

## WORK-LIFE BALANCE IN SPORTS ORGANIZATIONS: A CASE STUDY IN SLOVAK REPUBLIC

### *EQUILÍBRIO ENTRE VIDA PESSOAL E PROFISSIONAL EM ORGANIZAÇÕES ESPORTIVAS: UM ESTUDO DE CASO NA REPÚBLICA ESLOVACA*

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#### **Abstract**

Work-life balance (WLB) is a key factor in employee satisfaction and overall organizational effectiveness, but its implementation in sports organizations is often under-researched. This article focuses on a case study of a selected sports organization to analyze the current state of WLB and propose concrete measures to improve it. The methodology used combined quantitative and qualitative methods, including a survey among employees and semi-structured interviews with the manager, to obtain a comprehensive picture of workload, working time flexibility, management support and recovery opportunities. The results show that although the organization provides basic WLB initiatives, there are significant areas for improvement, especially in the areas of flexible scheduling, communication of expectations and motivation of employees to use available benefits. Based on the data obtained, the article proposes concrete strategic measures, including the implementation of flexible working arrangements, the introduction of regular consultations between employees and management and the creation of a culture that supports work-life balance. The article highlights

#### **Resumo**

*O equilíbrio entre vida pessoal e profissional (EVP) é um fator chave para a satisfação dos funcionários e para a eficácia organizacional geral, mas sua implementação em organizações esportivas é frequentemente pouco pesquisada. Este artigo se concentra em um estudo de caso de uma organização esportiva selecionada para analisar o estado atual do EVP e propor medidas concretas para melhorá-lo. A metodologia utilizada combinou métodos quantitativos e qualitativos, incluindo uma pesquisa com funcionários e entrevistas semiestruturadas com o gerente, para obter um panorama abrangente da carga de trabalho, flexibilidade do horário de trabalho, apoio da gestão e oportunidades de recuperação. Os resultados mostram que, embora a organização ofereça iniciativas básicas de EVP, existem áreas significativas para melhoria, especialmente nas áreas de flexibilidade de horários, comunicação de expectativas e motivação dos funcionários para utilizar os benefícios disponíveis. Com base nos dados obtidos, o artigo propõe medidas estratégicas concretas, incluindo a implementação de horários de trabalho flexíveis, a introdução de*



the importance of a systematic approach to WLB in sports organizations and provides a practical framework that can be applied in other organizations with a similar structure and nature of activity.

**Keywords:** Work-Life Balance. Personnel Processes. Sport Organization. Slovakia.

*consultas regulares entre funcionários e gestão e a criação de uma cultura que apoie o equilíbrio entre vida pessoal e profissional. O artigo destaca a importância de uma abordagem sistemática para o EVP em organizações esportivas e fornece uma estrutura prática que pode ser aplicada em outras organizações com estrutura e natureza de atividade semelhantes.*

**Palavras-chave:** Equilíbrio entre Vida Profissional e Pessoal. Processos de Pessoal. Organização Esportiva Eslováquia.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Work-life balance (WLB) is the ability of an individual to achieve a balance between work and other areas of life, and its importance extends beyond the work sphere and also affects a person's social and personal functioning (Grote & Guest, 2017). Maintaining a balance between work and private life contributes to physical and mental health, overall life satisfaction and quality of life (Lunau et al., 2014).

Modern society and the work environment place high demands on individuals. Flexibility, mobile technologies and constant availability lead to the blending of work and personal spheres, which can increase stress and disrupt WLB (Orlikowski, 2007; Jeffrey Hill et al., 2008; Bhanugopan & Fish, 2006). Current approaches therefore recognize the reciprocal nature of this interaction, where work can influence personal life and vice versa, with positive transfer of experiences between these spheres supporting overall well-being and motivation (Harris, 2004; Van der Zee et al., 2005; Cinamon, 2006; Fischlmayr & Kollinger, 2010).

Social factors, such as family and peer support and societal expectations, significantly influence the success of maintaining WLB (Sturges & Guest, 2004; Aryee et al., 2005). In the context of sport, the importance of WLB becomes even more critical, as athletes face specific demands such as intensive training, competitive schedules, travel and psychological pressure that affect their ability to harmonize their sports career with their personal life and social relationships.

The novelty of this article lies in the examination of work-life balance in sport with regard to the specifics of the sport environment, such as high physical and mental demands, unstable schedules and a combination of cooperation and competition in a team.

At the same time, it differentiates the levels of sports workload (amateur, semi-professional, professional) and examines their impact on the balance between sports career and personal life. The results bring new insights for sports organizations, coaches and athletes themselves in supporting effective WLB.

## **2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUNDS**

### **2.1 Personal processes in the work-life balance relationship**

The area of work-life balance is influenced by various processes within human resources. The basic ones include recruitment and selection of employees, adaptation and onboarding, training and development, performance evaluation, remuneration and benefits, workload management and capacity planning, and support for career and personal growth.

#### ***2.1.1 Recruitment and selection of employees***

When recruiting, candidates' expectations regarding work flexibility, home office options or other benefits that support WLB are assessed. Organizations may prefer candidates who are able to effectively manage work-life balance.

Work-life balance has become a critical factor in recruitment, with younger generations placing unprecedented importance on flexible work arrangements and supportive benefits. Studies reveal that Millennials specifically regard work-life balance as crucial to job performance and long-term satisfaction (Smith, 2010). Organizations offering work-life benefits can significantly increase their attractiveness to job seekers, particularly through perceived person-organization fit (Firfiray & Mayo, 2017).

Key recruitment considerations include flexible work arrangements, remote work options, and benefits that support work-life harmony. However, research also cautions that remote work isn't a simple solution, with potential challenges like work intensity and technological stress (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022).

Empirical evidence from multiple studies involving students and professionals consistently demonstrates that work-life balance benefits are now a strategic recruitment tool (Ahamad et al., 2022).

### ***2.1.2 Adaptation and onboarding***

Onboarding new employees includes informing them about flexible working hours, vacations, or wellness programs. The goal is to set expectations and allow the employee a healthy start to work without overload.

Adaptation and onboarding processes contribute to work-life balance by strategically communicating and implementing flexible work arrangements and wellbeing programs that support employee autonomy and personal needs.

The evidence suggests multiple mechanisms. Common onboarding features emphasizing work-life balance often include structured mental health initiatives that help reduce absenteeism and enhance job satisfaction (Sharma & Bhosle, 2025). Angayarkanni et al. (2024) revealed that flexible work arrangements like telecommuting and flextime can enhance employee satisfaction by offering greater autonomy in managing work and personal commitments.

However, challenges persist, including potential boundary management issues and organizational cultural barriers (Zhang & Bhaumik, 2024). Successful implementation requires holistic approaches integrating clear policies, leadership support, and regular feedback mechanisms.

### ***2.1.3 Education and development***

Training and personal development programs can include: time management and effective work organization, stress management techniques, as well as work-life balance and mindfulness programs, which help employees increase productivity without negatively impacting their personal lives.

Employee training programs significantly support work-life balance through integrated mindfulness, time management, and stress reduction interventions. Multiple studies demonstrate concrete benefits as a support for efficiency, decision-making, creativity, relationship building, cooperation, teamwork or other abilities and skills (Blaskova et al., 2022; Holubcik et al. 2023; Kusnirova et al., 2023; Kusnirova et al., 2024; Mutuc, 2025; Holubcik, et al. 2025).

Michel et al. (2014) found a 3-week mindfulness intervention reduced strain-based work-family conflict and increased psychological detachment. Kapahi and

Shrivastav (2025) revealed that integrating stress management in training improves employee engagement and reduces absenteeism. Marais et al., (2020) specifically showed that mindfulness programs enhanced time management and psychological flexibility in academic settings.

Key outcomes of studies include reduced workplace stress, improved mental health, enhanced job performance, and better work-life boundaries. Tenschert et al. (2024) additionally noted that such training increases stress resilience and job satisfaction.

#### ***2.1.4 Performance evaluation***

Performance appraisals can take into account an employee's ability to effectively handle tasks without undue stress. Organizations can encourage results-oriented work rather than working "by the hour," reducing the risk of overload.

Performance evaluation is increasingly incorporating work-life balance by shifting from time-based to results-oriented work approaches that reduce employee stress and enhance productivity. Multiple studies demonstrate this trend. Kim (2014) found that work-life balance is associated with increased job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and performance improvement. Tamunomiebi and Oyibo (2020) recommends organizations provide flexible work arrangements to enhance employee well-being.

The evidence suggests that by focusing on outcomes rather than hours worked, companies can create high-performance work systems. Byrne (2005) notes that employees benefit from greater control over their work structure, leading to improved motivation and productivity. Green and Skinner (2005) further validates that time management training can positively impact employee performance when contextually implemented.

The strongest evidence indicates that reducing work-life conflict directly correlates with enhanced organizational effectiveness and individual performance.

### ***2.1.5 Compensation and benefits***

Human resources policies can include benefits that support WLB, such as flexible working hours, home office or a hybrid model, extra vacation, time off for life events, or health and wellness programs (e.g. sports activities, counseling).

Compensation and employee benefits systems significantly support work-life balance by providing flexible work arrangements, targeted wellness programs, and comprehensive support mechanisms that reduce stress and enhance employee well-being.

Eernawati et al. (2025) found that work flexibility contributes positively to employee satisfaction, with comprehensive well-being programs reducing stress and increasing motivation. Sharma and Bhosle (2025) specifically noted that organizations implementing structured mental health initiatives observe measurable improvements, including reduced absenteeism and higher job satisfaction.

Flexible work arrangements, such as self-paced scheduling and independent workplace options, have been shown to particularly benefit employees by allowing better management of personal and professional responsibilities (Zhang & Bhaumik, 2024). However, successful implementation requires thoughtful policy design, leadership support, and addressing potential challenges like isolation and boundary management.

### ***2.1.6 Workload management and capacity planning***

Personnel processes focus on the optimal distribution of tasks and projects, preventing employee overload and supporting a balance between work and personal life.

Workload management and capacity planning are critical strategies for maintaining employees' work-life balance by systematically preventing overwork and optimizing task allocation. Efficiency increases competitiveness while effective personnel allocation can significantly improve workload distribution (Galadikova et al., 2025, Durana et al., 2025).

Multiple studies provide robust evidence for this approach. Darom et al. (2025) emphasize that overtasking diminishes productivity and contributes to employee burnout, recommending comprehensive workflow audits and equitable resource allocation. Giotopoulos et al. (2024) propose a dynamic workload management model that sets an upper limit on work acceptance to prevent employee exhaustion. Optimization is

therefore essential to ensure that workload distribution remains balanced, efficient, and aligned with employee capacity (Galadikova & Adamko, 2024).

Grawitch et al. (2010) further conceptualize this as personal resource allocation, suggesting that effective management helps employees make strategic choices about expending personal resources. Hudgins and Gevrek (2016) specifically highlight the need to balance labor, leisure, and productivity to avoid overwork.

The evidence consistently shows that proactive, systematic workload management is essential for maintaining employee well-being and organizational efficiency.

### ***2.1.7 Supporting career and personal growth***

Employees have the opportunity to plan their career development without having to sacrifice their personal lives, which is why organizations should support a balance between ambition and private interests.

Organizational support for career and personal growth can significantly contribute to work-life balance by creating personalized, flexible career paths that accommodate individual life stages and responsibilities.

Research demonstrates that forward-thinking organizations can achieve this through several key strategies. Pilot testing of flexible work arrangements, implementation of mentorship programs, and development of individualized career roadmaps reflect a “whole-life” approach to career development, which recognizes the importance of addressing employees’ needs for both professional growth and a healthy work-life balance (Litano & Major, 2016).

Empirical evidence suggests that employees with a protean career orientation who engage in extensive career planning can accumulate social and psychological capital, leading to greater work-life balance (DiRenzo et al., 2015). Additionally, Roger and Othmane (2013) found that supervisory support can help employees reach a better balance between private and professional life, though ultimately, personal effort remains crucial.

## **2.2 Work-life balance – Definitions, theories**

Modern society full of obligations requires a constant search for work-life balance (WLB), which is an even distribution of time between these areas (Lockwood, 2003).

Despite the growing importance of WLB, many people complain about its lack, and the problem often lies in the lack of time or support in managing work and personal commitments. The solution to WLB affects the labor market, competitiveness and efficiency of organizations, as work and personal obligations are intertwined. The conflict between these areas can lead to exhaustion and reduced concentration, while achieving fulfillment in one area requires compromises in the other (Piecuch & Niewadomski 2024).

The term WLB appeared in the 1980s, although the principles of its application existed as early as the 1930s. Historically, the concept has evolved from the model of the “ideal household” to families where both parents actively earn and participate in the running of the household. Contemporary organizations must create conditions that enable effective management of work and personal commitments in order to attract and retain employees and increase business performance (Jabeen & Jabeen, 2024). Despite increased attention to WLB, its achievement often remains insufficient, with higher job demands and longer working hours disrupting work-life balance.

There are 6 basic theories of work-life balance, namely (Sellahewa & Samarasinghe, 2021):

- 1. The segmentation theory**, originating in the 1960s, assumes that work and family life are completely separate and do not influence each other. According to this theory, there is no interaction between the two spheres; work and private responsibilities are considered independent entities. Research has shown that segmentation is typical of simple jobs, where the worker seeks primarily financial reward without opportunities for self-development or career growth. Nevertheless, the author of the work points out that even in such cases there is a certain relationship between work and private life, which suggests that the original theory is now partially outdated.
- 2. The enrichment theory** claims that satisfaction in one area of life can positively affect another area. For example, a good day at work can improve the quality of personal life, and a peaceful family life can bring positive emotions to work. Although the theory emphasizes the synergistic effect between the spheres, in practice this relationship may not always be fully realized, because both areas can also bring frustrations. The author of the work therefore warns that the enrichment theory is limited and not always scalable.

- 3. Conflict theory** describes a situation where meeting the requirements in one area makes it difficult to meet the needs in the other. Each sphere requires effort, and the complete fulfillment of all obligations is impossible, which leads to inevitable compromises. The author of the work emphasizes that the pursuit of perfect satisfaction can lead to stagnation and reduced motivation, because there is always room for improvement.
- 4. Spillover theory** describes the transfer of emotions, attitudes, skills and behaviors between the work and family environments. Positive experiences at work can improve family life and vice versa, while negative experiences can cause the transfer of tension. The validity of the theory depends on the individual's ability to depersonalize from negative experiences, which emphasizes the importance of mental resilience.
- 5. Compensation theory** suggests that a lack of satisfaction in one area can be balanced by satisfaction in another. Thus, work and family life complement each other, achieving overall harmony. This approach is currently very practical, when dissatisfaction at work is compensated for by activities and joys in private life, which makes it easier to cope with stress and frustration.
- 6. Instrumental theory** assumes that activities in one sphere facilitate the achievement of goals in the other. A typical example is maximizing work performance in order to obtain financial resources to improve private life. In contrast to the compensation model, the relationship between the spheres is considered positive here. The success of this theory depends on the individual perception of rewards and satisfaction, therefore it is not universally applicable.

Work-life balance represents the extent to which individuals are equally involved and satisfied in their work and personal lives. Work life can affect family life positively or negatively, and conversely, family and non-work activities can affect work attitudes, behavior and results. Inflexible working hours, overwork and stress lead to dissatisfaction and reduced ability to fulfill family responsibilities, thereby negatively affecting the overall quality of life. On the other hand, personal life obligations can limit career development and career choice, which in turn affects job satisfaction and motivation to continue in employment. Building a professional career is a time-consuming activity that often leads to a lack of time spent with family. Excessive work stress can lead to neglect of family responsibilities, which increases the importance of the concept of WLB. It

allows employees to maintain a balance between work and family responsibilities. Currently, many companies emphasize WLB and develop programs that increase the quality of life of employees and support an effective work-life balance. Experts and development workers thus have sufficient knowledge to design appropriate measures (Jabeen, Jabeen, 2024; Safi et al., 2023).

Effective WLB brings benefits to individuals, organizations and sports entities.

**For individuals** (Panchal, 2020; Jabeen & Jabeen, 2024):

- Maintaining mental and physical health.
- Increasing loyalty, motivation and engagement in work and leisure activities.
- Promoting innovation and activity in personal and professional life.
- Improving the ability to cope with stress and adverse situations, which leads to a more positive approach to the environment.
- Fewer conflicts in personal and professional life, higher morale and satisfaction, which improves the overall quality of life.

**For sports organizations** (Tiell & Walton, 2017):

- Effective adherence to WLB by athletes increases their performance and the achievement of short-term and long-term goals.
- A properly set WLB helps maintain the motivation of young talents, thereby supporting the future of the organization and preventing stagnation.
- Creating an environment that promotes balance increases loyalty and enthusiasm for the sport among all team members.

**For employers** (Ingle, 2021):

- Increased productivity and work efficiency.
- Reduced employee turnover, error rates, and absenteeism.
- Higher employee engagement and loyalty.
- Improved organizational image, which can translate into higher sales and profits.
- Effective WLB minimizes employee overload and enables them to meet customer demands with greater commitment and quality.

A properly set WLB concept is therefore essential not only for the personal development of individuals, but also for the success and sustainability of organizations, especially in the sports sector, where the performance of individuals directly affects the results of the entire team.

### 2.3 Work-life balance vs. sports environment

The sports environment can be defined as a set of physical, social, personal, goal-oriented and psychological factors that influence individual athletes and teams. Each sports team is therefore located in a unique environmental context, which is characterized by a specific reality. The sports environment is unique in particular due to its duality in the area of internal competition. While the cooperative nature of sports inspires connectedness and cohesion among team members, the competitive nature, on the contrary, strengthens competitiveness, motivation and a certain uncertainty among teammates. Social relationships in the sports environment bring with it many challenges that do not occur in other areas. To achieve collective goals, support between teammates is necessary, but to achieve individual goals, it is often necessary to surpass teammates and, in a sense, consider them rivals (Benson et al., 2015).

In terms of work-life balance (WLB), the sports environment presents several challenges, similar to other jobs. In addition to the classic issues related to the concept of WLB, the sports environment adds additional obstacles that athletes and other employees in the sports industry have to deal with. These include unstable working hours, unguaranteed success, risk of injury, burnout, long hours on the road, and adherence to individual and group schedules that athletes must fulfill even outside of working hours. These and many other expectations increase the burden that needs to be overcome on a daily basis with the help of a properly functioning WLB (Mazerolle, 2018). Digital, information, and communication technologies that contribute to increasing the level and quality of operations can enhance trust and transparency in managing complex schedules and coordination in dynamic environments, such as sports teams (Blazek et al., 2022, Koman et al., 2022; Koman et al, 2023; Gabrisova et al., 2025; Krupova et al., 2025; Hanh et al., 2025).

Working in the sports industry is demanding. In addition to the usual obstacles, such as irregular schedules or lack of autonomy, organizations also face problems of a traditional work environment, such as a lack of staff, financial resources, or employee qualifications. The problems arise from a variety of influences, including sociocultural (gender expectations), organizational (level of administrative support), and individual factors. In general, it can be stated that, as in other occupations, there are high levels of

work-life conflict in sport, regardless of gender, marital status or job position (Train, 2022).

Sport as an occupation is atypical – its essence lies in performance aimed at maximizing the results of athletes and generating profit for the organization. Not only physical abilities are important, but also proper nutrition, regeneration, motivation and concentration. WLB therefore differs for each athlete, according to personal goals, passion or financial motivations (Matuszak, 2020).

Athletes can be divided into three levels according to commitment, funding and social recognition (Eitzen, 1989; Luptakova et al., 2024; Romano, 2022; Papaevangelou et al., 2012; Taylor & Gratton, 2002).

- **Amateur level** – is the most developed in terms of the number of athletes. Amateurs perform sports without the purpose of profit, for the joy of competition, personal fulfillment or in their free time. They invest their own finances in sports and are often not paid. For them, sports represent a personal activity and the process is as important as the result
- **Semi-professional level** – represents the middle category. The training and commitment of athletes are more intense than for amateurs. Semi-professionals may receive partial financial remuneration, but they often have to perform other jobs in addition to sports. This level is characterized by a higher time, physical and mental load and often serves as a “gateway” to professional sports.
- **Professional level** – and differs from the previous ones mainly in remuneration. Athletes are part of a legitimate sports organization and sport represents their main source of income. They have a strict training regimen, high specialization and contractually defined work duties. Regular medical check-ups and transfers between clubs are common, often accompanied by large sums of money. Professional athletes face considerable pressure from fans, the club or the media, which can affect WLB, but rewards are often sufficient motivation.

A comparison of the levels of athletes according to source of income, legal relationship, time, physical and mental demands shows that as the level of athletes increases, the demands on WLB increase, with professionals facing the greatest pressure but also being rewarded the most.

Previous research on WLB has focused mainly on traditional work environments, where its impact on employee satisfaction, motivation and performance has been

confirmed (Lockwood, 2003; Jabeen & Jabeen, 2024). However, in recent years, this topic has also become relevant in sports, where the balance between work (sports) and personal life affects the psychological well-being and long-term performance of athletes (Tiell & Walton, 2017).

Despite growing interest, there is a lack of research reflecting the specifics of the sports environment, which is characterized by high physical and mental demands, frequent travel, unstable schedules and financial uncertainty (Mazerolle, 2018). In addition, sports teams operate on the principle of both cooperation and competition, which can affect motivation and the ability to maintain a balance between work and personal commitments (Benson et al., 2015).

While some studies differentiate athletes' levels according to the level of workload (Eitzen, 1989; Taylor & Gratton, 2002), there is a lack of knowledge about how these differences affect WLB and life satisfaction. The present research therefore addresses this gap by identifying the relationships between the level of sports engagement, the nature of the team environment, and athletes' ability to maintain a balance between sports and personal life.

### 3 METHODOLOGY, AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This article focuses on a case study of a selected sports organization operating in Slovakia (Central Europe) with the aim of analyzing the current state of WLB and proposing strategic recommendations for improving this concept, which can be applied in all sports organizations.

When writing the article, basic scientific methods suitable for social science disciplines were used, including analysis and synthesis of knowledge, induction and deduction of conclusions, comparison, case study, or trend analysis. Based on the studied literature, survey research, or interviews with managers of sports organizations, it is possible to answer the following four research questions:

**RQ1:** *How does the different level of athletes (amateur, semi-professional, professional) affect their ability to maintain a balance between work and personal life? – differences in time, physical and psychological burden for individual levels of athletes (Eitzen, 1989; Papaevangelou et al., 2012; Taylor & Gratton, 2002)*

**RQ2:** *What is the impact of internal competition and cooperation in the team on athletes' motivation and their management of WLB?* – emphasis on the duality between cooperation and competition among athletes, which affects psychological burden and personal time efficiency (Benson et al., 2015)

**RQ3:** *How do specific factors of the sports environment (unstable schedule, risk of injury, travel) contribute to stress and WLB problems in athletes?* – unique demands of the sports environment create additional burden (Mazerolle, 2018; Train, 2022)

**RQ4:** *To what extent does financial and organizational support for athletes affect their ability to achieve an optimal balance between sports and personal activities?* – reflecting differences between the levels of athletes and their dependence on financial resources and organizational structure (Matuszak, 2020; Romano, 2022)

The answers to these four research questions are presented throughout the article, but appear explicitly in Section 5. Discussion and Conclusion.

## 4 RESULTS AND IMPLICATIONS IN PRACTICE

### 4.1 Analysis of sports organization

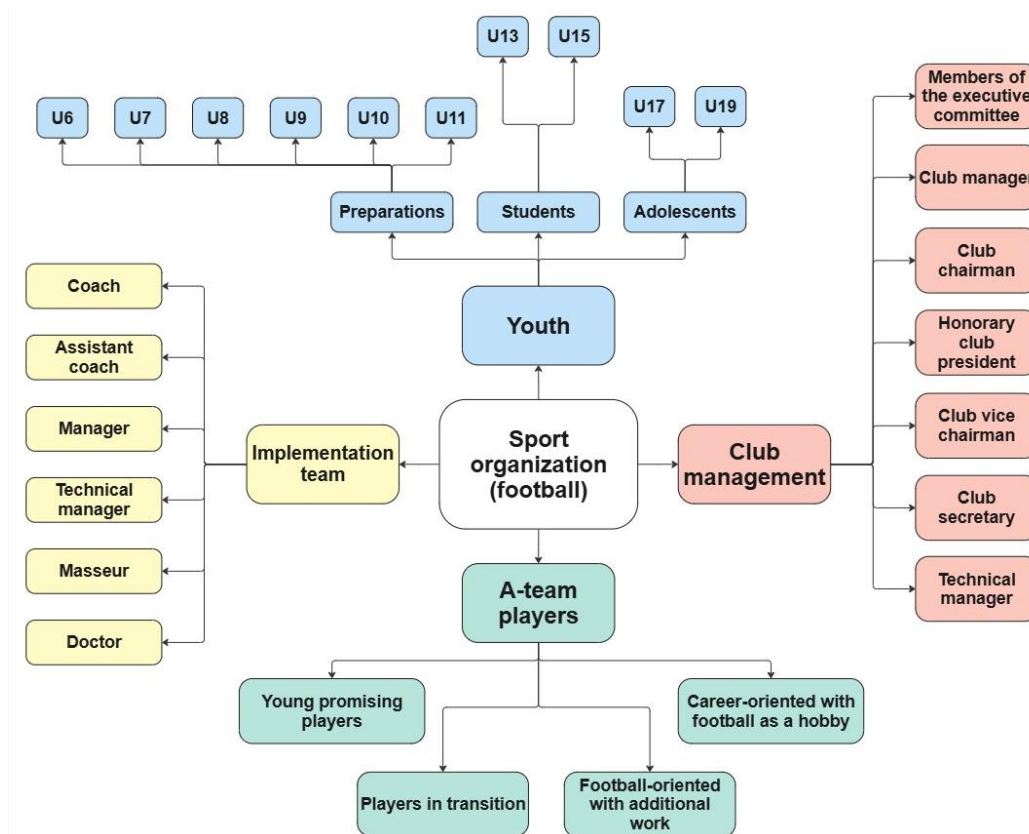
Sport as a professional sphere represents a unique space in which physical performance, psychological resilience and social cooperation intersect. Each sports team and organization operates in a specific environmental context, which includes not only training and competitions, but also personal, social and organizational factors affecting both individuals and the collective. In this area, the duality between cooperation and competition is clearly manifested: athletes must cooperate to achieve team goals, but at the same time competitive pressure motivates them to outperform their teammates and constantly improve their performance (Benson et al., 2015). Work-life balance (WLB) is therefore particularly challenging in the sports environment. Irregular schedules, high physical and mental demands, risk of injury or pressure to perform increase the complexity that athletes and employees of sports organizations encounter (Mazerolle, 2018; Train, 2022). In Slovakia, where sports clubs often face limited finances, a lack of qualified personnel and high expectations, the issue of WLB becomes even more significant.

A case study in a specific Slovak sports organization allows us to examine in detail how the theoretical principles of WLB are applied in a real environment. This approach provides not only practical findings that can help organizations improve conditions for athletes and employees, but also valuable insight into the specifics of the Slovak sports environment, which differs from foreign models (Matuszak, 2020).

We classify the sports organization that we decided to analyze as a football club. To better understand the functioning and structure of a semi-professional football club, a mind map was created (Figure 1). The division structure for the purpose of the work focused on WLB deals with the internal aspects of the club, which are: players, club management, implementation team and youth.

**Figure 1**

*Organizational structure of a sports organization*



The organization consists of the implementation team, management, youth and the A-team itself. The implementation team has 6 members and its main task is to ensure optimal conditions for the players, including training, regeneration and psychological support, thereby directly supporting the balance between the work and personal lives of

athletes. The club management, with 11 members, manages financial, personnel and operational matters, communication and marketing, and thus indirectly influences the working conditions of the players and the implementation team.

The youth make up the largest part of the organization with 189 members and ensures the long-term development of the club and the smooth transition of talents to the A-team. Their commitment and motivation can positively affect the performance of the seniors. The A-team, with 18 players of different age categories and career goals, forms the core of the club. Its success depends on the right conditions that allow the players to focus on their sporting, individual and work goals, while the right support from all segments of the club directly affects the effective functioning of the work-life balance of individual footballers.

As part of the work-life balance concept, we focused on the A-team, where we divided individual players into four segments:

- **Young promising players (9 players)** see football as a potential career and are willing to invest a lot of effort in their development, training and achieving their goals. They move from youth categories to senior football and have to adapt to higher physical and mental demands, competition and expectations of the club or family. The main factor influencing their WLB is the process of transition to senior level, while the club and the management team should provide psychological and physical support so that players find mental well-being and manage the pressure of training and competitions (Hutchinson et al., 2025).
- **Players in transition (2 players)** face significant life changes, such as completing their studies, changing jobs, joining a new club or family responsibilities, which interfere with their WLB. They have to find ways to reconcile football with other priorities, while adaptation to new conditions is individual and can affect the training process or psychological well-being. Support from the club, family or employer is crucial for managing this period and maintaining a balance between sports and personal life (Salazar, 2024).
- **Football-oriented players with additional work (3 players)** consider football as the main priority, while they only see employment as a source of finance. Their WLB is affected by high physical strain, combined with career uncertainty and risk of injury. The implementation team should ensure appropriate conditions for healthy development, regeneration and training planning so that players can

effectively fulfill their career goals without excessive stress (Gouttebarga & Kerkhoffs, 2018).

- **Career-oriented players with football as a hobby (4 players)** put their civilian career before sport, which they perceive as recreation and a source of relaxation. The main factor influencing their WLB is effective time planning and organization, so that they can fulfill work or study obligations and at the same time participate in training and matches. Proper time management is key to maintaining social bonds within the team and supporting the overall functioning of the club (Salazar, 2024).

It was found that the four categories of players have different perceptions of football and its place in their lives, which directly affects their work-life balance. Young promising players have to adapt to the demands of senior football, players in transition are dealing with life changes, football-oriented players with additional work face a combination of physical strain and financial uncertainty, and career-oriented players see sport as recreation and time-management is a priority for them. All categories show that support from the club, the implementation team and effective planning of activities are key to maintaining a balance between sport, work and personal life.

#### 4.2 Work-life balance analysis

The proper functioning of WLB is based on the reconciliation of private, work and domestic responsibilities. The term work-life integration is also used to define this concept, which explains the mutual overlap of individual areas of life, which can include work, home and family, community and health. (Hawley, 2019)

In the analyzed sports organization focused on football, the concept of WLB was analyzed only for A-team players, each of whom has their own priority focus in work or school in addition to football – 7 (39%) are studying, 2 (11%) work as administrative employees, 3 (17%) work as employees in production, 4 (22%) work as employees in the service sector and 2 (11%) have their own business.

Despite their work or school workload, up to 78% of them (14) devote 15 to 20 hours a week to football within the club. This corresponds to the fact that 56% (10) are involved in football for personal development and improvement, which should lead to a professional sports career in the near future.

Planning and proper time management help 8 (44%) players from the aforementioned A-team to coordinate work and private life. Next is support from family and friends (4; 22%), or mental and physical regeneration (3, 17%). According to the majority of players (11, 61%), the club is sufficiently helpful in harmonizing work and private life. This mainly consists of setting a training plan and teambuilding. Official matches in Slovakia are planned in advance and it is not possible to just swap them in higher competitions (there would have to be a serious reason for this).

Among the options for how the club should better support the WLB concept for A-team players, the following answers appeared: regeneration and health care for players (7.39%), support for the team atmosphere (4.22%), provision of information about WLB opportunities in the club (4.22%).

In the case of support for the WLB concept from the employer or school, up to 7 players (39%) do not feel sufficient support and understanding. This applies especially to players who are still studying, because their parents emphasize education and not sports. Flexible working hours (9.50%) and release for matches during school/work time (6.33%) could be helpful from the school or employer.

Athletes agreed that they see the greatest help in maintaining the right balance between personal and professional life in the correct planning of duties, accompanied by support from family and friends. Improvements in planning and time management can be brought to players by implementing planning practices, which can be introduced to players in the form of educational workshops and training on the topic of WLB. Support from family and friends is individual, but it certainly represents a burden in the form of an excessive number of obligations that the group is exposed to because of the players. The author of the work therefore believes that athletes should better distribute their time, thanks to which they would make life easier not only for themselves, but also for those around them.

### **4.3 Strategic recommendations**

Work-life balance (WLB) is a key factor for maintaining employees' physical and mental well-being, as well as for optimizing their performance in sports organizations. Based on current literature and best practices from various sectors, we recommend the

following strategic measures (Mamatha et al., 2024; Mendis, Weerakkody, 2017; Stephen & Elza, 2024, Koman et al., 2024):

**Flexible working conditions and time** - Implementing flexible working hours and adaptable work schedules allows employees to better balance work and personal responsibilities. Such measures lead to reduced absenteeism, increased employee satisfaction and improved team performance. In sports organizations, flexibility can include individual adjustments to training and administrative duties according to employees' personal or family needs.

**Supporting teleworking and digital flexibility** - Teleworking provides employees with the opportunity to organize their workday more efficiently and in a less stressful environment. When properly managed and using digital tools, this form of work can support focus and productivity, while allowing important family and personal commitments to be maintained. It is important for sports organizations to establish clear rules for employee availability outside the standard workplace.

**Well-being and mental health programs** - Initiatives that support the physical, mental and emotional health of employees are critical to maintaining WLB. External or internal stress management programs, consultations with psychologists and wellness activities reduce the risk of burnout and improve overall team performance. It is recommended that sports organizations integrate these activities into the daily work environment, including training and administrative tasks.

**Using technology to support WLB** - Modern digital tools, including applications for time planning, task tracking and team communication, allow for better organization of work and private life. Regular use of these technologies helps prevent stress and promotes the harmonization of work and personal activities.

**Managerial Training and Education** - Training focused on effective communication, employee motivation and conflict management is essential for managers and executives. These programs increase the ability of management to support WLB and create a culture that harmonizes employees' work and personal commitments.

**Work-life balance** - Instead of a strict separation of work and private life, an approach of integration and harmonization of both spheres is recommended. Setting clear boundaries, sharing household responsibilities and regularly planning personal time allows employees to achieve higher satisfaction and well-being, which directly affects their performance and loyalty.

**Supportive organizational culture** - An organizational culture that promotes inclusion, cooperation and positive relationships between employees and management is a key determinant of WLB success. Support from colleagues and management reduces conflict, increases motivation and improves overall team performance.

Implementing the above strategies in sports organizations can lead to a sustainable work-life balance for employees. The emphasis on flexibility, promoting mental health, leveraging technology, and cultivating a supportive work environment creates a competitive advantage for organizations that want to maximize the performance and satisfaction of their employees.

## 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study addressed a research gap regarding the lack of understanding of work-life balance (WLB) in the context of sports organizations. Previous research has focused primarily on work-life balance in traditional work environments, while the unique conditions of a sports career, such as high training demands, competitive calendars, and psychological pressures, have largely been overlooked.

Research results show that the area of WLB is a complex and multi-layered phenomenon also within sports organizations. The findings show that maintaining WLB is determined by the connection of several factors - within the professionalization of athletes, intra-team dynamics, specific conditions of the sports environment and support from organizations. WLB cannot therefore be perceived as a certain static state, but rather as a dynamic process of adaptation of the athlete to the demands of performance activity, environment and personal life.

Research also shows that the perception of work-life balance in sports depends significantly on the context. Factors such as the type of sport, the level of competition, or organizational background have an impact on individual coping strategies. While professional athletes have more resources at their disposal, they are also exposed to higher psychological pressure and low flexibility. Amateur athletes, although more autonomous, often struggle with a lack of time and finances, which makes it difficult for them to remain involved in sports for a long time.

**RQ1:** *How does the different level of athletes (amateur, semi-professional, professional) affect their ability to maintain a balance between work and personal life?*

Professional athletes face the most significant challenges in maintaining work-life balance, with increasing competitive levels correlating with greater difficulty separating personal and professional domains.

The evidence reveals distinct work-life balance experiences across athlete levels. Professional athletes experience more intense work-life conflicts due to demanding schedules and intense performance expectations (Matuszak, 2020). Professional sports settings require long hours, extensive travel, and schedules determined by organizations, which substantially reduce personal time (Mazerolle & Hunter, 2018).

Semi-professional athletes occupy a marginal position, showing similar personal commitment to professionals but lacking equivalent structural support (Yair, 1992). Amateur athletes, while experiencing fewer professional constraints, often struggle with balancing sport and other life activities (MacCosham et al., 2015).

Notably, professional athletes report greater socioeconomic and psychological satisfaction A. (Santos, 2013), but at the cost of reduced personal life flexibility.

The research findings confirm and extend the theoretical conclusions. The A-team analysis revealed four groups of players with different perceptions of football and its place in their lives, from young talents striving for a professional career to players who perceive the sport as a form of relaxation. Despite these differences, they all face similar problems with maintaining a balance between sport, work and personal life, mainly due to limited time and psychological burden.

Up to 78% of players devote 15 to 20 hours a week to football in addition to their job or studies. The key factors that help them maintain balance are time planning, family support and regeneration. The majority of players (61%) consider the club to be accommodating, but around 40% do not feel sufficient support from their school or employer. The results confirm that semi-professional athletes occupy a transitional position. They combine high personal commitment with limited organizational support, which makes maintaining a work-life balance extremely challenging.

**RQ2:** *What is the impact of internal competition and cooperation in the team on athletes' motivation and their management of WLB?*

Internal competition and cooperation within teams can simultaneously enhance athletes' motivation and performance through complementary psychological mechanisms.

A comprehensive study of 289 players across 42 elite field hockey teams revealed two key pathways to team performance (van Mierlo & van Hooft, 2024):

- Mastery goals foster cooperation, driving performance
- Performance goals encourage competition, also improving outcomes

Critically, these are not mutually exclusive. Team athletes can effectively balance competitive and cooperative interactions, with team sports demonstrating greater capacity to integrate these dynamics compared to individual sports (Landkammer et al., 2019).

The research suggests that carefully managed internal competition can motivate athletes without undermining team cohesion, particularly when baseline cooperation levels are high. However, coaches are advised to primarily emphasize mastery (learning) goals to mitigate potential negative competitive dynamics.

Our research shows that intra-team competition and cooperation are interconnected and can be mutually reinforcing. Players who perceive their team as a supportive environment report higher intrinsic motivation and less stress from comparing themselves to others. Conversely, excessive rivalry without clear communication of goals leads to tension and a weakening of team spirit.

Research shows that coaches play a key role in balancing competition and cooperation. Teams that combine the motivational elements of championship goals (focused on improvement) with an appropriate level of performance competition achieve better team dynamics and player satisfaction. This environment not only supports performance, but also supports a sustainable balance between sport and personal life.

**RQ3:** *How do specific factors of the sports environment (unstable schedule, risk of injury, travel) contribute to stress and WLB problems in athletes?*

Sports environment factors significantly contribute to stress and work-life balance problems for athletes through unstable schedules, injury risks, and extensive travel.

Multiple studies highlight these challenges. Mazerolle and Hunter found professional sports settings require athletic trainers to work long hours and adhere to schedules made by others, leading to reduced work-life balance. Ni et al. (2021) identified specific stress events like lost games, sports injuries, and unexpected retirement as major contributors to work-family conflict.

Soligard et al., (2016) emphasize that athletes face increasingly saturated competition calendars and high training loads, which are major risk factors for both

psychological stress and physical injury. Brink and Lemmink (2021) further note that psychosocial stress and recovery vary significantly within even a single training week.

The evidence suggests these environmental factors create persistent, systemic challenges for athletes' psychological well-being and personal life management.

Our research has confirmed that variable training and match schedules, frequent travel and the risk of injury significantly affect the balance between sports and personal life of players. More than half of the respondents stated that unpredictable changes in the program complicate their work and family obligations. Traveling to matches and training often interferes with time allocated for regeneration or private activities, which in the long term leads to a feeling of exhaustion.

Injuries have been identified as a major source of psychological stress, as in addition to physical limitations they also bring uncertainty regarding future performance in the team. Players who have the opportunity to communicate openly with the coach about adjustments to the training plan or personal needs show lower levels of stress and better manage the balance between sports and life off the field. These findings confirm that the environment of the sports organization and its flexibility fundamentally affect the ability of athletes to maintain WLB.

***RQ4:*** *To what extent does financial and organizational support for athletes affect their ability to achieve an optimal balance between sports and personal activities?*

Financial and organizational support critically influences athletes' ability to achieve an optimal balance between sports and personal activities, with substantial evidence demonstrating both positive impacts and existing support gaps.

Rahmani et al. (2024) found that financial support is “critical for enhancing athlete performance” and providing access to training and mental health resources. Andrijiw and Pink (2023) specifically identified that organizational support includes schedule accommodations, flexible work arrangements, and social support, which help athletes manage multiple career demands.

Maier et al. (2016) revealed that non-monetary organizational support, particularly family integration and private problem support, strongly positively affects athlete job satisfaction. However, Hong and Fraser (2022) noted that support is often limited, primarily targeting high-performance athletes and leaving lower-level athletes with minimal assistance.

The research suggests comprehensive support is crucial but currently inconsistent across different sports and athlete levels.

The results of our research show that financial and organisational support for players has a major impact on their ability to maintain a balance between sport and personal life. Semi-professional players often combine football with work or studies, while insufficient support from school, employer or club increases their stress and makes it difficult to plan activities.

Players who receive clear organisational support, such as flexible training plans, adjustments to match schedules or access to recovery and psychological support, report better coping with training and personal responsibilities. The research also confirmed that young talented players and players in transition stages of their careers benefit most from targeted support that allows them to focus on both sport and private life, thereby increasing their satisfaction, motivation and long-term career sustainability.

The results of this research highlight the need to understand WLB in sport as a systemic phenomenon that goes beyond the individual efforts of the athlete. Effective management of work-life balance requires coordination between the athlete, the coaching team and the organisation. Sport organisations should therefore aim to create an environment that supports not only performance but also the mental health and personal development of athletes.

From a practical perspective, it is recommended that sports clubs and federations implement programmes focused on psycho-hygiene, flexible schedules, career guidance and the integration of family life into the sporting reality. From a research perspective, it is appropriate to continue to investigate the long-term consequences of work-life imbalance, especially from the perspective of mental health, career transition and gender equality in sport.

In conclusion, it can be stated that although achieving a perfect balance between sports performance and personal life is rarely possible in practice, its conscious management represents one of the key prerequisites for the sustainable development of athletes and sports organizations themselves.

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The authors declare that they do not have any competitive financial, professional or personal interests from other parties.

## **DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT**

All data is contained in the article.

## **AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

Conceptualization, N.S., R. A.; Methodology, N.S and M. S.; Validation, N.S.; Formal Analysis, N.S., R.A., M.S.; Resources, N.S., R.A., M.S.; Data Curation, N.S.; Writing – Original Draft Preparation, N.S, R.A.; M.S..M.K.; Writing – Review & Editing, N.S. and R.A.; Visualization, N.S.; Supervision, N.S., M.K.; Project Administration, N.S.; Funding Acquisition, R.A., M.K.

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### **Authors' Contribution**

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

### **Data availability**

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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