1999, 2004; Gupta, 1987; Sohi and Yusuff, 1987; Spaaij, 2009).

The findings of this research show that the Cypriot Olympians were not in equal position at the start. Many Cypriot Olympians came from families with higher education and with more prestigious occupation than the families of the non-athlete children. The non-athlete children’s parents’ level of education is lower than athletes’ parents’, especially as far as the rate of university graduates are concerned (Table 3).

Table 3 Educational level of the Cypriot Olympians’ parents and of the Cypriot population’s in different periods according to gender (%)

Educational Level	1980-1992		1996-2008	
	Men Parents Population	Women Parents Population	Men Parents Population	Women Parents Population
Less than 4 th grade	0,0 4,5	10,5 14,5	0,0 6,5	2,5 13,25
Primary school	34 42	42 44,75	20 22,25	23 22,25
Secondary school	42 38	30,5 30	39 47	37,5 40.75
University-college	24 15,5	17 10,75	41 24,25	37 23,75
Total	100,0 100,0	100,0 100,0	100.0 100,0	100,0 100,0

The Cyprus yearly statistical book shows the statistics of the people who had never attended school, people attending primary and secondary school and higher education. It also shows that less than half of the Cypriot population in 1980s and in 1990s had primary level of education. More than 20% of the population had higher education such as college and university studies and degrees. Generally the level of the education of the men and the women in 1980s was lower than the level of those in the 1990s, but in any case, the educational level of men is higher than the level of the women in Cyprus concerning these periods. Of course, the level of education of the Cypriot citizen is improving during the years in both males and females ([www.mof.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/All/E2DC741030532A9FC2256D400023BD8D/\\$file/EDUCATION_INDICATORS-2008_09-EN-270510.xls?OpenElement](http://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/All/E2DC741030532A9FC2256D400023BD8D/$file/EDUCATION_INDICATORS-2008_09-EN-270510.xls?OpenElement)).

Comparing the educational level of the Olympians' parents with the rest of the population of the Cypriot society in the 1980s and in the 1990s the level of the education of the Olympians' parents is higher at those periods than the level of the education of the general Cypriot population.

The data on the athletes who participated in the Olympic Games held between 1980 and 1992 and between 1996 and 2008 were compared because the Cypriot government changed elite sport policy since the mid-1990, and it seemed to be essential to know whether it had an impact on the recruitment of top-level sport or not. The findings suggest that chances were not equal even in the pioneer stage of the Cypriot Olympic movement; the children whose parents had low education were at a disadvantage. However from 1992 onwards children whose parents graduated at colleges or universities had even higher chance to become top athlete than earlier.

Someone could say that in Cyprus it is a custom or even a national tradition that exists from the past that the people should be educated in high level. During the analysis of this issue it must be born in mind that the level of education has different meaning in small states where generalists are more needed than specialists. As the author mentioned before the system in Cyprus works with a particular way that does not allow PE teachers to teach the PE lessons in primary schools giving the impression that the state does not give the appropriate attention for the physical education in young age or the state is not willing to give the appropriate attention for this important part of the children's life. Do due this fact primary values never reach the children's knowledge. The individuals

could assess very carefully their employment possibilities before they undertake any specialized training, since they are required to have multifunctional knowledge. Since the training institutions are not flexible in Cyprus either, their rigidity resulted in the over-education of the population. It means that although Cypriot people are aware of the fact that they may have job that do not need high qualification they intend to get as many college degrees as possible in order to answer the special requirements set up by their domestic labour market in order to prevent unemployment or emigration.

Consequently, the level of education as one of the indicators of a socioeconomic status has lesser significance here than in larger countries and the picture on the equality of chances seems to be more complex when another crucial status characteristic, namely the occupation of the Olympians' parents are examined (Table 4).

Table 4 Occupation of the Olympians' parents (%)

Occupations	1980-1992		1996-2008	
	Men	women	men	women
Managerial/professional	0,0	0,0	5,0	2,5
Clerks	9,0	6,0	27,5	22,5
Self-employed artisans, shopkeepers	20,5	0,0	35,0	20,0
Skilled/semi-skilled workers	23,5	6,0	27,5	12,5
Agricultural workers	41,0	0,0	5,0	0,0
Unemployed/dependent (housewives)	0,0	82,0	0,0	42,5
Other (not relevant)	6,0	6,0	0,0	0,0
Total	100,00	100,00	100,00	100,00
	n=34	n=34	n=40	n=40

Although comparison can be only made with reservation, since the population's occupational categories of the data gained from the Census of the Cypriot Population (Department of Statistics and Research in Cyprus, 1992 and 2001) were not exactly the same and they referred only to the employed people, a few tendencies can be noticed. In the 1980s, when the Olympic movement was in its infancy in Cyprus, relatively many

athletes joined it from agricultural families. It has to be emphasized that not really from villages, because at that time also the towns were the scene of agricultural activities. Moreover, regardless of the athletes' birth place they were already living in towns when they chose their sport and it generally happened in a later age than the athletes' sport specialization in most other countries in the Olympic family. Otherwise the youths' dwelling place in their childhood can be linked to their exclusion from sport. Sport has been an urban phenomenon also in Cyprus, the villages lacked both sporting culture and adequate sports facilities. The preponderant majority of the Cypriot Olympians was born and spent their childhood in the capital city, Nicosia (34%) or in the seaside cities (59.5%). Although 31% of the Cypriots were living in villages, less than on tenth of the Olympians came from seaside or mountain villages. The dwelling place in Cyprus proved to be a barrier faced by people involved, or wanting to be involved in sport.

In the 1980s none of the athletes' father belonged to the social group of managerial or professionals and just a few of them worked as a clerk. The majority of the mothers were housewives. At that time Cypriot elite sport was open, the early socializing agents into sport were not necessarily the parents or other family members because the above mentioned reason: the athletes chose their sport themselves, at a relatively later age. When by the mid-1990s sport specialization unavoidably began in a younger age also in Cyprus, the share of agricultural families in the recruitment of top sport radically diminished, while the rate of Cypriot people working in agriculture decreased to a much lesser extent in the same period. Although elite sport did not turn into the privilege of upper or upper middle class people, as a social sub-system it became more closed, and it became the activity of middle class and self-employed people.

Cypriot elite sport has always been less open for women than for men. Out of the 93 Olympian there were only 27 women. The number of women was especially low in the 1980s when according to the dominant traditional value system women had an unambiguously inferior position in society. Since that time their status has improved, especially over the last decade. However, gender equality in everyday life is still not a reality despite the formal recognition. Cypriot women and men do not enjoy the same rights in practice. Various social, political, economic, and cultural inequalities persist (salary disparities, political under-representation etc.) including sport involvement.

These inequalities are the results of social constructs built upon numerous stereotypes present in all social institutions: family, education, culture, the world of work, and even the media. Referring to the Cypriot situation it is proved that this kind of inequality exists due to the fact that some sports which were included in the Olympic agenda had no woman participation. Such sports are judo, weightlifting, wrestling and tennis. Many people believe that there are sports that are hard and aggressive which might not be preferable to Cypriot women athletes. Regarding tennis, it might be accidentally in this category that women are not participating due to the fact that the level in Cyprus is under development and because much money is required to do that kind of sport.

The majority of the athletes' nationality is Cypriot. However, there are a number of athletes having foreign nationality before their participation at the Olympic Games. Those athletes have origins from Albania, England, Georgia, and Greece and were active in 1980s and at the beginning of 1990s. They became Cypriot citizens for several personal reasons such as, they moved to Cyprus to live and to find better life opportunities or they got married with a Cypriot inhabitant. There is also an athlete that had been "bought" by the Cypriot Sport Organization to participate in sports and compete with the Cypriot team. It seems that the international tendency of buying athletes exist also in Cyprus. In the international era of sport and especially in the countries with long history in sport and high budgets the phenomenon of buying and selling athletes is much more obvious. The countries with professional system want the best in performance and they have the means and the money to naturalize foreign athletes.

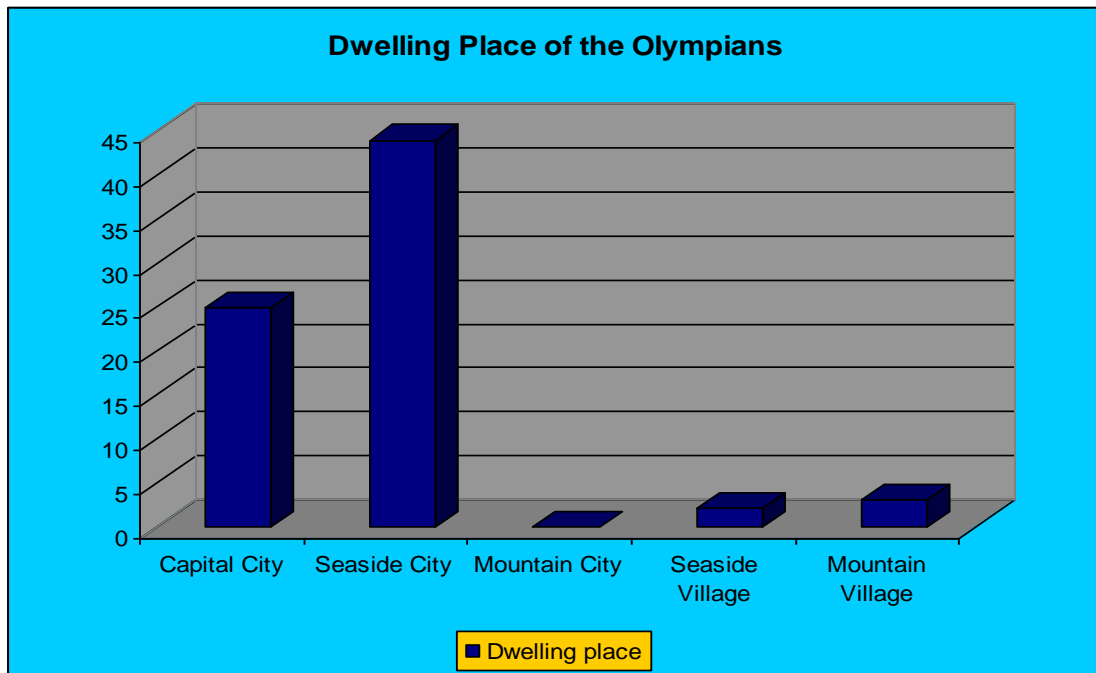


Figure 6 The dwelling place of the Olympians (in numbers) (N=74)

In Cyprus young children who were born in the villages did not have the equal chances with children born in the cities. In the villages, in many countries there are not adequate facilities and income to promote elite sporting activity like in the cities. The same situation exists in Cyprus, therefore many athletes move to cities for better sporting conditions, such as quality of training, quality of facilities, experienced coaches (Shippi, 2006).

4.2.3 The way to the top

Although the family did not play an outstanding part in the athletes' sport specialization, the fathers and mothers supported them more during their way to the top than their coaches, federations, friends and sponsors. The brothers and sisters joined their parents and they backed their athlete siblings more than their girl friends, boy friends, teachers, and even sport officials on behalf of the Cyprus Olympic committee or the Cyprus Sport Organization (Figure 7).

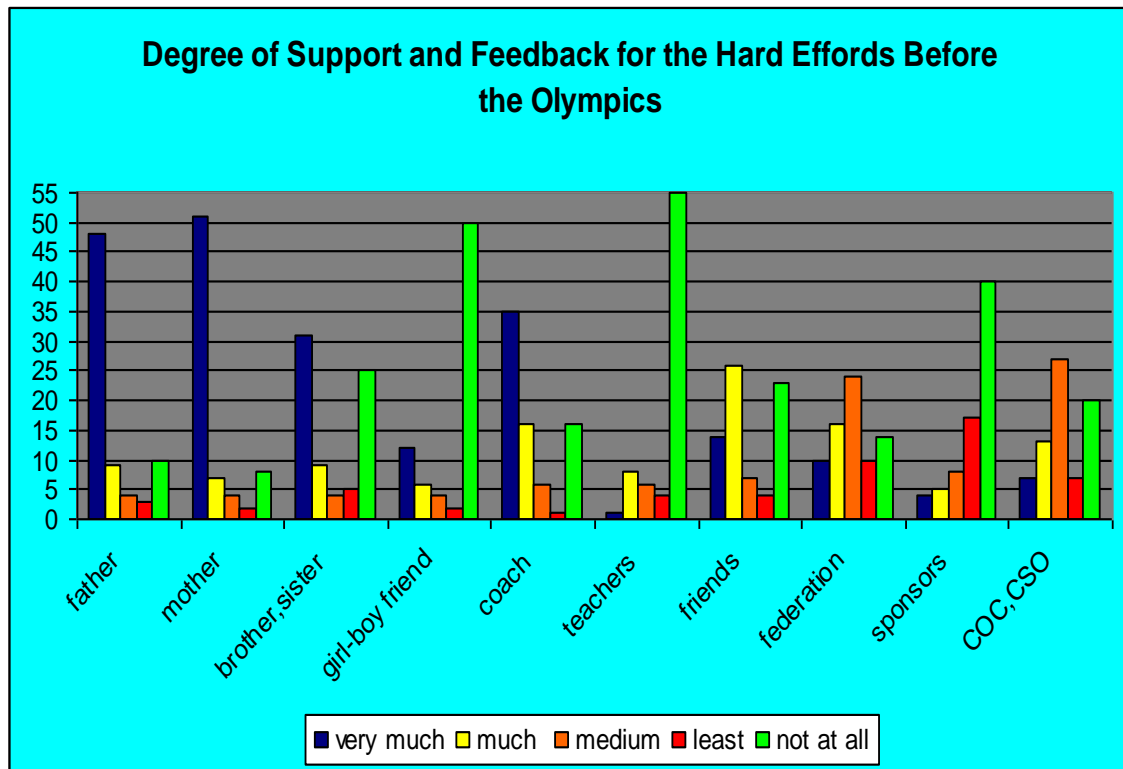


Figure 7 Degree of support and feedback given to the Olympians before their participation at the Olympics (in numbers) (N=74)

According to the findings of the CSO documents there were several plans that were established only after the 2000s to support the elite athletes.

One plan concerns the so called “Talents” which has been established in 2005. The group of athletes in this plan is youngsters who had a success based on the certain criteria competitions that CSO has. This plan supports the athletes and their coaches with money, provides health care and support to the athletes and covers the male athletes until the age of twenty and the female athletes until the age of eighteen. This plan provides a minor amount of money which is respectful but does not cover all the expenses of the athletes.

One more plan is the grouping of the “top elite athletes plan” which was established in 2002. This plan is divided into three categories and according to the results of the athletes they enter in the appropriate level category. The category of the elites is valid only for athletes over the age of twenty one, right after the talent plan stops. This plan provides the athletes with a monthly salary because of their result and extra money concerning other needs, such as massage, injuries, training camps etc. The

amount of money regarding this plan is definitely higher than any other plan, not in the level of professionalization but is one of the best motivations of the 21st century in Cypriot sport.

Another plan that exists for the needs of the elite sport is called the “special category plan” which was established in the year 2005. This plan covers the elite athletes over their twenty one years of age, right after the talent plan stops. Those athletes belong in the national teams of Cyprus, they have good but not so high results and they are not able to enter the top elite athletes plan because they do not fulfil the criteria. They have financial support but again not in the level of professionalization and of course less assumption than the “top elite athletes plan”.

An additional planning exists in the field of sport in Cyprus and has to do with the athletes doing their military services. This plan was established in the year 1989. The athletes that have been chosen from the COC and parallel from CSO, they are sent, by a list with their names on, in the chief offices of the military base and they are supported from the military with the benefit of three until six training accommodations per week, plus free furlough in case of national or international competitions.

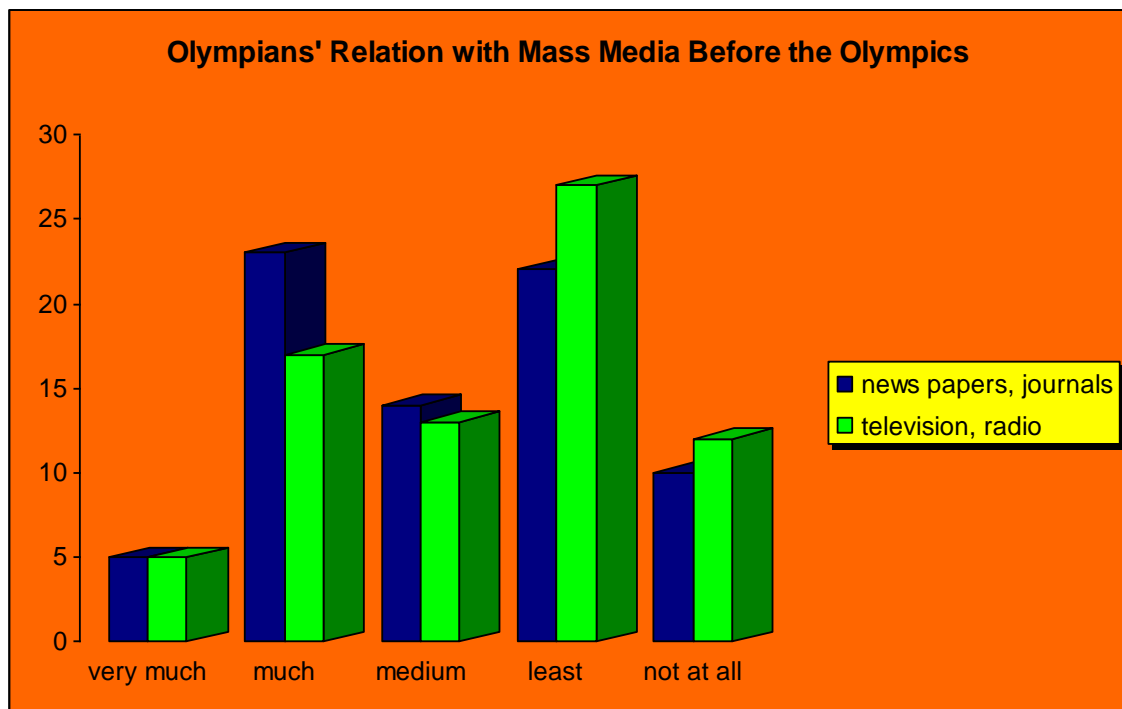


Figure 8 Support to the Olympians by the mass media before the Olympic participation (in numbers) (N=74)

Not too many athletes could count on the support of the Cypriot mass media before the Olympics. The athletes' evaluation about their relationship with the newspapers, journals, TV channels, and radio stations reveals how much support they were given by the media (Figure 8). Out of the Olympics the reporters said:

“We do cover competitions like world championships, world cups, European championships, the Commonwealth Games, the small Olympic games, several international tournaments and meetings etc, but rarely inland national championships or cups.” (Newspaper reporter)

“We start saying that generally in the sport reporting of Cyprus anything outside football became the poor relative and unfortunately all sports in Cyprus are always inferior to football. Nevertheless, I am very proud to say that with the national politics that appear in the national television we manage to show all the other sports, especially with my TV program from 2000 until 2006 with the three hours program every Saturday. Except for all kind of competitions in the international level, we showed the national sports like gymnastics, rhythmic gymnastics, swimming, figure skating, diving, athletics etc. Closing, I would like to mention that in the governmental TV our goal is wider and our expectations are more important than the hunt of TV numbers that the private TVs are trying to promote.” (TV reporter)

After the analysis of the documents in the newspaper the author found some interesting information. The reason the document analysis was carried out was to discover which is the attention or support or promotion that newspapers in Cyprus give to the top athletes from Cyprus competing in a national, international level as well as at the Olympic Games from the year 1980 until the 2008. Due to the fact that in the Olympic Games there were only athletes competing in the individual sports with the colors of Cyprus the author focused to that information.

The first thing discovered is that opening the sport section of a newspaper, the majority of the sport context talks about football news. The rest refers to the other team sports and the individual sports.

Moreover, it was discovered that the particular newspaper used to publish articles concerning various international competitions with a brief context on the athletes' participation and their results but rarely referred to local championships.

Since elite sport activity has become a special kind of work, the number of trainings and competitions have multiplied. The frequency of training depends partly on the branch of sport and on the reason of competition but generally speaking it is high. In many sports there are workouts not only every day, but sometimes even twice a day, and the athletes are invited to attend special training camps. The amateur nature of Cypriot elite sport is reflected by the relatively low frequency of trainings during the top athletes' sporting career. In the 1980s there were athletes in the Cypriot Olympic teams who had workouts only once or twice a week, and even in the 1990s a few Olympians were trained only three or maximum four times. In the 2000s the number of training increased to six, but the daily workouts has become a custom only recently (Figure 9).

Regardless of the frequency about two thirds of the Olympians found the workouts hard or very hard, and very few of them added to their statements that they also were pleasant at the same time. Only top athletes from the 1980s declared that their trainings were characterized by enjoyment. That time the athletes were not under stress.

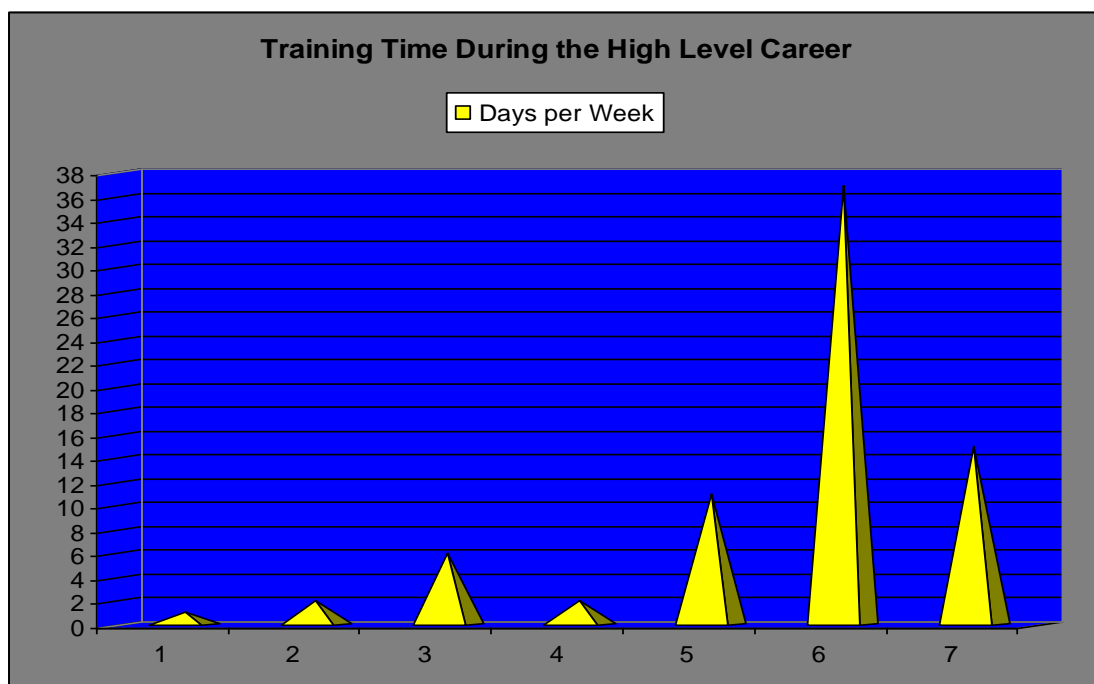


Figure 9 Frequency of training during the athletes high level career (in numbers) (N=74)

The athletes were aware of their disadvantageous situation in the international arena, but since they hardly received any support from the public or the business sector, they

relaxed. They wanted to improve their sporting achievement, but they did not want to win at any price.

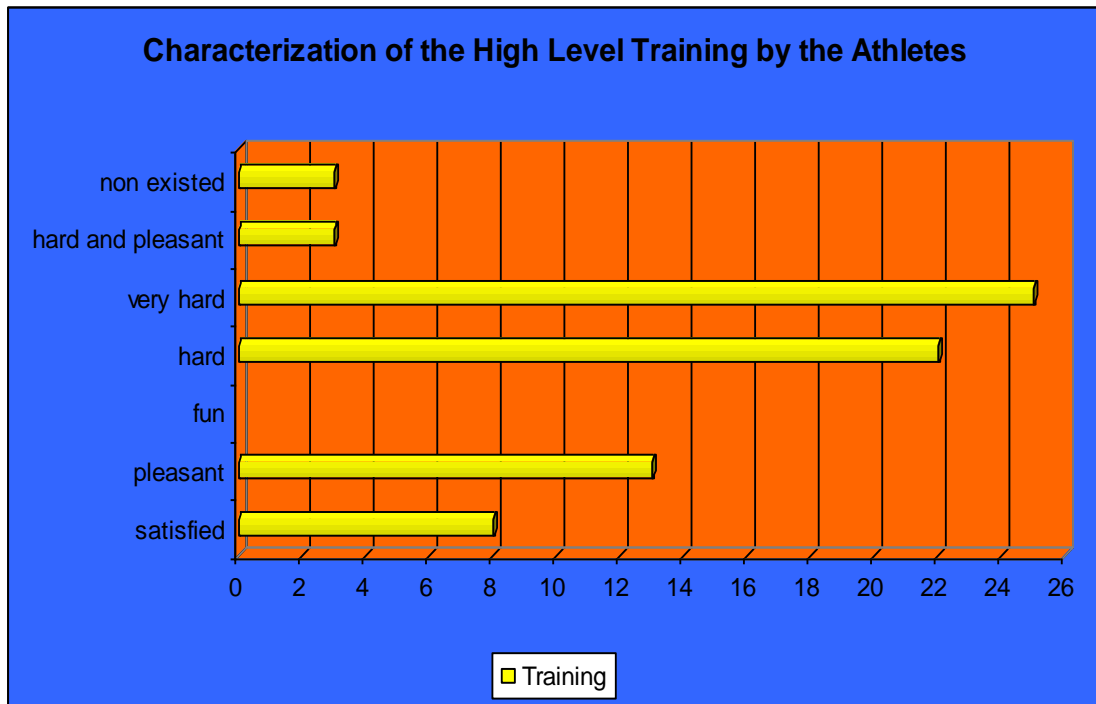


Figure 10 The athletes' opinion on their high level training (in numbers) (N=74)

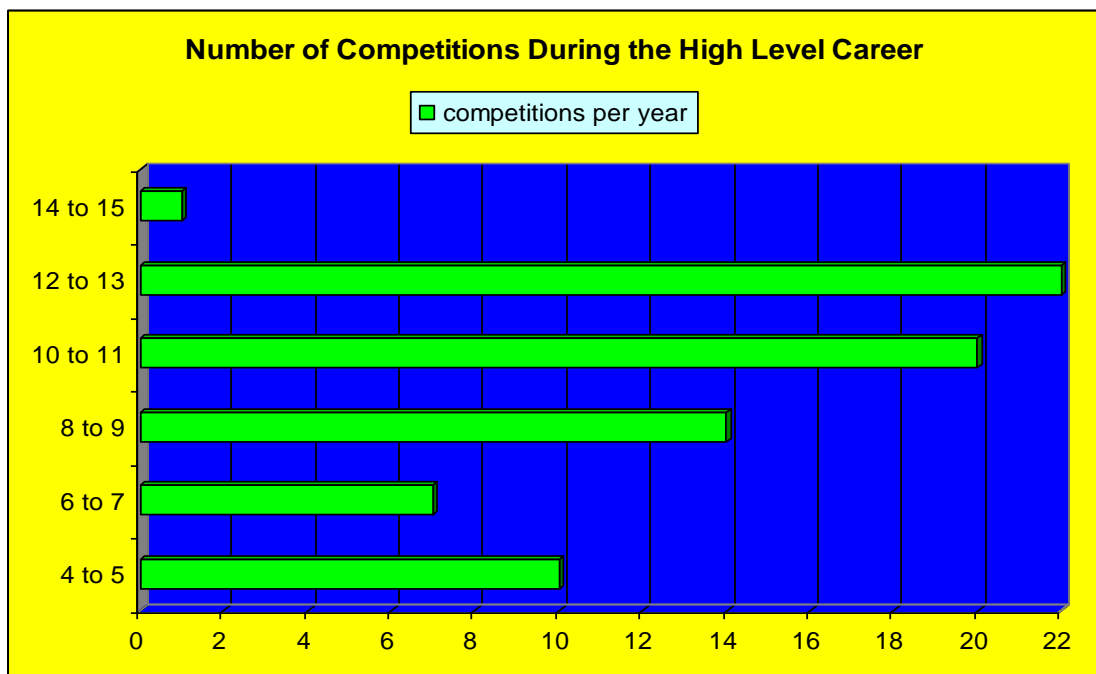


Figure 11 The number of competitions during top sport period (in numbers) (N=74)

The early Olympians seldom participated in competitions, only four or five times a year. The frequency of competitions increased gradually only when elite sport policy changed in Cyprus in the 1990s. In the 2000s it reached even 15 per year, and the athletes participated in 10-13 competitions on average yearly.

While the number of trainings and the competitions increased, the Olympians were not given modern therapies and special treatments more frequently. Not only psychologists were not employed by their clubs or national federations, but just a few of them had the access to regular physiotherapy or medical treatment. Even the nutrition supplements and the massage have gained ground only recently to a larger extent. In 1980s none of these procedures existed. The athletes began to use these procedures in 1990s and in 2000s more regularly.

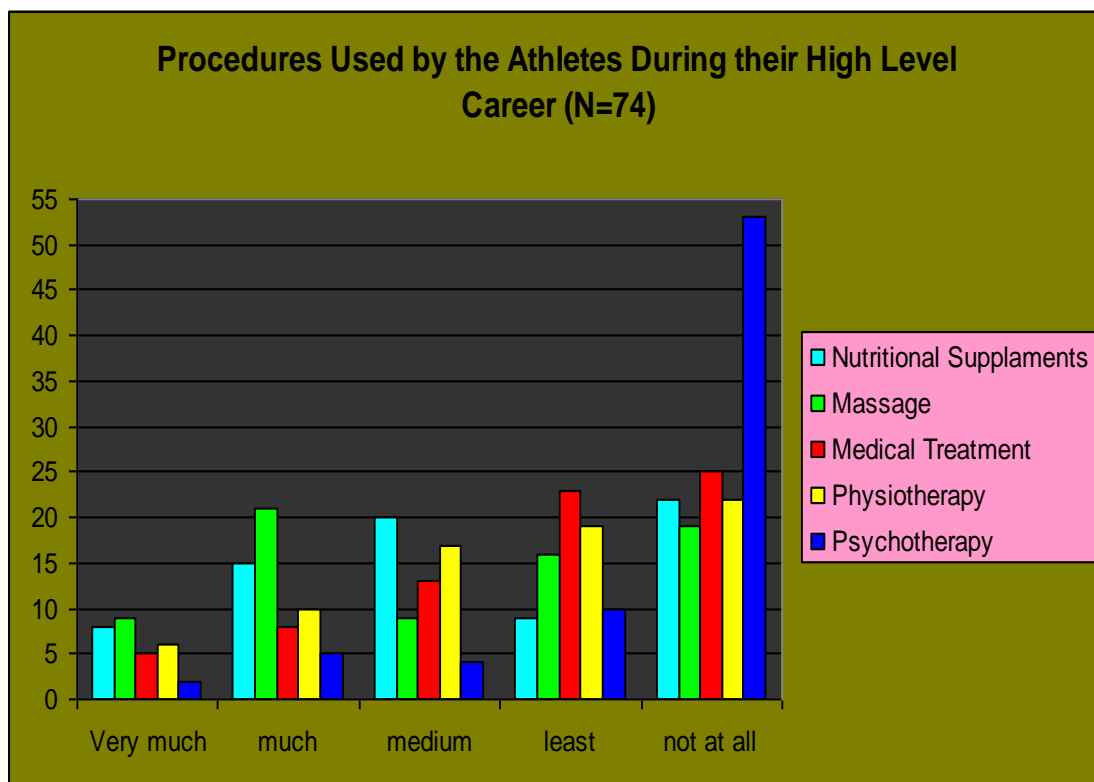


Figure 12 Therapy the athletes received during their career (in numbers) (N=74)

Having the ticket to the Olympics

Although the Cypriot athletes were aware of their country's contradictory attitudes towards elite sport and of their disadvantageous position in the international sport, it was their dream to take part in the Olympic Games at least once in their life, even if

they could not achieve a medal. Many of them realized that they had little chance for becoming famous worldwide, but they still strongly wanted to achieve their best performance in the Games. By so doing they hoped to serve their country and to get a procure glory. They had conflicting desire for glory; they intended to honor their small country knowing at the same time that their fame might cross the border only in exceptional cases. Their philosophy differed significantly from the view of elite athletes from sporting nations; they appreciated highly to be recognized more nationally and less internationally. Like true amateur athletes, most of them were not interested to earn money by their Olympic participation; financial reward came to the forefront only recently, in the late 1990s and beginning of 2000s. At this point several athletes started to think that they could earn money from their sport activity.

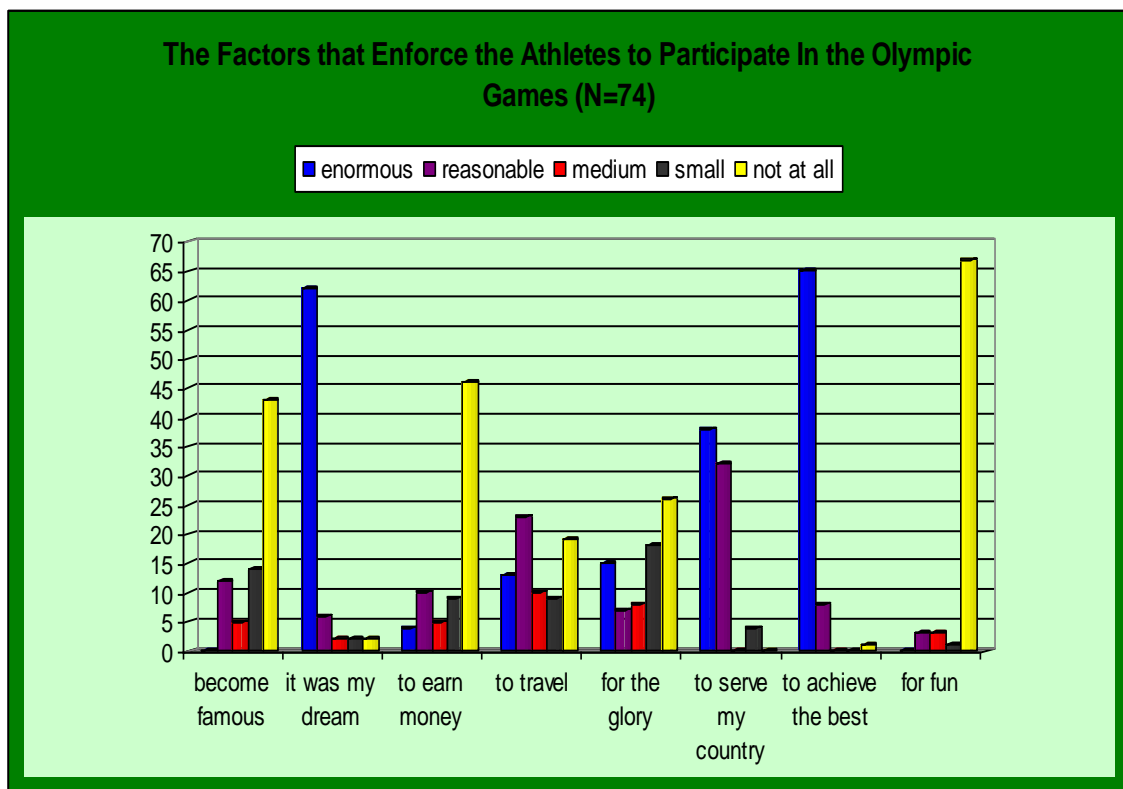


Figure 13 Motivations to participate in the Olympic Games (in numbers) (N=74)

Those Cypriot Olympians who accepted the limits of their situation were rather satisfied with their sporting career during their preparation to the Olympic Games and they felt ready for the big event (Figure 14 and 15).

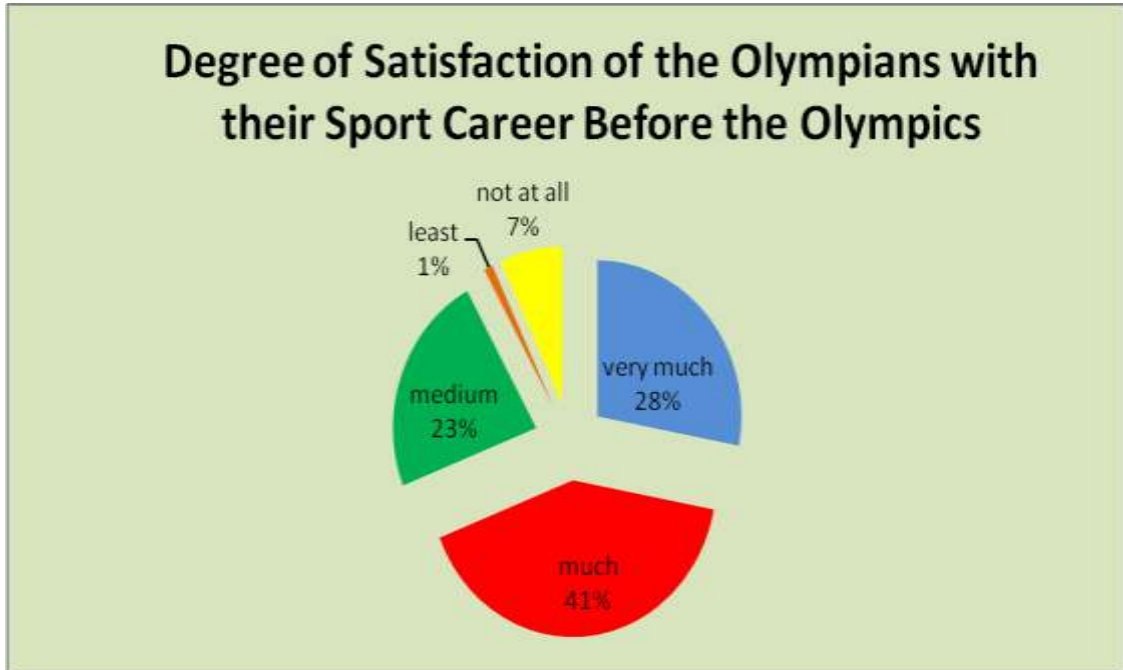


Figure 14 The satisfaction of the Olympians with their sporting career before their participation in the Olympic Games (%) (N=74)

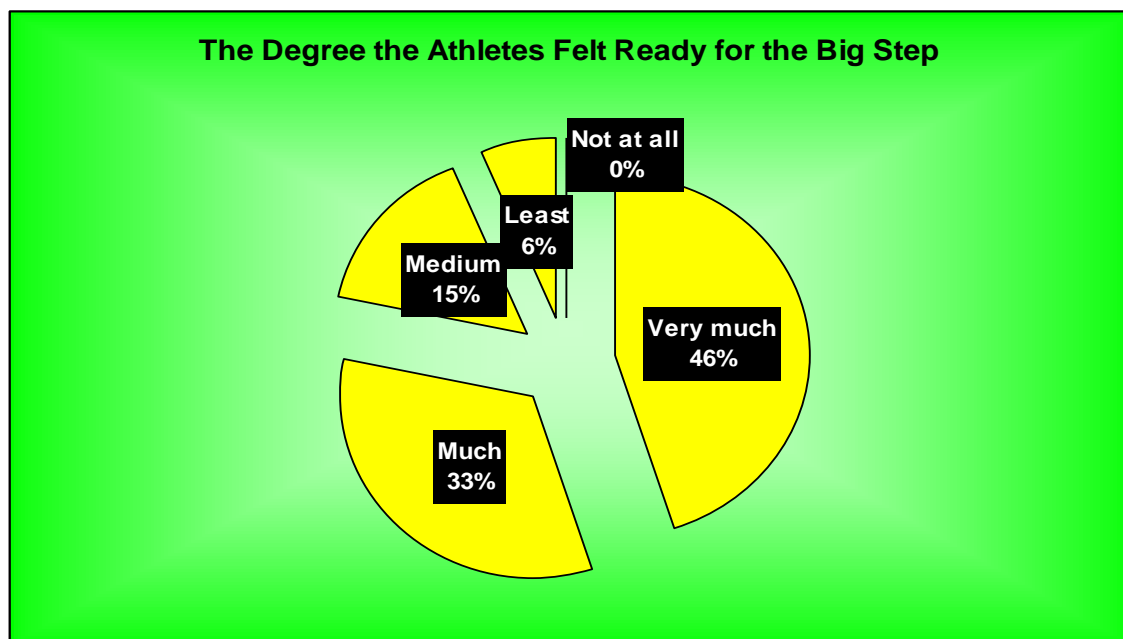


Figure 15 The degree of readiness of the athletes to participate in the Olympics (%) (N=74)

4.2.4 Social status and social mobility

The status of the Olympians

The author's findings show that the situation in Cyprus has not been following the international trends regarding professionalism as it pictures in the international area. The majority of the athletes have amateur status in sport and they do make their living out of sport. The results of this research show the athletes started their sporting career without financial support. They even bought their sport clothing and equipment themselves. Only two per cent of them said that they were sponsored during the first steps of their career. They participated in the Olympic Games in the 2000s in sailing and shooting. During their sporting career the Cypriot Olympians made efforts to combine high level sport activity (Figure 16).

The data presented in Figure 16 show that there were much more Cypriot elite athletes who could combine sport with education and even with working activity than athletes who could not. The latter were active in the 2000s. In the 1980s and in the 1990s even the elite athletes found it natural in Cyprus that they were involved in sport at a high level and they studied seriously at the same time. They also took it for granted that they had to earn their bread outside of sport, that is, they had to have a job.

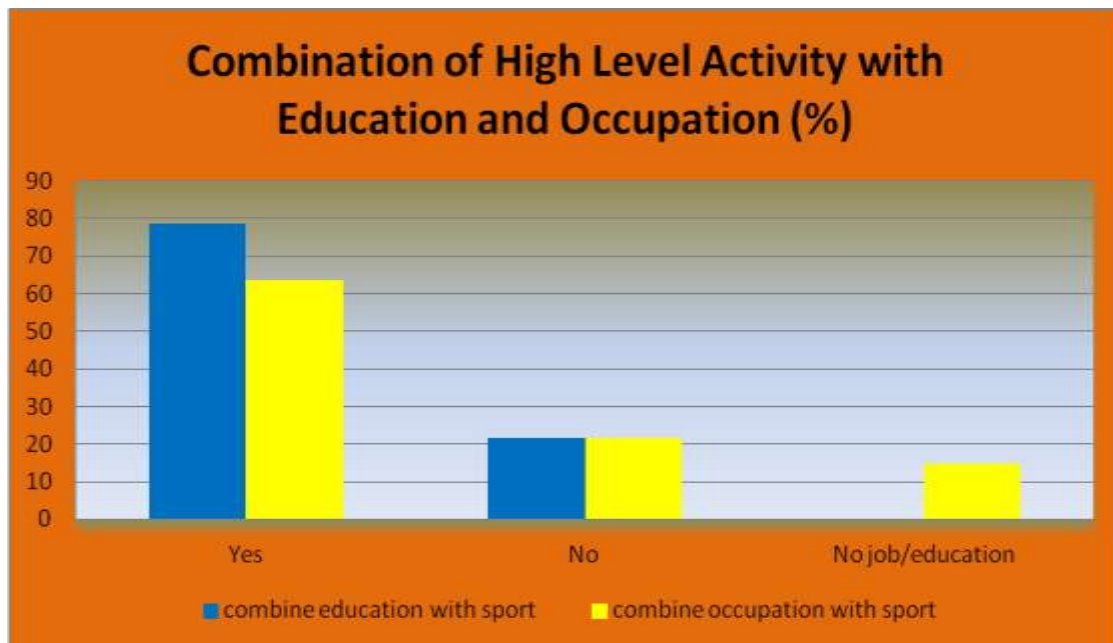


Figure 16 Combination of sport with education and occupation (%) (N=74)

Most athletes from these periods used to have jobs during their high level career to earn and their living. Generally they worked in a full time, only a few of them said that they were working as part timers. However there have been recently some changes in elite sport in Cyprus in this respect. In the last decade the Cypriot elite athletes worked only occasionally, most of them did not work at all during their top career (Figure 17).

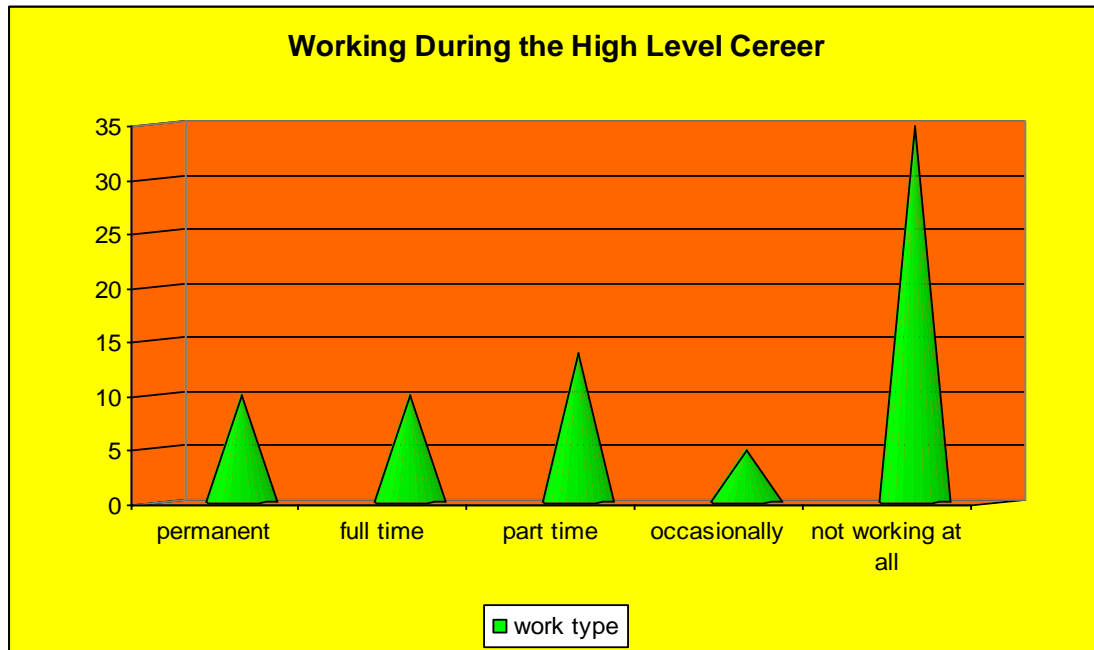


Figure 17 The kind of work the athletes had during their high level career (in numbers) (N=74)

Intergenerational social mobility

According to the results of the research the educational level of the Cypriot Olympians were also high (Figure 18).

The majority of the Olympians graduated at universities (63%) or at colleges (16%). 11% of the athletes has even more education than just one university degree (they got certification from special courses). Only one tenth of them have lyceum or secondary school degree. According to these findings the Cypriot Olympians level of education is radically higher than their parents' or the men's and women's of the same age in contemporary Cypriot society.

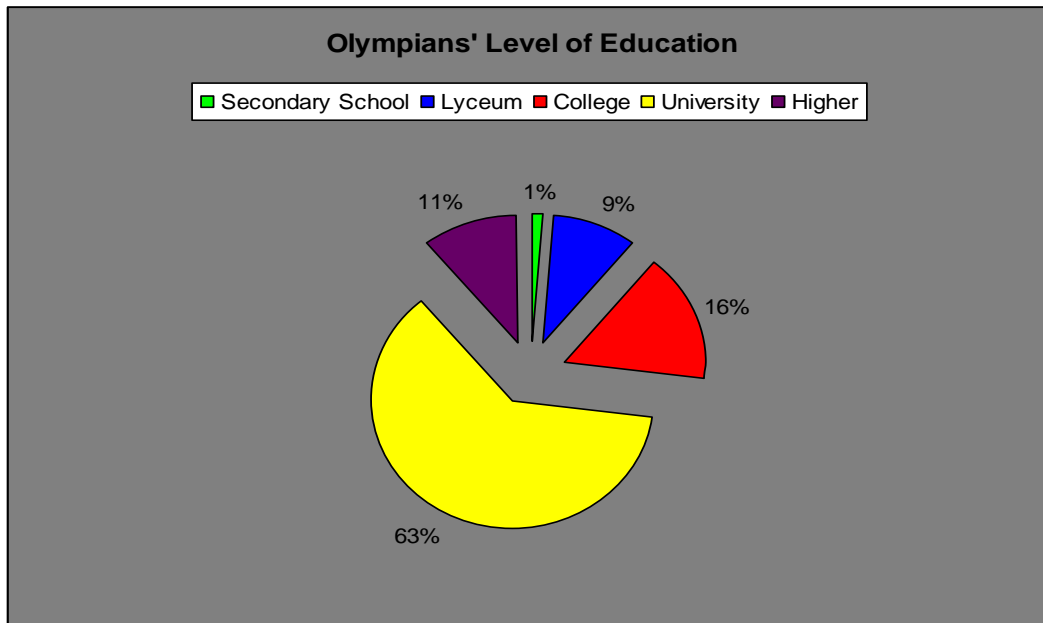


Figure 18 The Olympians' level of education (%) (N=74)

The occupation of the athletes (Table 5) does not reflect exactly how high their educational level was. It is probably to the fact that the athletes focused on their sporting career and accepted jobs which did not require high education but could be easily combined with their high level sporting activity. The data presented in Table 5 refer partly to the active athletes' occupation and partly to the retired athletes' present job.

Table 5 Occupation of the Olympians (in numbers) (N=74)

Occupation	Athletes
Higher-grade professionals, administrators and officials. High level managers and proprietors	2
Lower-grade professionals, administrators and officials. Small managers and proprietors	17
Routine non-manual employees in administration and commerce (largely clerical). Employees in service industries.	17
Routine non-manual employees, lower grade (sales and services).	23
Small proprietors and self-employed artisans.	4
Small proprietors and artisans without employees	3
Not working (university student)	8

The findings of this research show that the situation in Cyprus has not been following the international trends regarding professionalism as it pictures in the international arena. The majority of the athletes have amateur status in sport and they do not make their living out of sport. The athletes' sporting career had an impact on their marital status. In contrary to the expectation there are more single and less divorced people among them (Table 6).

Table 6 The Olympians's marital status at present (%) (N=74)

Single	Live with partner	Married	Divorced
27	8,1	59,4	5,5

In Table 6 it can be observed that 27% of the Olympians are single, 8,1% of those answered that they live with a partner, 59,4% are married and 5,5% the elite athletes who answered that they are divorced. It seems that the elite athletes need quiet and balanced family background therefore, on the one hand they got married later than the none athlete population of their age. But if they get married they stay with their family and do not divorce.

4.3 The athletes' relationship with their coaches and sport clubs

Coaches play an important role in the life and in the development of the athletes' achievement at all levels. However, the coach is definitely a key person in the case of elite athletes. The nature of the human relationship which develops between top athletes and their masters has a significant impact on the athletes' sporting career.

During their sporting career the athletes generally work together with several coaches. Very few athletes are lucky enough to have just one coach over their whole professional way of life. Although the volume of Cypriot elite sport is narrow this tendency can be observed there as well. In the research the Olympians were requested to evaluate the relationship with their coach with whom they reached their best performances in sport, and with whom they worked together the longest period. Their evaluation referred to two periods, during their sporting career and after their retirement (Figure 19).

Due to the small size of the sample the data of Figure 19 do not show the athletes' opinion by gender and by Olympic years. However the deeper analysis of the findings revealed that the most positive evaluations were given by the athletes of the 1980s and the less positive ones were declared by the Olympians who have been active after the mid 1990s. The male and female athletes' assessments were rather similar.

The most surprising information shown by Figure 19 is that 13.5% of the respondents had no coach at all. Mainly athletes of the 1980s trained themselves or each other. At that time coaching was seldom a paid job in Cyprus. The relationship between the athletes and their masters was based on friendship, the atmosphere was rather intimate. Some athletes in 1980s said:

"I had a friendly relationship with my coach telling him all of my subjects regarding training."(Male athlete in 1980s)

"My coach was always at my side and sometimes I felt more confident by his side than with my parents." (Female athlete in 1980s)

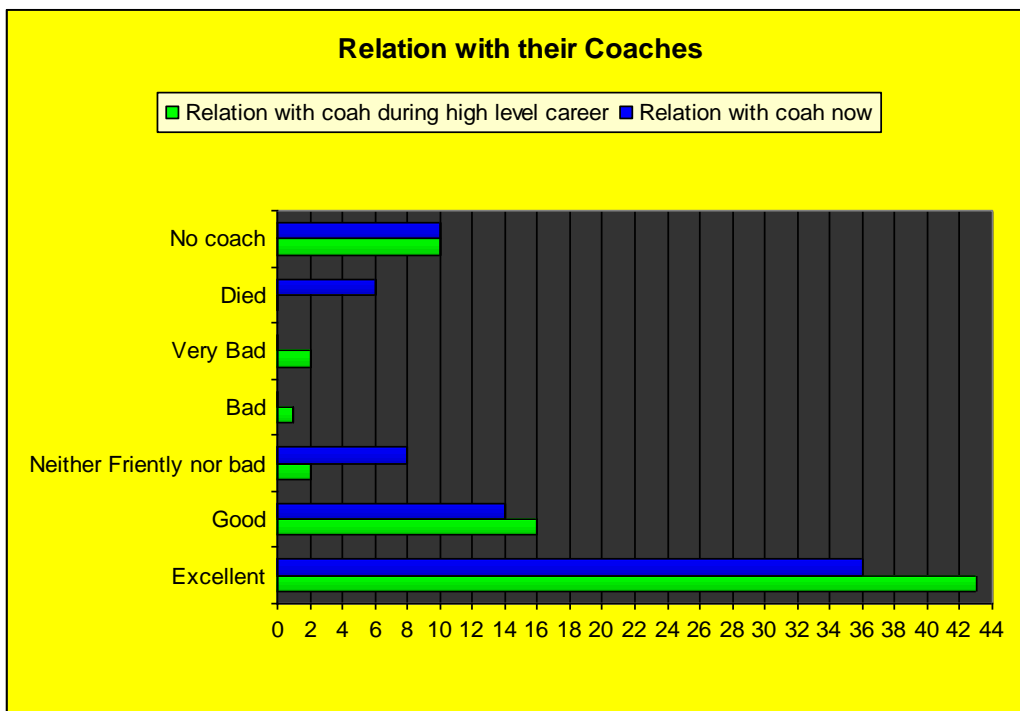


Figure 19 The athletes' relations with their coaches during their high level careers and after their retirement (in numbers) (N=74)

Several coaches said:

“I thought of my athlete like of my own child.” (Male coach in 1980s)

“I was trying to give to my athlete all the knowledge that I knew not only in sport but also for life guiding her from my experience in my life.” (Male coach at the beginning of the 1990s)

In spite of the family atmosphere the athletes highly respected their voluntary coaches due to the dominant traditional value system according to which respect for authority and the elderly was a fundamental norm in multigenerational Greek families. Since the mid 1990s globalization has also affected the interpersonal relationships in Cyprus. The younger generations did not follow any more the older generation's behavioural patterns. The formally close ties in families and in neighbourhoods loosened that time. Coaching became a paid job and some athletes also received some money for their sporting activity. The particular features of Cypriot elite sport, the globalization of international sport and Cypriot society, especially the modification in the traditional value system prevailing until the turn of the millennium contributed to the changes in the relationships between coaches and athletes in the country.

Some of the athletes said:

“I had several fights with my coach sometimes concerning my training and my development.” (Female athlete in 2000s)

“I respected my coach when I was an elite athlete and now that I have retired from top sporting activity but sometimes I could not understand the pressure he used to put on me in trainings; I believe he wanted me to reach the best of me.” (Male athlete at the end of 1990s)

Some of the coaches said:

“I was strict regarding the trainings with my athletes but outside of the training hall I had good relations with them.” (Coach in 2000s)

“I wanted the best for my athlete and sometimes we had hard conflicts in the subject of responsibility for the training schedule.” (Coach in 1990s)

The Cypriot elite athletes often moved abroad with the aim of studying (52.1%) or because of other reasons (12.7%); and in these cases the athlete-coach relationships were unavoidably interrupted. Many young athletes continued their studies abroad

because university and college education were limited in Cyprus, and paradoxically the fact that they were elite athletes meant more advantage abroad than in Cypriot universities. The universities in Cyprus have not got a proper system to help the athletes' trainings, e.g. the lessons at the university could be from morning until late afternoon, and so athletes lose the possibility for good and high level trainings. Moreover, alternative to select the major and minor of their studies did not exist in Cyprus so the solution for them was to move to another country and in many cases the universities abroad gave those a lot of benefits because of their high level sporting activity. The other main reason of the Cypriot Olympians' emigration was the backwardness of national top sport, they were not happy with their development and they hoped to have better conditions, including coaches with good reputation. Several athletes found better facilities and coaches abroad indeed that helped them to improve the achievement of their sporting activity.

Because of various reasons out of the seventy four athletes forty eight changed their coach during their sporting career (Figure 20). Some athletes, who did not have the opportunity to move abroad, changed their coach within the country. In several cases it was not the athletes' initiative to work with a new coach, the sport federations employed a new coach or the coach left the sport club for another job. Several athletes' moved together with their coach to another sport club. Otherwise the majority of the Olympians remained faithful to their club; about 75% of them spent their professional life in the same sport organisation. This "loyalty" is not at all typical and it can be observed in contemporary sport society, only rarely.

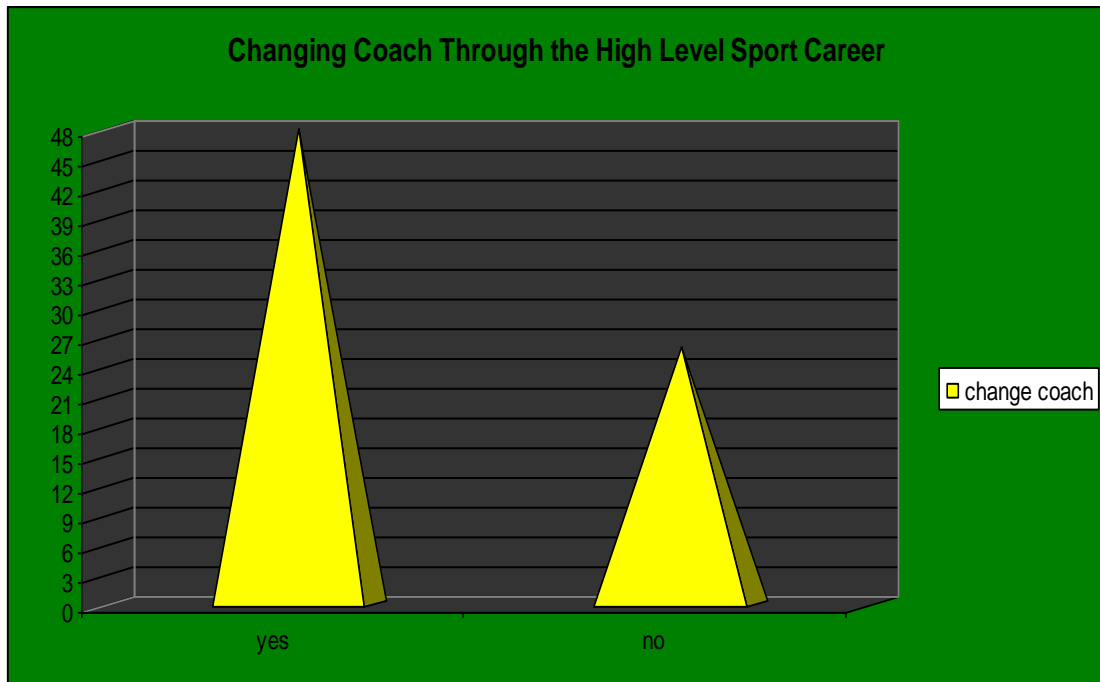


Figure 20 Changing coaches by the athletes (in numbers) (N=74)

The main reasons for changing sport club were rather objective and partly similar to the causes which led them to look for a new coach: they wanted to find better training possibilities, to participate in another national championship where the standard was higher, they moved abroad or to another dwelling place most often with the aim of studying. The few athletes who changed their sport club because of their subjective circumstances reported the following reasons:

“I was kicked out from my club when I became pregnant.” (Female athlete in the 1990s)

“I disagreed with club managers; there was a fight between them and me.”
(Male athlete in the early 1990s)

“The coach was not satisfied with my achievement.” (Female athlete in the 2000s)

These two latter quotations suggest that the coach-athlete relationship may determine not only the athletes' but also the coaches' and sport managers' professional careers. At first sight the dependency looks one-sided, since the coaches and club leaders make decisions on the selection of a national squad. In reality there is a mutual dependency; the results at various international and national competitions might have

serious financial and moral consequences on the athletes' sports club, their national federation and on their coaches' and sports managers' position in the above mentioned sport organizations.

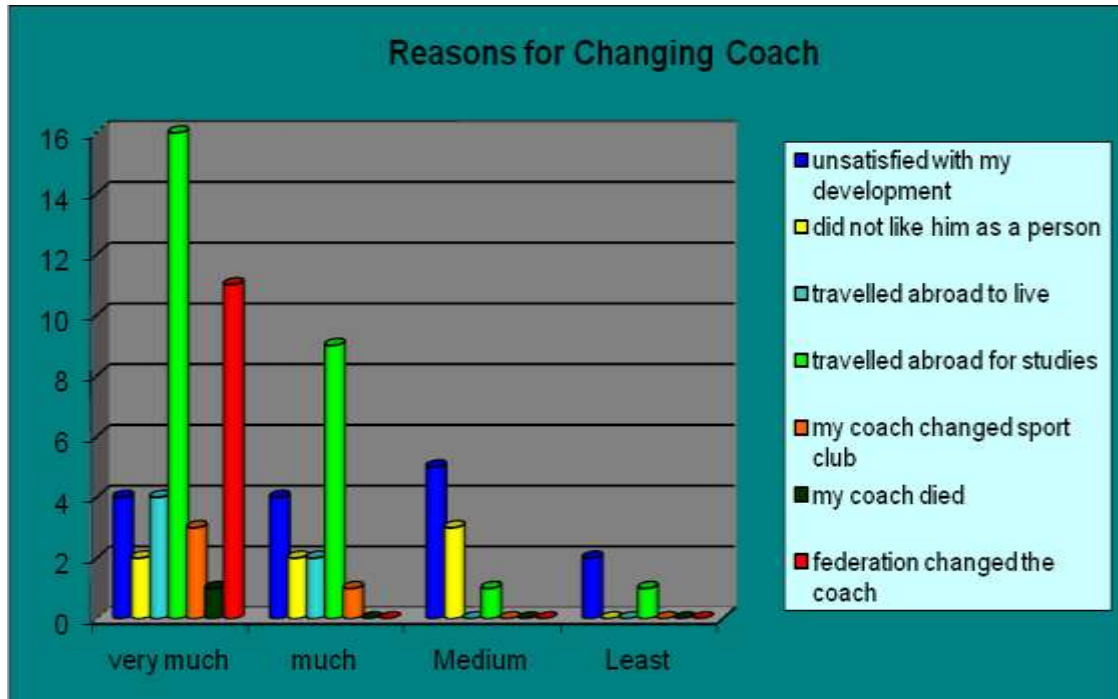


Figure 21 The reasons because of which the athletes changed their coach (in numbers) (N=74)

Taking into consideration the mutual nature of the dependency the author was interested in both sides' opinion about the most important qualities of each other. He considered as starting point the findings of a survey carried out 25 years ago (Foldesi, 1986), and during the in depth-interviews' information was gathered about similar human characteristics as Foldesi did in her classical research. The Cypriot Olympians found more or less the same characteristics important as the Hungarian competitors did long time ago, but the rank of them proved to be different. They classified the following human qualities as the most positive, and respectively the most negative ones:

Positive characteristics

Professionally competent

Creative

Clear judger

Responsible

Co-operative

Empathic

Intelligent

Humanist

Negative characteristics

Dogmatic

Conservative

Aggressive

Subjective

Unjust

Authoritative

The most spectacular difference is that professional knowledge is at the head of the ranking with all Cypriot athletes competing since the mid 1990s, and the performance centric attitudes were not regarded as a negative feature, regardless of gender and sport. At the same time the old time Hungarian athletes' listed good sense of humor as an important quality, the examined Cypriot athletes neglected it in all Olympic team. According to the interviewed coaches the ideal athletes are obedient, co-operative, hard working and reliable. Few of them appreciated creativity, independence, fair play and intelligence. Contemporary masters are of the opinion that today's athletes focus more often on money than their predecessors and they also are less fair and generally devalue the primary sport values. There is one issue on which the coaches and the athletes share the same view, although from the opposite perspective. They think that two-three decades ago the athletes and their masters had exactly the same purpose; namely to win or to perform well in a fair way. In these days many coaches want their athletes to win at any price, or at least to achieve at the highest level possible. The athletes also intend to win or to perform their best but not at the price of their health, they make plans for a longer period.

4.4 The impact of the Olympics

Satisfaction and recognition after the Olympic Games

It is important to point out that achieving a main goal is not always everything, it is also relevant what the individual learns through the journey to achieve his/her goal that can help him/her in the future course of his/her life. After the Olympics more than the two thirds of the Cypriot participants had the feeling that their dream had come true (Figure 22). They were intelligent enough to enjoy their participation in the Games and at the same time to evaluate their achievement critically. They were pleased to be very modest actors in the event of their dream, and they understood that even their very best sporting performance could not have been competitive, they had no chance to win over athletes having much better conditions in connections with sporting facilities, experts, public support and above all arriving to the Games from bigger countries with rich sporting traditions and national sport culture. The majority of the athletes were satisfied with their participation, but regarding their result, mostly the athletes in late 1990s and 2000s had bad feelings and they were rather unsatisfied.

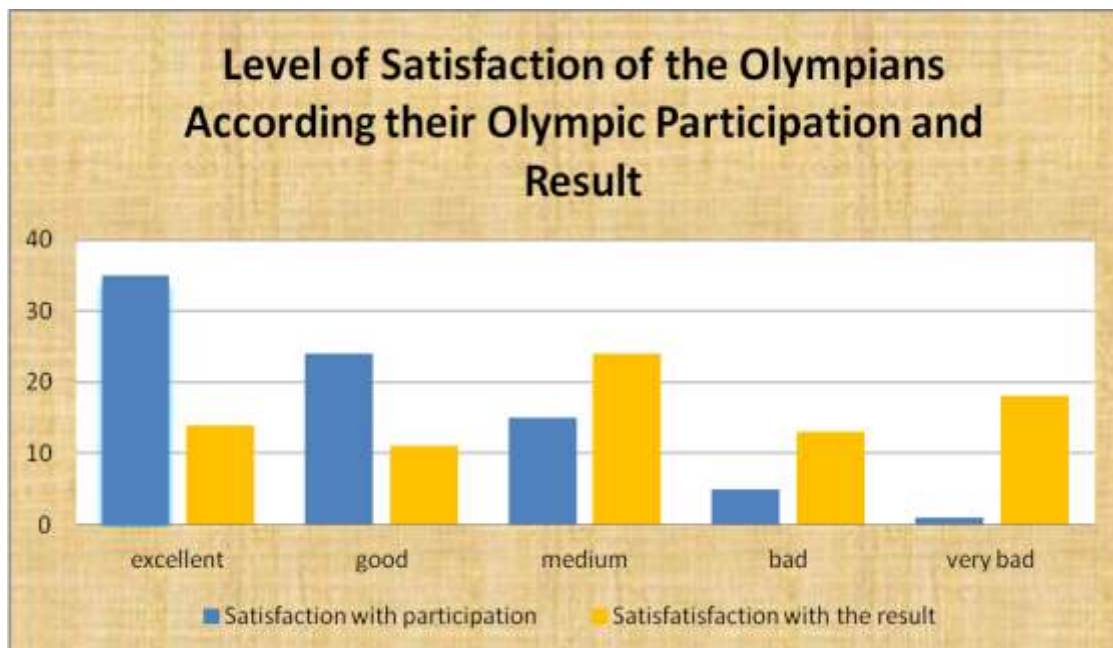


Figure 22 The Olympians' level of satisfaction with their participation and their results (in numbers) (N=74)

However most of them (98%) hoped that their results could be better in the future and 85% of them were willing to start trainings for the coming Olympic Games. Their positive attitudes originated in the fact that their efforts were recognized and their prestige increased after the Olympics (Figure 23). Not only their family members and friends but also the sports authorities, the local community and even the larger society appreciated their standing grounds among the “Goliaths”. Their opinion regarding the media support was less positive, many of them declared that they could count the less on their recognition. They paid attention just to a few of them.

Some of the athletes said:

“I have heard my name on the news and I read my name in the newspapers but that was all.” (Female athlete in the 2000s)

“Because my result was one of the best the media paid too much attention for my person and I was invited in several TV programs.” (Male athlete in the 2000s)

“The press does not know me, I have not heard my name anywhere I am really sad and disappointed in the way media treat sportsmen like us.” (Male athlete in the 1990s)

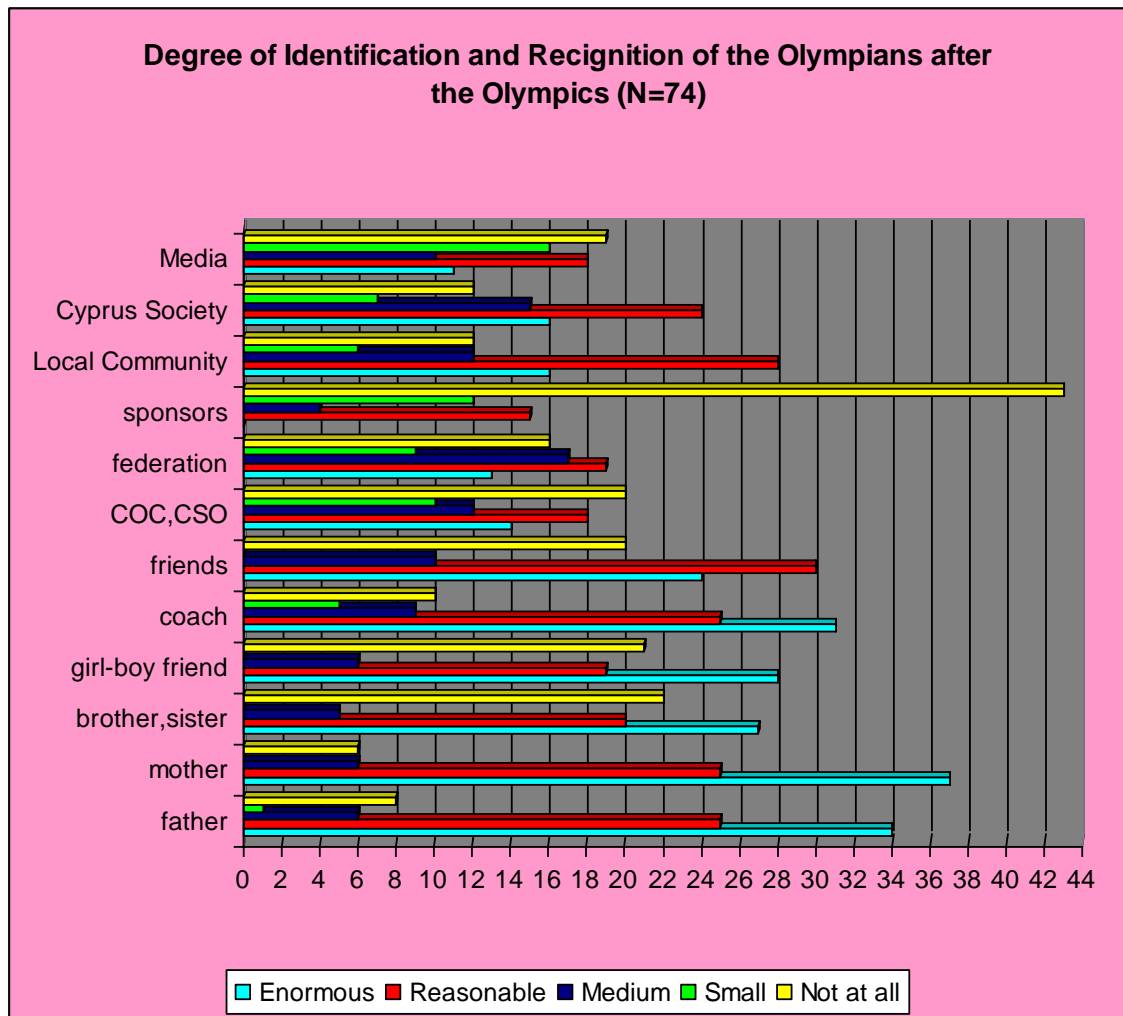


Figure 23 The Olympians' opinions of their recognition after the Olympics (in numbers) (N=74)

On the other hand, a newspaper reporter said:

"We cover various areas like the course of the Olympic torch from the time that lights up in the gardens of Olympia and the cities it travels through until its final destination, in addition, during the big event we refer every day to the results of the athletes in every event paying attention to new Olympic records, to famous names of each sport that left their mark on the field of sport and to our Cypriot athletes."

A television reporter said:

"We have many hours of live showing of the Olympics covering the majority of the Olympic sports every day, moreover we do concentrate on sports with the

big names but we also pay attention to the sport that Cypriot athletes are participating because the Cypriot society likes watching high level sport especially when Cypriot athletes are participating.”

The analysis of the newspaper supported the above reporter's words. The national sport newspaper always referred to the Olympic Games a month before its start and a couple of days after the event finished. It also writes about the course of the Olympic Torch from where it starts and the countries that crosses as well as the final point which is the Organizing country of the Olympic Games. It also publishes the departure of the Cypriot delegation and mentions the training of the national athletes in the foreign country.

The newspaper also publishes articles related to the athletes who answered the requirements related to the qualification to the Olympics and gives the names and the sport in which they compete in; they are even in front pages. During the period of the Olympic Games, it publishes every day's results of each sport and pays more attention to the sports in which Cypriot athletes are competing and also gives information about the new records, if there are any by top athletes.

The days after the end of the big celebration of sport it points out the final places of the countries, publishes several articles about the arrival of the Cypriot delegation and refers to some conferences in Cyprus related to the Olympic Games where the athletes participated in.

A couple of the key actors in sport said:

“We give money prize (prim) to the athletes who have succeeded a result according to the special criteria of CSO and they get into sport programs when they get the appropriate limits.”

Private life, health status

The Cypriot Olympians' positive opinions also were in close connection with the fact that according to their experiences their sporting career influenced their life in a positive way (Figure 24).

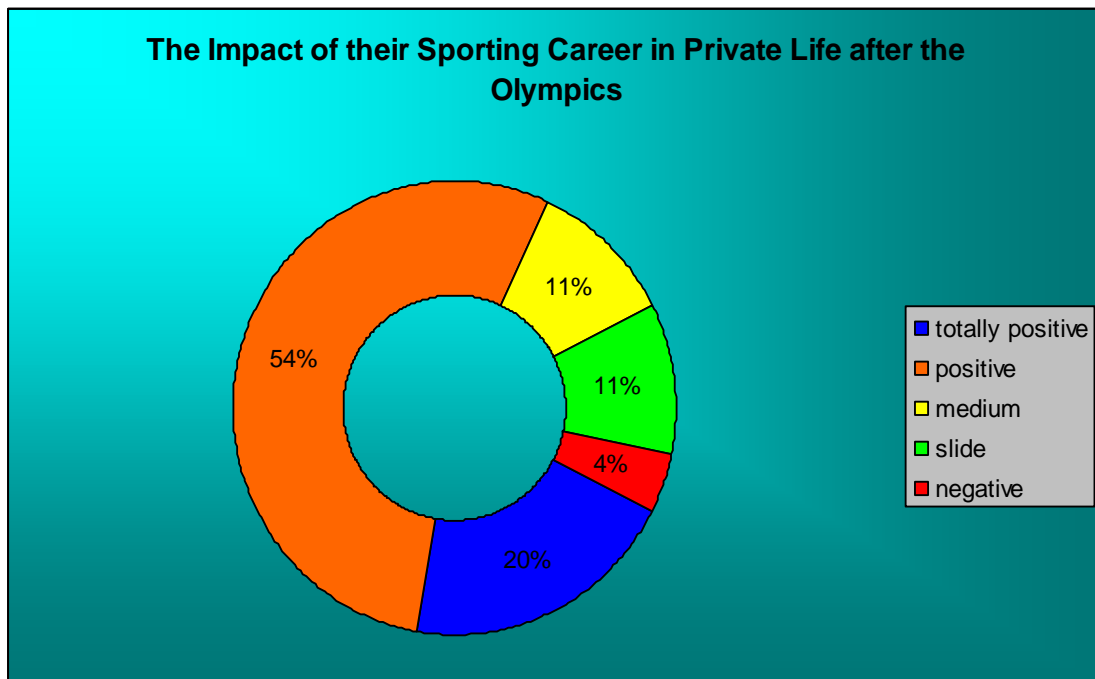


Figure 24 The impact of the Cypriot Olympians' sporting career on their private lives (%) (N=74)

Twenty per cent (20%) of the athletes said that their sporting career had a totally positive impact on their private life, and 76% of the athletes referred to a basically positive impact. Only four per cent of them said that their career had a negative impact on their personal life. Most of them had all reasons to be happy. First of all – in contrast to many internationally successful athletes – according to their self-evaluation, the Cypriot Olympians' health did not deteriorate after the Games (86%). This was the favorable consequence of their otherwise unfavorable circumstances that they were not paid too much attention by sport authorities at the beginning, consequently they were not generally exploited physically, and they were not pushed to win at the price of their health (Figure 25). Still there were few athletes whose health status became bad or very bad, they were members in the recent Olympic teams (14%). Most of the athletes who faced several problems were males and none of them were from the 1980s. All of the athletes with some kind of problems are from the late 1990s and 2000s.

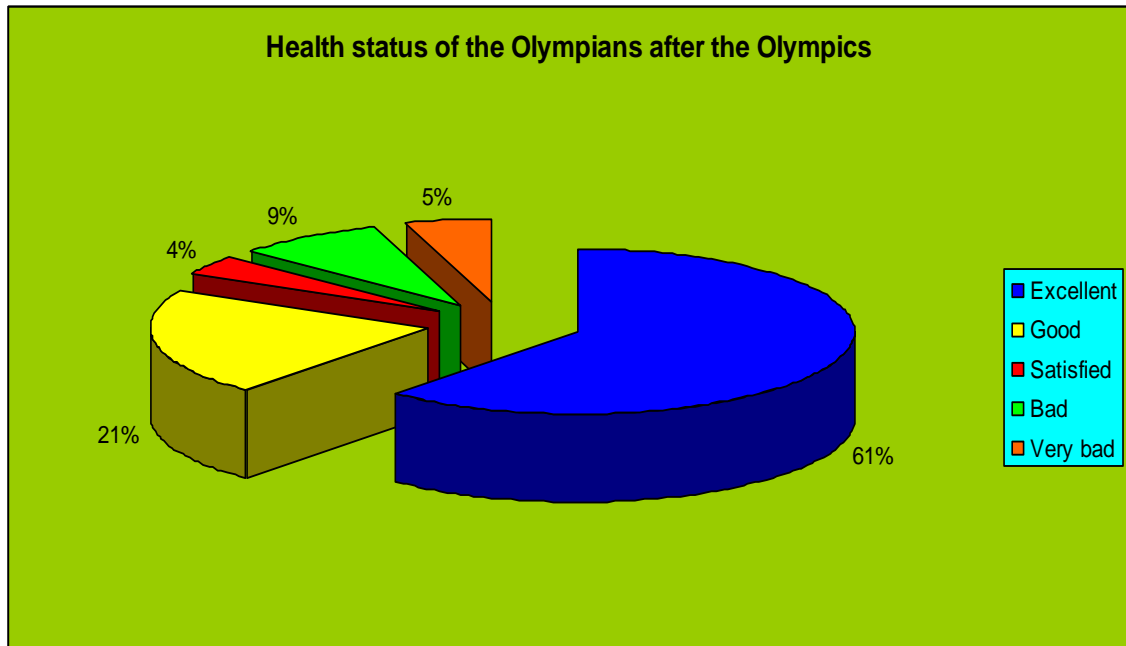


Figure 25 Health status of the Olympians after their participation in the Games (%) (N=74)

The athletes were of somewhat worse opinion about their financial status. Notwithstanding, 79% of them were more or less satisfied with it, and one fifth of the Olympians complained (Figure 26). There were athletes from all Olympic Games who complained about bad and very bad financial status, and there were both males and females had to face some financial problems.

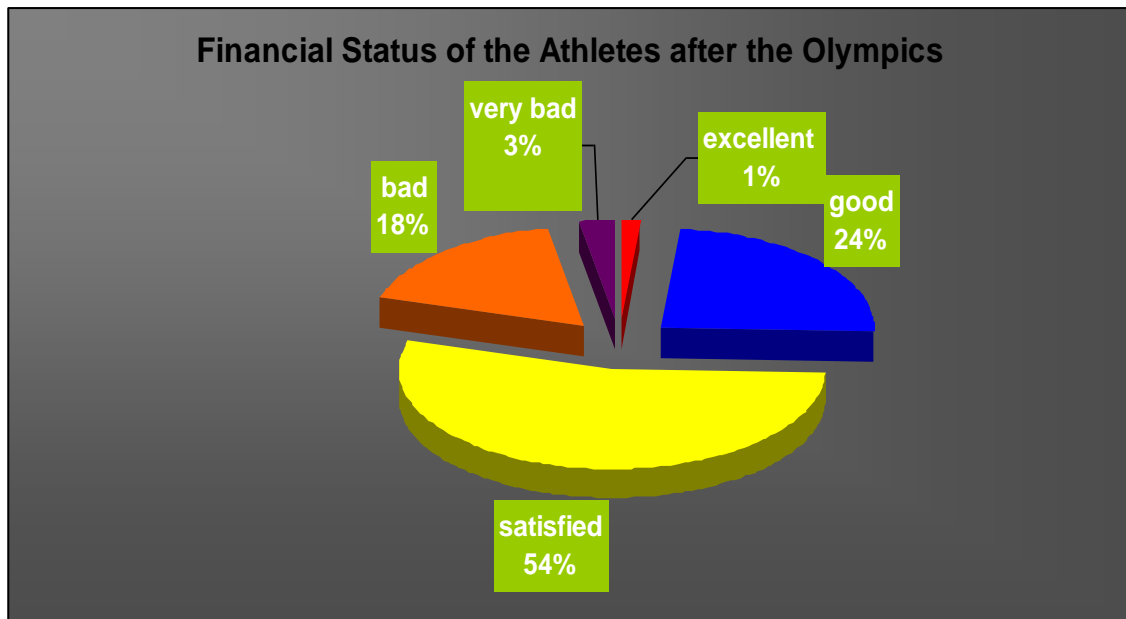


Figure 26 The financial status of the athletes after the Olympics (%) (N=74)

Regarding that in that time one fifth of the research subjects were active elite athletes, it could have been expected that they received money mostly for their competition and/or from their sponsors. Contrary to this assumption only a couple of Olympians are supported by sponsors, and also very few of them are paid for their achievements at competitions. The others have some money from their sports federations but this is not sufficient, and does not cover the cost of their living. Several active Olympians have a sport related job and the retired athletes worked full time in sport related jobs as well (Table 7).

In the year of the data collection the sources Olympians' income were the following:

Table 7 The Olympians' source of income in the year of data collection (%) (N=74)*

	Rank	%
CSO, COC	1.	64,8
Non sport related job	2.	45,9
Sport related job	3.	29,7
Sports federations	4.	26,9
Competitions	5.	1,2
Sponsors	6.	1,08

*The respondents could mention more than one source of income.

The most telling finding is the extremely low contribution of the business sector to the elite athletes' financial support. The Olympians expect a stronger backing from the public sector, from "the State" without realizing that the business sphere has a much larger share in the promotion of top sport in many other parts of the world. In Cyprus it does not happen, since it is a small country with few independent big firms and with a small market where top athletes could be effective advertising mediums.

4.5 Retirement from top sport

Elite sport has enormously changed during the last decades, from playful leisure time activity it became hard work. Top athletes who used to participate in games and sports just for fun became employees while training and competing. In addition, these days sporting activity is a special kind of work for high level athletes it is considered being their occupation. For the majority of them it is the source of their living income.

As it could be observed in the previous chapters the elite athletes' status is different in Cyprus. However the Cypriot top athletes' sporting career also arrives to an end. It could be rightly assumed that their disengagement from sport occurs in a different way, in different economic and health status and partly because of different reasons.

In this part, the results related to the athletes' disengagement from elite sport are to be presented in a chronological order. It means that the sporting career of the athletes is examined from the time they gave up their top sporting activity, through the reasons for which they stopped their high level career, the problems they had, if they had any, to the people who helped them to solve those problems.

Regarding the Olympians' age of disengagement one can see that more than the half of the athletes stopped their career in the decade between ages 26 and 35. Relatively many of them ended their career either later, at the age of 36 to 40 or earlier, between 21 and 25. A small minority ended their top sport career at a very young age, more specifically before their 21 years of age (Figure 27).

The late retirement from top sporting activity characterizes the male athletes and the early disengagement age characterizes the female athletes.

Comparing the disengagement ages of Cypriot and Hungarian former Olympians (from the results of Foldesi, 1999, 2000) it can be seen that less than half of the Hungarian athletes stopped top sporting activity in the ages between 30 and 35, a quarter of them between the ages of 36 and 40 and a bit more than the 1/5 retired from elite sport over the age of 40. On average the Cypriot former Olympians ended their top sport career at a younger age than the Hungarians, and none of them were active over the age of 40, a phenomenon that can be observed with the Hungarian retired athletes. (Foldesi, 1999) The explanation of this difference is that the Hungarian athletes were paid generously for their sporting activity. Their interest was to be active as long as they could. It was just the other way around with the Cypriot Olympians. They could not afford to be active too long since they had to find better jobs to earn their bread.

On the other hand the Cypriot Olympians benefited from their earlier retirement since the majority of them had no health problems. Based on their self-evaluation the majority did not have any problems. Only a minority of them appear to face problems after their disengagement (Figure 28).

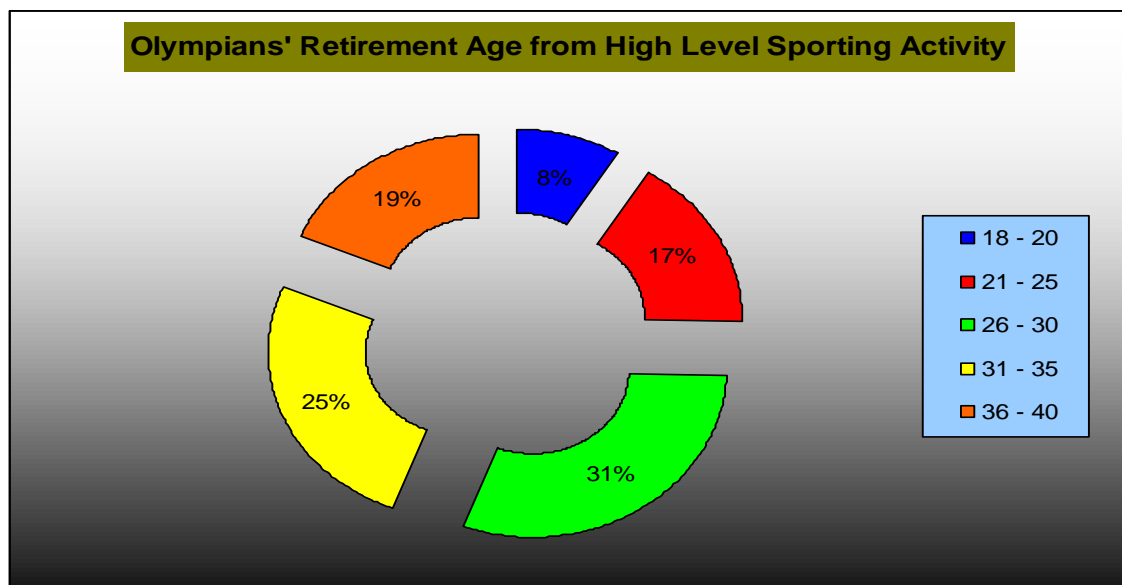


Figure 27 Age of the athletes' retirement from top sporting activity (%) (N=59)

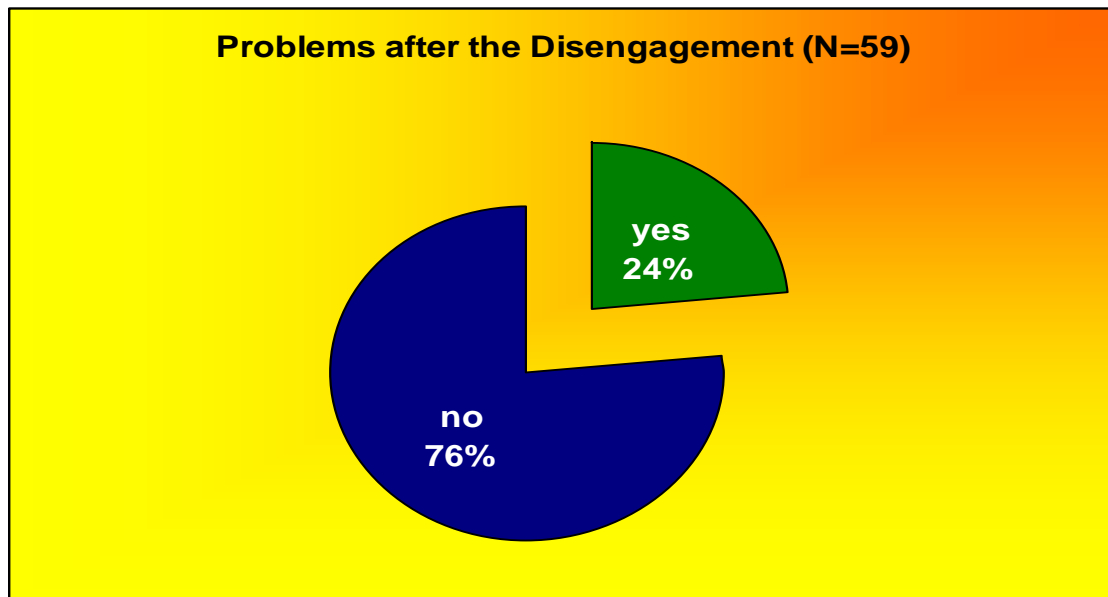


Figure 28 The Olympians' problems after their disengagement (%) (N=59)

Comparing again the Cypriot and Hungarian retired top athletes, the Cypriot Olympians are in a much better position. According to Foldesi (2000) only 28% of the Hungarian former Olympian said that they were completely healthy, less than half of those were partly healthy and 23% said that they are not healthy at all. It is clear that Cypriot athletes were healthier after their retirement from high level sport than the Hungarians. On the other hand the Cypriot athletes complained about the national health system which neglects top athletes and does not ensure proper treatment either in prevention or in rehabilitation in case of bad injuries.

A couple of athletes said:

"After I stopped my sport career I had to figure how to overcome my health Problems." (Athlete in 1990s)

"Nobody from the sport authorities helped me to solve the problems that I had after I stopped my career." (Athlete in 2000s)

A sport key actor said:

Cyprus does not have a professional health system to overcome the important Injuries and the health problems that come to the surface regarding the period after the athletes' disengagement. Of course, there were times that the athletes asked for the help of the sport authorities and we did our best to solve the problem."

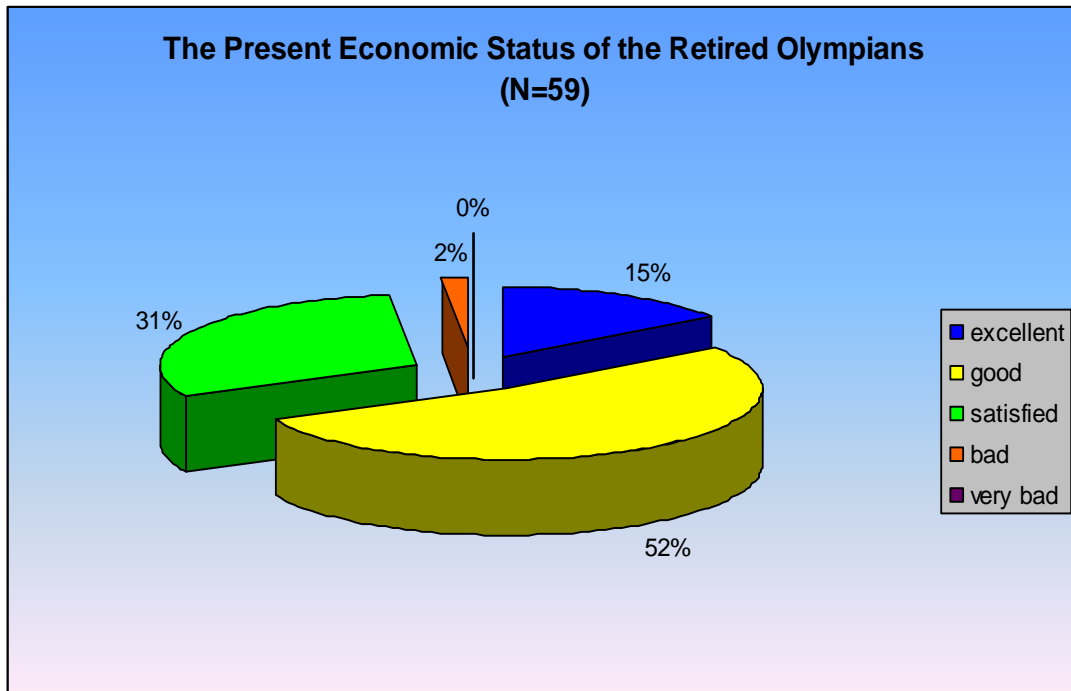


Figure 29 The financial status of the retired Olympians (%) (N=59)

In spite of receiving modest financial support, the Cypriot former Olympians did not complain about their financial situation which seems to be better than the average. Only few of them reported economic difficulties and none of them said that his/her economics are very bad.

The disadvantageous situation in their active period turned to their advantage after their withdrawal from elite sport. Since they had to work parallel with their participation in top sport most of them had a job which guaranteed the cost of their living.

Observing the reasons of the Cypriot Olympians retirement from sport, it is interesting to mention that the most important reason for retirement is based on the psychological tiredness which might be a result of the enormous efforts they made in order to do sports at top level. This is the same reason that led most Hungarian Olympians to disengagement. Physical tiredness was also an important reason for many Cypriot Olympians to give up their career but psychological tiredness occurred more often.

Another expected reason for withdrawal from top sport activity could be the athletes' age. Although the Cypriot Olympians referred to this reason, in their case it

meant an earlier life cycle than with the Hungarian elite athletes. Many of them were not totally committed to elite sport; it was an expectation only in their sport culture, as it could be observed in the previous chapter. Sport injuries of different body parts also contributed to finishing high level activity by both the Cypriots and the Hungarians, but it was a more serious and more frequent reason with the latter.

A special reason for the disengagement from sport with the Cypriot Olympians was that they faced great problem to find time for training. This did not happen with the Hungarians top athletes as they were paid to have sufficient time for preparing themselves for competitions. They were not ensured to have enough time for education, but this was similar with some Cypriot elite athletes as well.

Several Hungarian Olympians retired because they had bad relations with the media, their coaches, even with their teammates and their fans. Not a single Cypriot Olympian was in such bad relationship with people which would have led them to withdrawal. On the other hand, a few Cypriot athletes were fired from elite sport, but it was never the cause of the athletes' retirement in Hungarian sport.

Another important reason for disengagement from sport was the inadequacy of money for both Cypriots and Hungarians. That is why some former elite athletes were forced to stop and do something else for a living, to improve their financial income, even their quality of life

In Cyprus many athletes were so unsatisfied with the training facilities (almost a quarter of them) that this reason led them to the end their careers. The reasons that contributed to retirement from sport (problems with their coaches, some the high cost, family problems, getting married or engaged) were insignificant (Figure 30).

The withdrawal of the Cypriot Olympians was smoother than it is generally in the world of elite sport. The majority of them did not have any problems after their disengagement, only nearly a quarter of them confronted problems. The most important problems that appeared in their way were connected with socializing into the new way of life out of high level sporting activity and with finding a good job. Some other problems were of psychological and physiological nature or were connected to education (Figure 31).

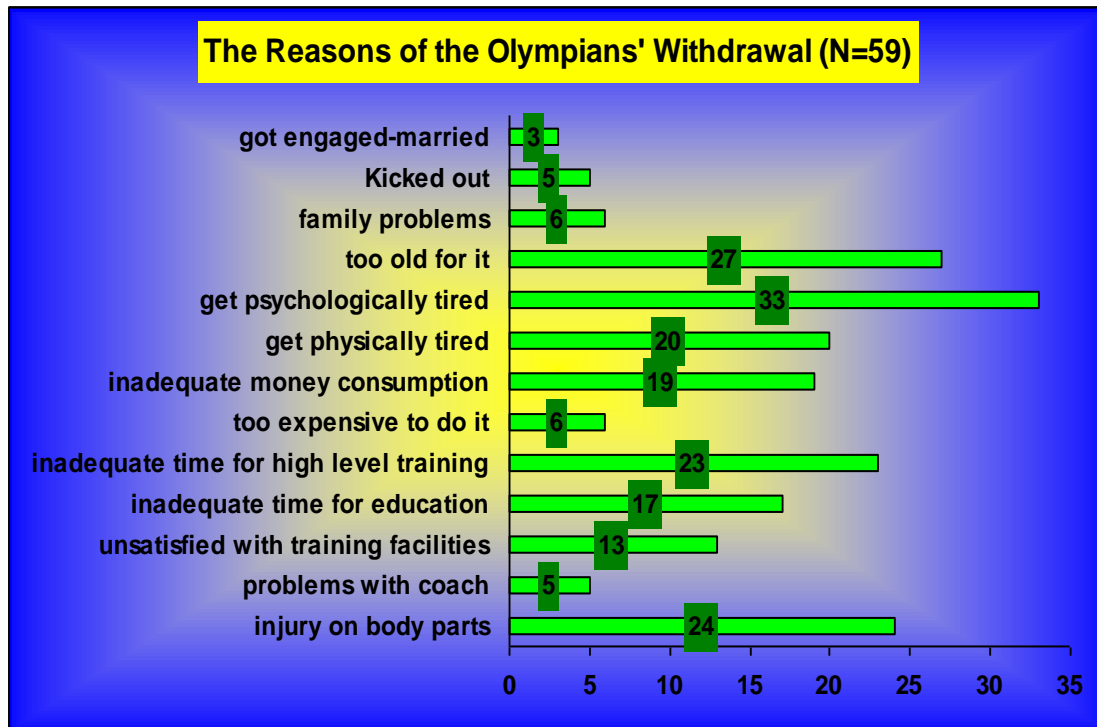


Figure 30 The reasons that contributed to the athletes' retirement from sport (in numbers) (N=59)

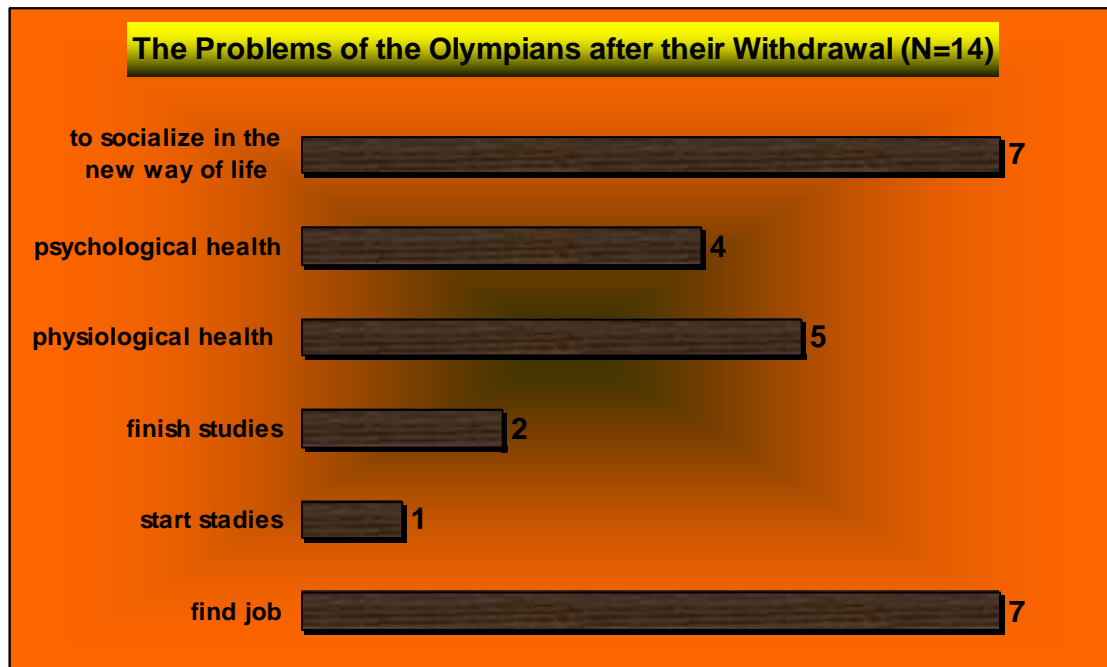


Figure 31 The problems the athletes faced after their withdrawal (in numbers) (N=14)

As it was expected the most important source of help to overcome the above mentioned problems was the family which, as always, was ready to help and to give assistance under any circumstances. Out of the large family the athletes underlined how much they could rely on their wives/husbands', girlfriends/ boyfriends' support. Some athletes managed to solve their problems by themselves, some others with the help of their former coaches. There were very few athletes whose problems which have been created at the disengagement had not been solved; the athletes could not count at all on either the Cypriot Olympic Committee or the Cyprus Sport Organization when they were in trouble. Some sports federations were around but the majority of them were not interested to give a helping hand either (Figure 32).

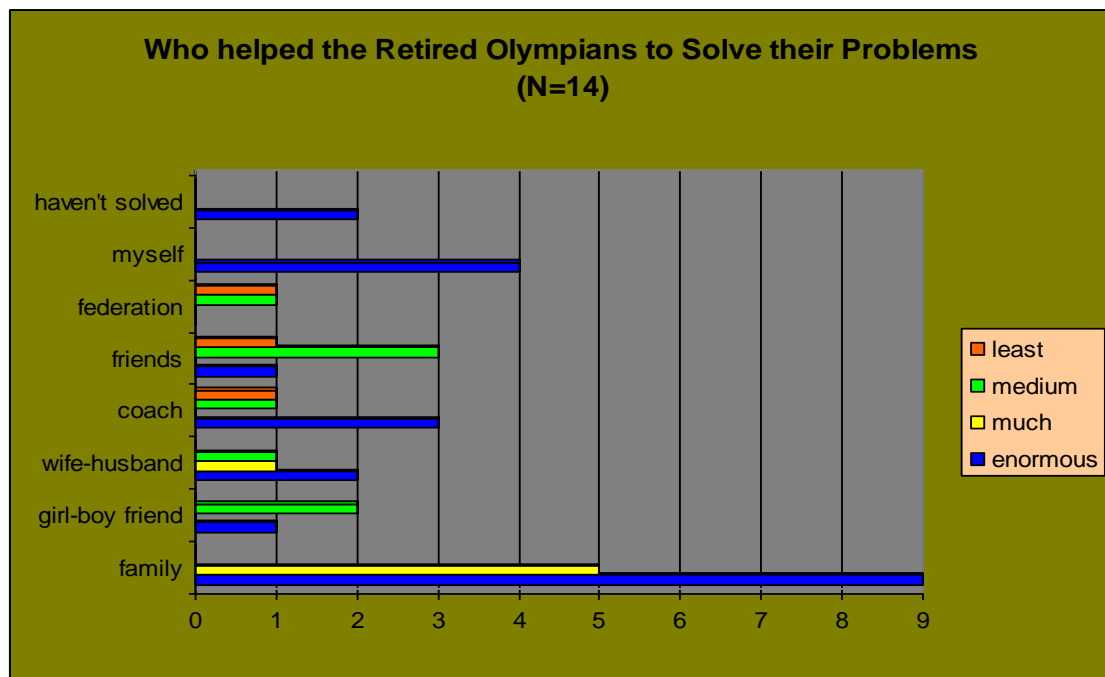


Figure 32 People who helped the Olympians to solve their problems after their disengagement from top sport (in numbers) (N=14)

Now the authorities in Cyprus are trying to figure out solutions to this problem. The decision makers are trying to get a specific health sport system and to make the entering of the top athletes from the “sports” world to the “civil” one mildly without causing them much problems after the disengagement from their high level sporting

career, in other words to land them with different circumstances to their new way of life.

With full knowledge of the negative or ambivalent attitudes towards the retired athletes it is quite understandable that at the Olympians' suggestions to be given to the managers of the referred sport organizations were connected to the necessity to increase their responsibility. Among others, the author grouped some of the recommendations of the athletes. They suggested changing the following in the sports federations and in the leading sport organizations:

Funding

“Invest in sport.”

“Better control in financial and political issues concerning sport.”

“Find sponsors for financial support and improvement.”

Structure

“Change the administration and the way of thinking in the federation.”

“Put people in high places who have answers and plans, who know about sport and contribute to the development of sport. Change people without a knowledge about the sport.”

“The members should know their role and have to be trustful to know how to promote the sport and not destroy it.”

“Better structure for ensuring future for the young athletes.”

“Engage more qualified coaches in top sport.”

Culture and mentality

“Change the mentality of the members to be aware of the sport, to support and help.”

“Change the philosophy and the mentality in all aspects within the sport.”

“The mentality has to be: athletes above all.”

“Stop the personal and financial interests of the members of the federations and stop the phenomenon of pushing people out of sport.”

“All decisions have to be made only for the good of sport and parallel for the good of the athletes because without them no federation exists.”

“Avoid personal ambitions by the members of the federations because many times they are against the athletes.”

Some athletes hope that the establishment of a Ministry of Sports would highly contribute to the promotion of elite sport in Cyprus.

5. DISCUSSION

The interpretation of the results presented in the previous chapters caused some difficulties. Several athletes who could have explained the reasons of certain phenomena did not co-operate. However, the reluctant athletes' attitudes can be understood, it reflected several sport authorities' attitudes towards them, respectively it is their answer to the ambivalent Cypriot sport policy.

The rest of the athletes criticized first of all the unpredictable character of the national sport policy concerning elite sports, especially individual sports. The Olympians never knew how many of them would be supported to participate in competitions where they could be qualified. Sometimes they had no idea how big the Cypriot Olympic team might be, partly regardless of the number of qualified national athletes. Most of the elite athletes told the author that they did not have time to help. Others said that they were not interested, some others disappeared and neither their federations nor the Cyprus Olympic Committee and the Cyprus Sport Organization could not find their tracks.

In each Olympic Games since 1980 the number of the athletes in the Cypriot delegation is of two figures, except in Seoul in 1988 where Cyprus had the smallest team with only nine athletes. The Cyprus delegation was the biggest in Sidney in the year of 2000 with twenty two athletes. This "up and down" in relation to the participation's rate of the athletes is due to the fact that there was no basic plan by the sport authorities to be followed and to the limits of the participation at the Olympics which changes from year to year. Besides, unfortunately, many athletes were not able to reach the standards.

The age of the athletes who took part at the Olympic Games with the Cyprus team fluctuated between 21 until 50; there are though athletes in younger age under 18, like in rhythmic gymnastics. It is quite interesting to overview these differences in ages. Comparing the Cypriot Olympian's age stratification with the age of the members of other Olympic teams (Eisen and Turner, 1992; Schaefer, 1992; Foldesi, 1999) the average age of the Cypriot teams is higher. There are fewer young than older athletes among the members. This phenomenon is probably in connection with the amateur nature of their status; they did not specialize into their sport very young, their parents

did not push them either. Most Cypriot athletes practised their sport without the intention to become a professional or to earn their bread by their sporting activity.

The grandparents, fathers, mothers, uncles, directed the family and determined the children's life course, including their leisure activities to a great extent. The family ties were very strong even two-three decades ago, they have disintegrated only recently, but even today they are closer than in many modernized societies. The low contribution of the family members to the future Olympians' start in sport is due to the lack of sporting traditions and the sporting customs in their circles.

The grandparents and even the parents of the members in the Cypriot Olympic team in the 1980s had little personal experiences in sport, if any. The majority of the Olympians' parents were not competitive athletes in one-two decades later either, and very few of them were involved in recreational sport, as well. The few parents who competed in their youth oriented their children to sport, but most of them were men, one could hardly find women among them.

The otherwise not too sport friendly schools played similar role in the future champions early sport socialization as the family did. According to some authors in the special sport schools athletes have better opportunities for good and effective trainings and they have an advantage to become top level athletes. (Suomalainen et al., 1987). Many Cypriot children who were gifted in sport were left alone. They chose their sport themselves, and most of them were specialized in the sport in which they became Olympians in a later age than their foreign rivals. In the early period the sport sphere was not interested in sport talents either, coaches have become important socializing agents since the late 1990s, just in the period when sport related agencies' role started diminishing in the children's socialization into sport worldwide, as a consequence of early specialization.

The contradictory start had an impact on the athletes' sporting careers. Several of them became member in their national teams later than it could have been generally expected. There is a small group of athletes who became members in the national teams in the ages of 26 to 30, which is quite late. Although it was unusual, they were very good and had excellent results.

The inspiration that drove the athletes to choose their sport and to be winners was born in them; it was their interest and their ambition to become champions. This

amateur spirit, the love of their sport, the goal to be good among the best proved to be a more effective motivation than to get money.

At the start the Olympians lacked family support, but they were warmly backed by their family on their way to the top. Fathers, mothers, husbands, wives, girlfriends, boyfriends gave them all the assistance they could. The families stuck together, even those members who originally were not really interested in sport helped their relatives demonstrating that in a Cypriot family everybody belongs together regardless of the area of his/her activity.

The social background of the elite athletes was much better than the average. Their parents' level of education and their occupation was very favourable. It means that the athletes' chances for becoming top athletes were higher in their childhood than the children's with families with low education and low socioeconomic status. Like in the international arena top athletes coming from families with favourable socioeconomic status had higher chances to step up the social ladder by their achievements in sport (Sohi and Yusuff, 1987). Not only because they could afford financing their sporting activity when it was needed, but because the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) in their family comprised the recognition of the necessity of physical activity, unlike in families with low cultural capital.

Notwithstanding the level of education of the athletes is much higher than their parents', which partly characterizes the progress in the Cypriot society in general and partly shows that the elite athletes in Cyprus had the opportunity for studying, more exactly they created themselves the opportunity for studying. Most of them prepared themselves to withdrawal from elite sport. Respectively many of them had a job even during their sporting career.

The social status of the Cypriot Olympians was different in the period during 1980s and in the 2000s. It has always been different from the big sporting nations. In the 1980s it was characterized by huge differences comparing with the international arena. In the 21st century the differences still exist but not in such a high level as in the past. The major difference between the Cypriot elite athletes and top athletes with the big sporting nations today is mostly related to money.

The Cypriot Olympians had ambitions to win but they did not subordinate their private life to their sporting career. Half of them were married and only a slight minority

divorced. Another small minority lived together with a partner and about a quarter of them was single. The athletes who lived together with partners without getting married were members of the Olympic teams in the 2000s.

The rate of divorcing or living together with partners is not significantly higher among elite athletes than among the non athletes' Cypriot population. During the last 10-15 years when the long time dominating traditional values started to lose their prevalence in the country, the elite athletes with much international experience played a pioneer role in some changes, for instance concerning independence and freedom. However, they attributed outstanding importance to the togetherness in their family; most of them preserved conservative values in connection with marriage.

The cohabitation with partners seems to have a particular meaning in Cyprus. Generally speaking engaged partners are living together and the engagement is taken very seriously, it should and it does lead to marriage in most cases. The Olympians had traditional attitudes in this context because they needed a stable, well balanced background and because their mentality was deeply rooted in the Cypriot culture.

Almost all Olympians are Cypriots by original nationality (95%). Only four Olympians who participated in the Olympic Games under the Cypriot colours had foreign nationality originally and then they changed it to a Cypriot one. The Cypriot Olympic teams consisted of Cypriot athletes mainly and there is no phenomenon of buying or selling athletes, unlike to the big powers of sports where this phenomenon can be observed.

Nevertheless, it should be kept in mind that the Cypriot athletes competed exclusively in individual sport events in the Games. Migration can also be observed in Cyprus in team sports, for instance there are clubs the football teams of which consist mostly of migrant players in international championships and cups. There are also other areas where team sports, especially football, are in an advantageous position. Their sports clubs and their players are also financed by the business sector.

In the individual sports there is no sign of sponsorship. Their sports federations are not given money, clothing, not even equipment, except a minor percentage, that is less than 5%. The sports authorities do not support athletes at the start either. They wait until the youngsters become elite athletes and then they might help them if they have appropriate results. Over the last decades talent care system did not function in Cyprus,

they have made attempt at introducing one only recently, at the beginning of the 21st century.

The majority of the athletes trained in Cyprus, several athletes chose first of all Greece for their high level training, a few of them chose the USA or certain European countries, and a very few went to Japan to train. The athletes who went to training to foreign countries were college or university students in that country and they combined the two activities there. It means that they went abroad not only for studying but also because they were looking for better training methods, coaches, and sporting facilities. Their staying in foreign countries increased their value with the Cypriot sport authorities, their national sport federation, and with the media.

The mass media did not pay much attention to individual sports except the last decades, when some positive changes could be observed. In the in-depth interviews made by the author with a sport journalist and a TV reporter the following information came to the surface. The sport journalist admitted that newspapers cover only the big international competitions but rarely the local cups and championships. The TV reporter talked about the truth in Cypriot sport telling that in Cyprus everything outside football becomes “a poor relative”.

The television began to promote all sports only after the year of 2000 by the establishment of a Saturday TV program which lasted less than a decade. The public television reporter also stated that governmental TV's goal is wider the hunt for TV consumers than the private TVs try to promote.

Not only the athletes who moved abroad but also those who stayed in Cyprus made effort to combine high level sporting activity with their education and occupation. Many of the athletes proved that they could combine their sport with their studies and even with their job without serious problems. This is a rare situation which is rooted in the amateur spirit in Cyprus Sport. The athletes try to do everything for covering the cost of their everyday life. They are willing to work parallel practicing their sport that they love so much. The idea here is that, since elite sport in Cyprus is characterized as amateur, athletes who involve in it do it because they enjoy it, despite the difficulties they face.

Only the half of the athletes had no full time work during their high level sporting career, many of them had part-time job or they worked occasionally. Cyprus

has little money to offer to the athletes in individual sport and the athletes themselves have to find ways to cover their life expenses. They also contribute to the cost of their sporting activities. They are not provided with nutritional supplements, opportunities for massage on a regular basis, adequate medical treatment in case of injuries, and with modern physiotherapy and psychotherapy.

The COC, the CSO, and the individual sports federations are reluctant to ensure the conditions which are necessary for the development of the athletes' achievement today; in exchange they do not set up unreal expectations towards them. They seem to accept that Cypriot athletes never won medals in the Olympic Games), they have been satisfied with a scoring place for long. Although national plans were prepared to promote sport, including competitive sport (e.g. National Sport Development Support Scheme, 1998, Talents, 2005; Top elite athletes, 2002; Professional settlement, 1992-2006), neither of them changed radically the situation. On the contrary, the Professional settlement program which was established by the CSO in 1992 with the aim to pay monthly was shrinking and it collapsed in 2006. Similarly the first National Program for the Olympic Preparation, which was launched in 2005 by the COC and the CSO ended in 2008 after the Beijing Olympic Games because it was not a permanent plan and no permanent committee was established. For the first time this plan set ambitious aims but most of them were not realized.

The failure of the above mentioned programs also contributed to the fact that in spite of changes in the highest sport authorities' attitudes towards Olympic sport, the Cypriot Olympians' conditions concerning sporting facilities, health care, reliable plans, lack of information on drug use, etc have not really changed.

The first Cypriot Olympians in the 1980s had been true amateurs in the original sense of the word and remained amateurs until the late 1990s, when the vast majority of international athletes had already reached "prolympic" status. The amateur nature of their status diminished their chances for reaching big successes, but at the same time it also was to their advantage: they remained healthy at the end of their sporting career and they had no serious social, economic, physical, and psychological problems after their withdrawal from elite sport.

Since the mid-1990s and the beginning of 2000s the government sport policy has been changing, some of the best elite athletes are financed by public money and there

have been attempt at promoting top sport. However, most athletes' income from sport in individual Olympic sport does not cover the cost of their living, not even today. Moreover the circumstances related to their training and to the level of institutionalization and organization did not follow the international trend. In other words their sporting conditions remained amateur, this time in a pejorative sense.

Many governments give priority to financing elite sport because of various foreign and home political reasons. The Cypriot government policy focused more on the population's sport participation to promote health and to improve the people's quality of life's and tried to pay serious attention to elite sport only in the last decade. The efforts of the highest sport authorities have not been crowded with big success in either fields. The regular sport participation by the Cypriot population is one of the lowest in the European Union (Humphreys et al, 2010) and at least according to the findings of the author's research the circumstances and conditions are unsatisfactory in elite sport. The efficiency of sport policy may increase if the determinants of success in the two areas of sport are examined in the future in a closer connection with each other. It can be only hoped that the unexpected success in the Olympic Games in London, in 2012, that is, the winning of the first Cypriot Olympic medal (a bronze medal in sailing) would contribute to a significant turn in the elite sport policy in the country.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This thesis deals with the social background of the Cypriot elite athletes who competed at the Olympic Games under the umbrella of the Republic of Cyprus from the first time that the country participated at the Olympics (1980 in Moscow) until the recent Olympic Games which were held in the year 2008, in Beijing. The objective of the dissertation was also to discover which social, economic and cultural factors have significant impact on the athletes' sporting successes in a small country like Cyprus.

The Cyprus Olympic Committee (COC) was established only in the year of 1974 and it was recognized by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 1979. Despite the short history of Cyprus related to the Olympic Games important findings came up to the surface from the research that was carried out by the author with the aim to realize the objectives of the thesis.

Although not too many sports and no team sports at all were involved in the Cypriot Olympic teams the results are relevant. On the one hand the size of the research population is small, indeed. The distribution of the data in per cent should be interpreted with reservation, and conclusions should also be drawn with certain reservation.

On the other hand, the research population embraces all Cypriot Olympians. Their number is also small, not only due to the brief Olympic history of Cyprus but to the size of the country and its inhabitants. It is obvious that in this small population there cannot be too many talented athletes who can reach the ever increasing high standards and can answer the high expectations at the Olympic Games as there can be in big countries. However, it can also be stated that the Cypriot elite athletes' achievements are respectful in the arena of international sport. Notwithstanding the findings presented in this thesis might be interesting because the topics discussed here have never been investigated previously, this is the first approach to study these issues from a sociological perspective.

Analyzing the major social and political factors affecting sporting success it can be stated that there are ones which are distinctive only to small states and there are ones which might arise in both small and large states but assume greater prominence in small countries. In the mirror of the findings of the research the first hypothesis (H1), according to which since Cyprus is a very small country, the major social, cultural, and

political factors determine sporting successes there on macro and meso level in a special way is justified.

In case of Cyprus it was found that while traditional economic and political factors are important, many inherent national characteristics such as geographical, demographic and cultural factors have a significant and pronounced impact. It can be concluded that out of macro-level determinants not only the size of the population has been a relevant factor. The country's economy, in principle, would not have hindered sporting success but geographical conditions were not too favorable and the lack of elite sport culture and traditions meant a serious obstacle. The independent sport history in Cyprus is short and the colonial legacy did not comprise sporting traditions related to elite sport.

Among the special considerations which were taken into account the meso-level ones proved to be the most important. That is, under similar macro-level (and micro-level) conditions the Cypriot athletes' chances for performing at a higher level in the international arena would have been better if the national sport policy had been more supportive. The facts that elite level sports facilities were not developed, the emergence of "full time" athletes was not supported, sport science and sports medicine were not developed, and the competition opportunities for elite athletes were not promoted, limited the athletes' opportunities for reaching higher standard. The national sport organizations did not regard outstanding sport performances as a resource valuable to help achieve a wide range of non-sportive objectives. Of course, the factors affecting sporting success at different levels are interrelated. For instance, national identity is generally stronger in small countries than in the larger ones, therefore the role of sport in its promotion is less significant here than in larger ones.

Most problems faced by small countries in connection with micro-level factors affecting sporting successes are similar to the ones which arise almost equally in both small and large states. Social inequalities according to socioeconomic status, gender, dwelling place might have some special forms in states with different size but the basic tendencies are the same. It seems that the smallness of Cyprus has also had some advantages. For instance, the classical sporting values survived longer here, and most elite athletes have preserved their amateur status until recently. Some benefits originated from these circumstances: the amateur athletes had less health deterioration than the

professional and the “prolympic” ones, and their disengagement from elite sport caused less social and psychological problems to them.

The strong interpersonal networks of small countries may cut both ways. On the one hand the closeness of interpersonal relations can cause considerable difficulties. On the other hand in countries with small populations daily life is usually more personal than in countries with large populations, and the knowledge of other people's backgrounds and personalities might facilitate the processes of planning and co-ordination in elite sport.

The size, geographical locations, economies, and cultures, including sport, of small countries vary widely. Beside their economic conditions, sporting traditions and culture their sporting successes are highly influenced by their elite sport policy. In small states where the emergence of full time athletes and the construction of elite sport facilities are supported, competition opportunities are promoted, and the training of coaches as well as sport science and sport medicine are developed, the athletes have higher chances for reaching international success. However, the case of Cyprus shows that there are several features (size of the population, lack of universities, emigration of young people, strong interpersonal networks etc.) arising from the smallness of states which have great effect on their sporting success and their impact cannot be balanced.

The results from this investigation also verified the second hypothesis (H2), which suggested that Cypriot children and young people have no equal chances to become top athletes. Children coming from families with low income and low education background or coming from rural areas have unequal opportunities. The findings showed unambiguously that inequalities to becoming elite athlete exist in Cyprus. The Cypriot Olympians' socioeconomic background in their childhood was much better than the average circumstances of children of the same age. Children coming from families with higher education and higher income had higher chances for sport involvement and easier access to sports. The educational level of the Cypriot Olympians' parents was considerably higher than that of the Cypriot population of similar ages. Most of them had prestigious occupation with good income. The preponderant majority of the Cypriot Olympians' family was living in cities, especially in seaside cities where the sporting culture was rich and there were adequate sporting facilities. Cypriot children who were

living in villages had no equal access to sport, their dwelling place proved to be a barrier in front of them.

The third hypothesis (H3), according to which the social status and social role of the Cypriot Olympians changed due to their participation in the Olympic Games and the mechanism of intra- and intergenerational mobility with Olympians competing in different periods occurred differently, was only partly verified. The findings of the investigation showed that the Olympians' level of education is much higher than their parents' which might be a sign of intergenerational social mobility. However, their occupation does not reflect the very high level of their education and it was not proved that the latter is in relationship with their sporting career and especially with their participation at the Olympic Games. Regarding the changes in the social role of elite athletes in the Cypriot society and in the mechanism of intra- and intergenerational mobility in different periods, no sufficient information is available to make a statement and to draw reliable conclusions.

Finally, it was assumed that the Cypriot Olympians are not professionals in the same way as other Olympians living and competing in countries with long sporting traditions are. Money does not play a crucial role in the elite athletes' sporting career in Cyprus and most Olympians do not earn their life exclusively from sport (H4). The findings justified this assumption. They supported the presumption that the Cypriot situation does not follow the international trends regarding professionalism. The majority of the athletes had amateur status in sport and they made their living out of sport. Most of them could combine sport with education and even with working activity. In the 1980s and in the 1990s most elite athletes used to have full time jobs during their high level sporting career in order to cover the cost of their living. There have been recently some changes in this respect. Since the 1990s several elite athletes were given financial support, therefore less of them worked full time, but they had a part time job or worked occasionally or they did not at all. One of the major conclusions of this research is that since 1980s until 2000s the aspect of sport has changed radically due to the financial support that came to the surface in early 1990s. It is true that the athletes can see sport from different aspects. However, their training conditions, sporting facilities and health care system remained at such a level as if they still participated only in amateur competitions.

It could be said that the author of this thesis is not clear about what is best for the athletes. He presents the amateur status of the elite athletes sometimes as a positive result and some other times as a negative one. The author believes that an amateur athlete is characterized by the classical sport values but he is aware of the fact that top sport activity became a profession and it is impossible to be successful at an international level without earning money by competing at a high level. Therefore, it would be ideal to combine some major characteristics of the amateur and professional status in sport. That is elite athletes should be able to have a source of income from sport while competing on a high level but at the same time they should have the opportunity for respecting the true values of sport.

6.1. Recommendations

On the basis of the conclusions it might be recommended to each stakeholder working in and around sport to think about the interest of a structured sport system in order that in the near future Cyprus has a strong system similar to the ones of the big countries. Moreover, in Cyprus the professional sport system has to be created and promoted so the help and support will be given for the young age athletes until they reach the top level. Cyprus has to get out from the sport amateurism if the sport authorities in Cyprus have goals and dreams for higher achievements.

As it was mentioned in several parts of this dissertation, the vast majority of the Olympians can be characterized by amateur status. There are advantages and disadvantages in their social situation. Nevertheless, a solution could be a correct professional system without losing the primary sport values, which would be the best not only for Cyprus but globally as well, for the benefit of sports.

In an attempt to promote gender equity, policies in national sports organizations should change to become more inclusive.

The sport authorities and other people responsible for sport act efficiently to promote sport for all in Cyprus, but they also should find solutions and to support competitive sport much more efficiently. Children and youngsters nowadays spend a lot of time watching television and playing with video, and computer games diminishing

the time for physical activity and training. Therefore, sport officials should find several ways to motivate them.

The athletes should be supported by more the resources, more sponsors have to be involved, and more money has to be spent for improving the infrastructure in sport. In addition, the creation of a professional health sport system will provide the athletes a better way of life during their career and afterwards without leaving them unattended while facing various health inconsistencies.

The Cypriot sport authorities of Cyprus Sport Organization, with the help of Cyprus Olympic Committee have to create a stronger sport system in order to cover the needs of the national athletes and to give assistance to young athletes who want to reach the top.

It is worth of mentioning that the military service lasts more than two years for Cypriot males. It is obligatory and, cannot be postponed. It start right after the secondary school, at the age of eighteen. It is a particular period of time in an elite athlete's career, so particular plans should be established by sport officials with the co-operation of the military leadership for the benefit of the athletes.

It is also suggested that top athletes' disengagement should be followed by continuous medical treatment for as long as needed, if the health problem is a result of their top sport career. But a specific sport health system should also be developed by the authorities to prevent or minimize the occurrence of injuries of the top athletes during their high level sporting activity.

Moreover, retired top athletes should have the right to receive some kind of scholarships to be able to study and be educated in an appropriate way. A good sport system can influence the various colleges and universities to take athletic achievements into consideration, when athletes apply for entrance. It can ease the transition from a sporting career to the labour market.

Finally it has to be emphasized that further studies are needed in this area. It is necessary to examine each sport separately and to discover their particular structure, functioning, and problems. The findings of such research might probably be more accurate, therefore they might help find better solutions to the major problems. They can also contribute to both the improvement of the athletes' sporting conditions and personal circumstances and to a more efficient elite sport policy in Cyprus

7. SUMMARY

7.1 Summary in English

This thesis deals with the social background of elite sport and elite athletes in small countries through the example of Cyprus. Its major objectives are to examine the major social, cultural, and political factors determining sporting successes in very small countries at macro- meso-, and micro-levels; to discover the equality of chances for becoming top athletes there; and to reveal the entire life-course of the elite athletes, from sport specialization to retirement, including their social status, social mobility, and social role. These issues have not been studied yet in this context. The thesis is based on the author's research during of which the following methods were used: survey with the involvement of all Cypriot elite athletes who participated in the Olympic Games between the period of 1980 and 2008 (N=93), in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The findings discovered that macro-level determinants: population, economy, geography, sport culture, and tradition are responsible for elite sport successes, more exactly for the lack of them, to a high degree in Cyprus. Meso-level factors determine sporting successes in a special way since outstanding sport performances are not seen by Cypriot sport policies and politics as a resource valuable to help achieve a wide range of non-sportive objectives. The decision-makers do not assume that the Cypriot athletes' modest results in international competitions could generate social and/or political benefits, and act accordingly. Most problems faced by small countries in connection with micro-level factors affecting sporting successes are similar to the ones which arise almost equally in both small and large states. Social inequalities according to socioeconomic status, gender, and dwelling place might have some special forms in states with different size but the basic tendencies are the same. In the conclusions it is emphasized that there are several features (size of the population, lack of universities, emigration of young people, strong interpersonal networks etc.) arising from the smallness of Cyprus which have negative effect on the athletes' sporting success and their impact cannot be balanced. On the other hand, the smallness of the country has also some advantages: the classical sporting values survived longer here, and most elite athletes have preserved their amateur status until recently. Consequently, they have less health deterioration than the professionals, and their disengagement from elite sport

caused less social and psychological problems to them. At the end some recommendations are made and the necessity for further research is underlined.

7.2 Összefoglalás

Jelen értekezés az élsportolók társadalmi háttérével foglalkozik kis országok esetében, Ciprus példáján keresztül. Fő célkitűzései a kis országok sportsikereit meghatározó makro-, mezo- és mikroszintű társadalmi, kulturális és politikai tényezők vizsgálata, az esélyegyenlőség kérdésének vizsgálata, és a sportolók teljes életútjának bemutatása a sportágválasztástól egészen a visszavonulásig, beleértve társadalmi státuszukat, mobilitásukat és társadalmi szerepeiket. Ezeket a témákat ebben a kontextusban még nem vizsgálták. Az értekezés alapja a szerző kutatómunkája, melynek során a következő módszerekre támaszkodott: kérdőíves vizsgálat minden ciprusi élsportoló részvételével, akik 1980 és 2008 között részt vettek az Olimpiai Játékokon (N=93), mélyinterjúk, valamint dokumentumelemzés. Az eredmények azt mutatják, hogy a makroszintű tényezők, mint a népesség, a gazdaság, a földrajzi adottságok, a sportkultúra és a hagyományok mind meghatározók az élsport sikerességét, pontosabban sikertelenségét illetően Ciprus esetében. A mezoszintű tényezők sajátos módon határozzák meg a sport sikerességét, mivel a ciprusi sportpolitika szereplői nem látják a kiemelkedő sporteredmények tágabb, sportrendszeren kívüli hozzáadott értékét. A döntéshozók nem feltételezik, hogy a ciprusi sportolók szerény eredményei a nemzetközi versenyeken társadalmi, és/vagy politikai haszonnal járnának és ennek megfelelően is cselekszenek. A sportsikereket meghatározó mikroszintű tényezőkkel kapcsolatos problémák hasonlóak a kisebb és nagyobb államokban. Az egyenlőtlenségek a társadalmi-gazdasági státusz, a nem, vagy éppen a lakóhely tekintetében sajátos formában jelenhetnek meg a különböző méretű országokban, de az alapvető tendenciák mégis hasonlóak. A következtetésekben a szerző rámutat arra, hogy Ciprus kis méretéből adódó számos tulajdonság (a népesség száma, az egyetemek hiánya, a fiatalok migrációja, a személyes kapcsolatok túlzott jelentősége) negatívan befolyásolja a sportolók sikerességét és ezek hatását nem lehet ellensúlyozni. Másfelől az ország kis méretének vannak előnyei is: a sport klasszikus értékei tovább maradtak fenn és a legtöbb élsportoló státusza egészen a közelmúltig amatőr maradt. Következésképpen egészségük nem romlott olyan mértékben, mint általában a professzionális sportolóké és az élsportból történő visszavonulásuk is kevesebb szociális és pszichés problémát okozott számukra. Az értekezés végén a szerző néhány ajánlást fogalmaz meg a sport fejlesztésére, valamint további kutatások szükségességére vonatkozóan.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First of all I would like to thank the Semmelweis University which gave me the opportunity to make my Doctoral degree (PhD).

I would also like to thank my professor, Dr. Földesi Szabó Gyöngyi, for the knowledge and the support, for the tutoring and the education that she gave me.

I would like to thank my friend Oliver Ott for his help in translating several parts of my research and my publications in Hungarian language as well as because he was accommodating me many times during my staying in Hungary. Special thanks to Tamás Dóczi, Koltai Erika, and several people at the university who helped me organizing, managing, and translating important tasks during the procedure in the PhD.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my parents, Neoklis and Athanasia Shippi, for supporting me ethically and financially in this important part of my life when I was doing my doctoral degree (PhD). I am thankful and I appreciate everything they have done for me.

APPENDIXES

Appendix A – Questionnaire

A. Family Background

1. What is your current age?
.....
2. What is your original nationality?
a) Cypriot, b)
3. What is your current nationality?
a) Cypriot, b)
4. What is your current dwelling place?
a)Capital city, b)Mountain city, c)Seaside city, d)Mountain village, e)Seaside village
5. Where did you live most of your time as an athlete?
.....
6. What is your level of education?
a) less than 4th grade, b) primary school, c) secondary school, d)lyceum,
e) college, f) university, g) higher level
7. What is your current occupation?
If you have no occupation, please, choose one of the following alternatives:
a) registered unemployed, b) unregistered unemployed, c) university student,
d) other
8. What was your father's occupation during your childhood?
If he had no occupation, please, choose one of the following alternatives
a) registered unemployed, b) unregistered unemployed, c) retired,
d) not relevant
9. What was your mother's occupation during your childhood?
If she had no occupation, please, choose one of the following alternatives:
a) registered unemployed, b) unregistered unemployed, c) retired,
d) not relevant
10. What was your father's level of education during your childhood?
a) less than 4th grade, b) primary school, c) secondary school, d) lyceum,
e) college, f) university, g) higher level
11. What was your mother's level of education during your childhood?

- a) less than 4th grade, b) primary school, c) secondary school, d) lyceum, e) college, f) university, g) higher level

12. Did your parents practice sports outside Physical Education classes?

They were

	Not	In recreational sport	In competitive sport
Mother			
Father			

B. At the start

1. How old were you when you started participating in sport activities?

.....

2. I. What was the sport in which you participated in the Olympic Games?

.....

II. How old were you when you started practicing in your sport?

.....

3. How old were you when you started participating in competitions?

- a) less than 4, b) 4-5, c) 5-6, d) 7-8, e) 8-9, f) 9-10, g) older than 10

4. To which degree the following facts inspired you to choose your sport?

	Not at all	Little	Neither inspired nor not inspired	Much	Very much
My parents choose it for me					
My father was an athlete					
My mother was an athlete					
My father's recommendation					
My mother's recommendation					
Interested in this sport					
Good body shape					
Media influence					
Friends' invitation					
Coach invited me					
PE teacher's recommendation					
Other teacher's recommendation					
I wanted to be a champion					
I wanted to become famous					
I wanted money					
Other reasons, namely					

5. Did you have any kind of sponsors providing you with the following at the beginning of your sporting career?

	Yes	No	Don't remember
Money			
Clothing			
Equipment			
Other possibilities, namely			

C. The way to the top

1. In what age did you became member in your national team?

.....

2. How many years did it take you to become a national athlete?

.....

3. Did you have any other different sport activities during your high level career?

a) yes, b) no, c) I don't remember

If yes, what?

.....

4. Did you have any kind of work during your high level activity?

a) permanent, b) full time, c) part time, d) occasionally, e) not working at all

5. Did you have any hobbies during your high level career?

a) yes, b) no

If yes, list some of them:

1.

2.

3.

6. How old were you when you started participating in competitions as a national athlete?

a) less than 15, b) 16-18, c) 19-21, d) older than 22

7. How many days per week did you train during your high level career?

a) 1, b) 2, c) 3, d) 4, e) 5, f) 6, g) 7

8. How many times did you participate in competitions per year during your high level career before your participation in the Olympics?

a) less than 2, b) 2-3, c) 4-5, d) 6-7, e) 8-9, f) more than 9

9. What was your best result and at which competition, during your high level career before your participation in the Olympics?

.....

10. How would you characterized your high level training before the Olympics?
 a) pleasant, b) partly fun, c) fun, d) hard, e) very hard

11. Did you ever change sport club during your sporting career?
 . a) yes, b) no

If yes, how many times?

If yes, what were the reasons that you changed sport club?

.....

12. Did you ever change coach during your sporting career?
 a) yes, b) no, c) I don't remember

If yes, how many times?

.....

If yes, explain the reason(s)

	Not at all	Least	Neither affect nor disaffect	Much	Very much
I was not satisfy with my development					
I didn't like him as a person					
I travelled abroad to live					
I travelled abroad to study					
My coach changed club					
My coach did not accept me any more					
Other possibilities, namely					

13. What was your relationship like with your last coach during your high level career?

Excellent	Good	Neither friendly nor bad	Bad	Very bad

What is your relationship like with that coach now?

Excellent	Good	Neither friendly nor bad	Bad	Very bad

14. What were the topics you discussed with your coach?

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Very often
Personal life					
Problems related to my life					
Training					
Problems related to training					
Arguments					
Going out together					
Other topics, namely					

15. Was your relationship with mass media satisfactory before the Olympics?

	Not at all	Not really	Neither satisfactory nor unsatisfactory	Much	Very much
Journals					
TV, Radio					

16. Did people support your hard effort and give you feedback about it before your participation in the Olympics?

	Not at all	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
Father					
Mother					
Sister(s)					
Brother(s)					
Girlfriend					
Boyfriend					
Coach					
Teachers					
Friends					
Federation					
Sponsors					
COC, CSO					
Othes, namely					

17. Did you use nutrition supplements during your sporting career?

a) yes, b) no

If yes, to which degree were you satisfied with nutrition supplements during your sporting career?

Not at all	A little	Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied	Much	Very much

18. How often did you use the following treatments during your high level career?

	Not at all	Seldom	Sometimes	Often
Massage				
Medical treatment				
Physiotherapy				
Psychotherapy				

19. To which degree could you combine study and sport time during your high level career?

Not at all	Least	At a medium level	Much	Very much

20. To which degree did your high level sporting activity influenced your education?

Not at all	Least	At a medium level	Much	Very much

21. To which degree did your high level sporting activity influenced your occupation?

Not at all	Least	At a medium level	Much	Very much

22. Did you move abroad during your high level sporting career before your participation in the Olympics? (not including holidays)

a) yes, b) no

If yes, why?

To study	
To work	
To train	
To study and train	
To study and work	
To study, work, and train	
Other reasons, namely	

23. To which degree were you satisfied with your high level sporting career before your participation in the Olympics?

Not at all	Least	Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied	Much	Very much

24. To which degree did you feel ready to take that step (participate in Olympic Games)?

Not at all	Least	At a medium level	Much	Very much

D. After the Olympics

1. What was your health status like after your participation in the Olympics?

a) excellent, b) good, c) satisfactory, d) bad, e) very bad

2. What was your economic status like after the Olympics?

a) excellent, b) good, c) satisfactory, d) bad, e) very bad

3. To which direction did your high level sporting career influence your private life after your participation in the Olympics?

Very negative	A little negative	Neither negative nor positive	Positive	Totally positive

4. Are you satisfied with your sporting career after your participation in the Olympics?

a) not at all, b) a little, c) neither satisfied, nor dissatisfied, d) much e) very much

5. How many times did you participate in the Olympic Games?

.....

6. What was your best result in the Olympic Games?

.....

7. To which degree are you satisfied with your Olympic result?

Very much	Much	At a medium level	A little	Not at all

8. To which degree were you recognized by the following persons and agencies after your participation in the Olympics?

	Enormously	Reasonably	At a medium level	A little	Not at all
Father					
Mother					
Sister(s)					
Brother(s)					
Girlfriend					
Boyfriend					
Coach					
Friends					
Sport federation					
Sponsors					
COC					
Media					
Local community					
Cypriot society					
Others, namely					

.....					
-------	--	--	--	--	--

E. Special and Personal

1. Regarding your participation and your Olympic result, to which degree did your dream come true?

0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%

2. According to your own opinion, could you have achieved better?

a) yes, b) no, c) partly, d) don't know

If you had the chance, could you chose the same way from the beginning to the Olympics?

a) yes, b) no

3. To which degree did the following factors motivate your participation in the Olympics?

	Enormously	Reasonably	At a medium degree	Little	Not at all
To become famous					
To realize my dream					
To get money					
To travel					
To get glory					
To serve my country					
To have fun					
To achieve my best result					
Other reasons, namely					

4. To which degree do you have income now from the following sources?

	Enormous degree	Reasonable degree	Medium degree	Small degree	Not at all
Competitions					
Sponsors					
Federations					
COC					
Sport organizations					
Job in sport clubs					
Job not related to sport					
Other sources, namely					

5. What is your present marital status?

	Yes	No
Single		
Living with partner		
Married		
Divorced		

**F. Retirement from sporting activity
(Only for athletes retired from elite sport)**

1. How old were you when you withdraw from high level sporting activity?

.....

2. To which degree did the following reasons contribute to your disengagement from your high level sporting career?

	Not at all	A little	At a medium degree	Much	Very much
Injury at leg					
Injury at hand					
Injury at joints					
Injury at back					
Problems with the coach					
Unsatisfaction with training facilities					
Lack of time for education					
Inadequate time for high level training					
Too high cost to do it					
Inadequate money consumption					
Getting tired physically					
Getting tired psychologically					
Becoming old for it					
Family problems					
Problems with media					
Other reasons, namely					

3. What is your present economic status?

a) excellent, b) good, c) satisfactory, d) bad, e) very bad

4. Are you involved in sporting activities now?

a) yes, b) no

5. Do you have contact with sporting areas now?

a) yes, b) no

If yes, which sporting areas are you involved in?

	Voluntary	Part time	Full time	Not at all
Coach in a sport club				
Coach of a federation				
Member of a sport club				
Manager in sport				
Member of a national federation				
Member of an international federation				
Other areas, namely				

6. Did you have any problems after your retirement from high level sporting career?
 a) yes, b) no
 If yes, what kind of problems?

	Yes	Partly	Not at all
To find a job			
To start studying			
To finish studies			
Health problems			
To socialize in the new way of life			
Other problems, namely			

Who helped you to solve these problems?

	Not at all	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
Father					
Mother					
Sister(s)					
Brother(s)					
Girlfriend					
Boyfriend					
Wife					
Husband					
Coach					
Sport mates					
Friends					
Federation					
Sponsors					
Others, namely					

7. If you were the leader of your sport federation what would you like to change in your sport?

.....
.....
.....

Thank you for your participation and cooperation

Appendix B - Guidelines for the in-depth interviews

For TV and newspaper reporters

- -Do you cover Olympic Games, if yes, by what means?
- What are the areas and the subjects that you cover during Olympic Games?
- Do you support individual sports regardless of the Olympic Games at national and/or international level?
- Do you support the athletes and the individual sports, if yes, in which way?
- Do you believe that your field of activity can be improved?

For coaches

- What was your relation with your athletes during their high level career and after withdrawal from top sporting activity?
- Do you believe that your athletes had proper facilities?
- Could you spend for your athletes' coaching adequate time?
- Could you give to elite sport your best?
- Do you believe that sport authorities support the coaches at an appropriate level in Cyprus?
- Do you believe that your field can be improved?

For key actors in sport

- Do you believe that high level sport authorities in Cyprus do a good work in the era of sport?
- Do you believe that you give adequate support to the athletes in Cyprus from their first steps in sport socialization through their elite sport career to their retirement from top sporting activity?
- Do you believe that Cyprus needs a better sport system for better achievements?
- Do you believe that your field can be improved?

The in-depth interviews with Cypriot Olympians was based on the findings by questionnaires.

Appendix C – List of documents for analysis

- Central Offices of Cypriot Phileftheros Newspaper in Nicosia, Cyprus.
- Sport newspapers published in the Olympic years of 1980, 1984, 1988, 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, and 2008, one month before and one month after every Olympic Games.
- Web-pages of Cyprus Sport Authorities:
 - <http://www.sportskoa.org.cy/>
 - <http://www.cyprussports.org/koa/activities/national-programs/2012-02-21-11-11-50/file/39-2012-02-07-06-48-15.html>
 - <http://www.cyprussports.org/koa/activities/national-programs/2012-02-21-11-11-50/file/38-2012-02-07-06-46-04.html>
 - <http://www.cyprussports.org/koa/activities/national-programs/2012-02-21-11-11-50/file/36-2012-02-07-06-43-56.html>
 - <http://www.cyprussports.org/koa/activities/national-programs/2012-02-21-11-11-50/file/32-2012-02-07-06-40-03.html>
 - <http://www.cyprussports.org/koa/activities/national-programs/esyaa.html>
 - <http://www.olympic.org.cy/>