

IFMA

Athlete Career Programme

Guidelines for How to Make Good Choices for
Your Future

2013

Introduction

This guide is intended for use by Muaythai athletes.

Parents, coaches, and trainers are also encouraged to read it and be aware of the challenges and opportunities athletes encounter in the search for an after-sports career.

This guide is available on the IFMA website. It is intended for electronic distribution to every IFMA Member National Federation, for further free distribution. It is not to be used for commercial purposes. Please think twice before printing, and save paper.

The guide is written in a style which addresses athletes, drawing on the experiences of current and retired athletes who have had to make the same decisions that face athletes today.

Every athlete is different, because every person is different. However, there are some common, shared experiences of being in a high-level sports career. The International Olympic Committee has many internet resources available to help athletes. They are available electronically to the public, so that non-Olympic athletes can also access them and use them. You can find them all here:

<http://www.olympic.org/content/olympic-athletes/athletes-space/programme/>

IFMA's guidelines are designed to help you think about your after-sports career, to answer 5 key questions, and to direct you in a more in-depth way, to resources in the IOC Athlete Career Programme.

Your sports career will be always be a valuable, memorable, and important part of your life. However, the constraint of a Muaythai sports career is that, like many other sports careers, it is time sensitive. As your body ages, even with the best training, you will most likely retire in your thirties. You need to be equipped and ready to know what kind of life you will pursue afterward. Planning for the future today is your best strategy!

5 Key Questions

Whether you are just beginning your career as an athlete, have been an athlete for several years, or are thinking about retirement, there are many questions to ask yourself. These are just a few of them:

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1. Do I have to choose between my sport and my studies?

Study and Sports: Is it possible?

The short answer is, that for those who have the motivation and support from those around them, it can be possible to do both. A lot may depend on the amount of time you must spend traveling to compete.

Secondary School (High School)

When you begin to compete seriously as an athlete, you may find that your school work begins to suffer, while you are still in secondary school (high school). Some of the reasons may be the following:

- You have to travel a lot to train or compete, and you miss school days
- You don't have the energy to study after training
- You feel tired and can't always concentrate
- You don't have the time in your schedule for training, studying and friends

What are some things you can do to help improve your school performance?

- Have your parents, coach or trainer help you to talk with your school. When a school is informed, they can take measures to help you complete your school work. This could include rescheduling tests or exams which conflict with competition days, allowing deadline extensions for some assignments, or assigning make-up work so you can keep up with what you have missed.

- Be aware of what you eat and drink. A healthy, balanced diet should be able to provide you with the energy you need for training and studying. Fruits and vegetables may not seem as appealing as snack food, but when you think about the energy trade off, it's worth it. Sugar or caffeine will give you a short boost of energy, but will not be long-lasting, and your energy will drop again.

- Be aware of how much sleep you are getting. Your body and mind need sleep to repair and restore you after your daily routine. Make sure you are getting regular hours of sleep. Although you may try to push yourself to do everything, cutting sleep to study more, sleep deprivation will lower your productivity.

- Manage your time. It can be hard to be aware of how much time one spends every day doing a certain activity. But take a moment to think carefully about how you spend your time and then write a plan for how you can use your time in the way that is best for you.

Your health and happiness are more important than sporting success. However, the pressure to succeed can sometimes seem more important. You may want to balance stress and tiredness from training with seeing your friends. Studying may seem like the least important thing in your life.

However, poor school performance will probably increase your stress. You may not have the time to be the top student of your class, but you do have the time to be a good student. A good student is one who works in order to learn, not one who knows everything without having to do any work!

Plan your week with study times included. Just as you have a training schedule, make a study schedule. Know which days you are going to study, and which days you are going to relax or see your friends. When you do study for the same number of hours consistently and build a routine. When you are busy, a good routine makes it easier to balance all the things you need to do. Take a short break after every hour of study, something small like having a drink of water or walking around the room. It will help you to maintain your focus. Don't turn on the TV or your computer until after your scheduled study time is finished. Identify things that distract you from studying and limit them. Do you need to turn your phone on silent? Is your house too noisy? Tell your parents, friends, coach and teachers about your study goals. Ask them to help you accomplish them.

University Studies or Technical Training

If you have completed secondary school, perhaps you are wondering if it is possible to pursue formal studies, like attending a university or receiving technical training, while still pursuing a sporting career. Consider the amount of time you have to travel. Explore your options, especially which universities or schools are open and flexible to supporting students who are athletes. There may be distance education or virtual learning programmes which you can access, although the number and range of things you can study may be limited. Consider your age and abilities. Can you take a break from sport to pursue studies, and vice versa?

Tips for Parents:

Pay attention to how your son or daughter is doing at home and at school, and help them to take responsibility for the choices they are making. Discuss what you think are important priorities for life and listen to what your son or daughter wants to achieve. Be in touch with coaches or trainers.

Tips for Coaches & Trainers:

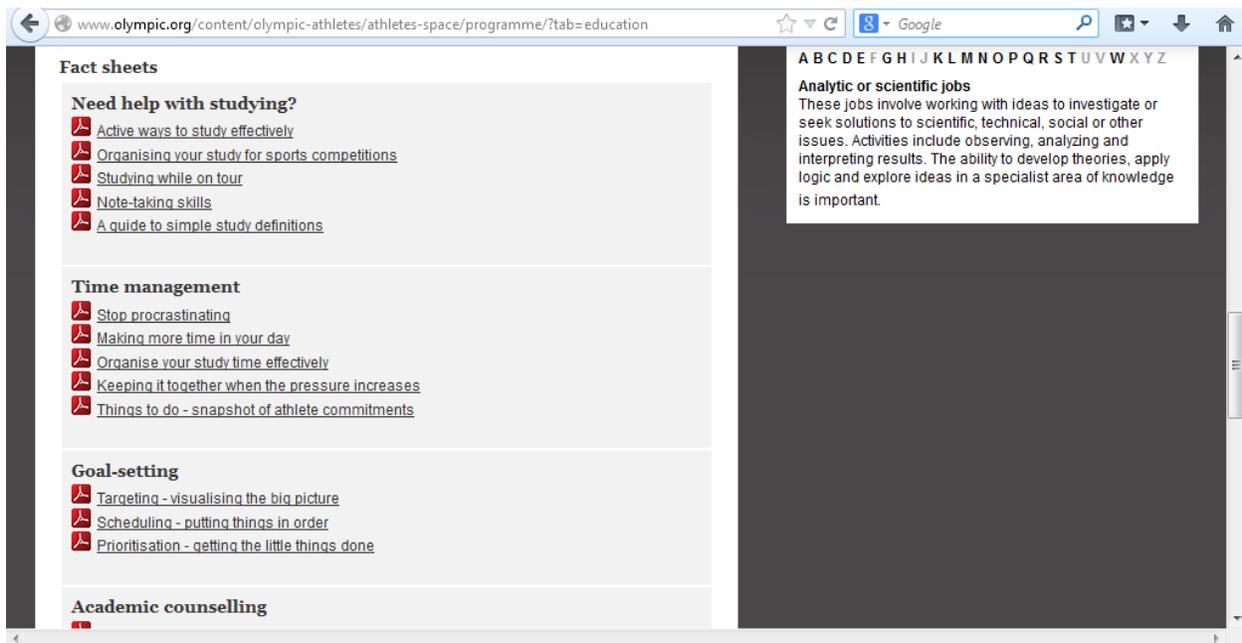
Observe if your student seems tired or stressed. Ask your student how he or she is balancing studying and training. Be in touch with parents.

For more resources, please visit:

<http://www.olympic.org/content/olympic-athletes/athletes-space/programme/?tab=education>

The IOC Education page lists resources on Studying, Time Management, Goal-setting, Academic counselling, Relocation (studying in another country), and Planners (Budget and Time planners).

Under each section are downloadable factsheets in pdf format, which you can interact with. Click to download each pdf.



Screenshot of some of the IOC Athlete Career Programme e-content under “Education

2. What am I going to do after my athletic career ends?

Even though you may be just starting your career as an athlete, it's important to think about where you want to end up, as everything you experience can be a chance to learn about what you do or don't want to do later.

Do I want to work in Muaythai?

Some athletes retire from competition but continue in Muaythai careers. What are some of the options available?

- Employment as a personal trainer in a Muaythai gym or fitness gym
- Coaching
- Acting as a technical official such as referee or judge
- Owning your own gym
- Building a career in your NF, CF or IF

While you are competing as an athlete, you will have the chance to observe all of these roles. If one of them appeals to you, take the time to ask questions and get to know people in the field you are interested in.

For those seriously interested in a Muaythai career, think about attending the Muaythai University in Bangkok, Thailand. The Muaythai University offers Phd Graduate programs in the technical aspects of the sport and its management. Please ask your National Federation to contact IFMA's Athletes Commission on your behalf, for more information.

Tips for National Federations: Make your members aware of career opportunities within the Federation or the national or regional Muaythai community. Encourage networking and communication between members.

How can my interests outside my sport help me find the career I want to pursue?

Do you have other hobbies or interests outside of Muaythai? Are you interested in a sports-related but non-Muaythai specific field (ie. sports medicine, sports coaching, sports merchandising, sports journalism, sports law)? Do you see an application for Muaythai in another kind of work? (Private security, special forces training, police training, army training) Do you want to pursue something outside of Muaythai, but still remain active as a volunteer?

Do you do any volunteer work? Are you interested in social or community development work? Do you enjoy teaching or training others when you have the opportunity? Are you good at fund-raising for events or meeting new people? Think about what you enjoy doing, it may naturally lead to a career.

Do I want a new career?

While you are competing, you may observe many other career possibilities at international events:

- Public Relations & Marketing
- Media & Journalism
- Logistics (managing the flow of goods and services from their point of origin to the place where they are to be used)
- Catering
- Event Coordination
- Retailing (the sale of merchandise and services)
- And many more!

Taking the opportunity to speak with those you meet. International sports events are opportunities which bring you into contact with people from all over the world, from all different walks of life. They may help you to identify interests or opportunities which are right for you. You can make new connections which may prove useful later on in life, and build long-lasting friendships.

What networks of people do I have around me?

Once you have identified an area of interest, do some research: What kind of jobs are there in this area? What kind of experience might a job in this area require? Do you know someone who does this? Talk with your school counsellor about how you can train or prepare for this particular kind of job. Talk with your parents, your coach, your friends, and find out if you know someone who may be able to help you learn more or gain experience in the field you are interested in.

Did you know?

Sue Latta, current Chair of IFMA's Female Commission, is originally from New Zealand. She has been a four-time World Champion, one of the early pioneers in female Muaythai and IFMA.

She pursued further education and holds a Bachelor of Science, Dip BS, Dip Tech, Physiology, Sport coaching, PE, Health & Science from Massey University.

Following her competitive successes at the international level, Sue became the President of the New Zealand Muaythai Federation. In 2009, she became President of the Oceania Muaythai Federation Amateur (IFMA's continental CF for Oceania) and also Vice President of IFMA

She currently works as a teacher at an international school in Singapore. Her dedication to Muaythai, on a volunteer basis, has seen the Female Commission become one of IFMA's most active and dynamic commissions, ever increasing its global network to connect and support female Muaythai practitioners around the world.



3. What kind of skills have I learned as an athlete that I can transfer to a professional working environment?

You may not realise it, but the experiences you have as an elite level athlete can be valuable and transferable skills later on in your professional life. The important thing is to know how to develop your skills and present them professionally later.

Think about your life as if you were a future employer. What do you have to offer? What is a future employer looking for? As globalisation is ever increasing, cross-cultural skills are become more valuable in the work place. The ability to work in a team, handle pressure, meet deadlines, and deliver results are all relevant to working life, as well as being a key part of your sporting life! Leadership and public speaking are additional skills that can add something extra to your resume.

Some of the skills you may have include:

-Adaptability and flexibility

You are probably familiar with international travel, with schedule changes, training and competing in new and unfamiliar environments. If you are confident in your ability to get your training done and meet your personal athletic goals no matter your environment, then you will be able to handle a working environment where change and flexibility are constant.

-Cross-cultural skills

You have probably visited many different countries and cities during sporting events, interacting with different cultures and fellow athletes from a wide range of social, religious and cultural backgrounds. Having respect for other cultures and being open to communication with others from different backgrounds is a key skill.

- Teamwork

Although Muaythai is not a team sport, there is a sense of team work and community inherent in every Muaythai gym or training centre. When you travel abroad to take part in multi-sports Games, you will be part of your national team. Teamwork is about having respect for those around you, listening to others, identifying problems and finding ways to solve them with others. Take your National Team as an example: It will usually consist of a Head Coach, individual trainers, the team doctor, your fellow athletes, and a national referee. Each person on the team has a distinct role to play. You are meant to support each other in your individual roles.

- Ability to handle pressure

You have already thought about the pressure in balancing training with school work, social life, and competitive success. You may have had to face more pressure at a younger age than some of your friends and peers who are non-athletes. Sooner or later, everyone faces pressure and stress, and so developing strategies to manage pressure is a key life skill. If you have been able to find a healthy balance as an athlete between your duties and commitments, this is a transferable skill to working life. If you have struggled as an athlete, then this is an area you can work on to develop the skill to handle pressure.

-Ability to meet deadlines

You have learned to prepare and train yourself for competition. In the working world, you must learn to prepare and train yourself to meet deadlines. This is one reason why further education helps people to find employment later on, because they have been trained to meet academic deadlines. However, meeting deadlines is a basic life skill, and one you are surely able to master as an elite athlete.

When you know there is a deadline ahead of you, set goals and manage your time, in the same way you would if you were preparing for a competition.

-Ability to deliver results

The ability to deliver means that you are able to do what you say you are going to do. In Muaythai, as in many other sports, part of an athlete's success lies in his or her mental preparation and strength. Technique, skill, speed, stamina and strength are certainly key parts! However, when you are evenly matched with an opponent, sometimes the result of a competition becomes a question of willpower.

What is your attitude? When you meet a challenge, do you lose heart or do you give everything you've got? Identify if this is an obstacle for you and train your attitude.

In work, as in sport, a great deal depends on your attitude. In the same way that you can feel overwhelmed by your opponent in the final round, and give up, a work project can seem overwhelmingly difficult to complete. Be aware of behavioural triggers. Are you avoiding work, procrastinating, unable to find motivation? Sometimes the reason may be psychological. Until you have dealt with it, it may feel very difficult to compete or work effectively.

Sometimes feeling overwhelmed can be the result of being unprepared. If you identify this in your life, take the steps to change.

-Leadership

Have you ever taken a leadership role in your Muaythai gym, community, school, or National Federation? The five pillars of Muaythai, respect, honour, tradition, excellence and fair play, are

key values for a good leader. In this sense, tradition means being aware where you have come from, and what your background is, not failing to be innovative!

Are there leadership opportunities in your National Federation? Are you taking part in your national Youth, Female or Athlete's Commission?

-Public Speaking

As an elite level athlete, you will encounter the press and media. Managing them is a useful skill. Although it can be difficult or unexpected at first, learning how to talk to the media, and to deliver your own message, is a valuable skill. You may think that being good at public speaking is a skill that some have, and some don't. However, like all skills, public speaking can be learned!

Have you ever trained hard for a competition, felt nervous right before, but gone into the ring and competed to the best of your abilities? Public speaking can be like that. The more practise you have, the more comfortable you will feel. You may always feel a little bit nervous, but if you are prepared, you know that you can always get into the ring.

When you are delivering a message, either for yourself, sponsors, or campaigns you represent, practise what you are going to say. Think about the topic carefully, as if you had to explain it to your parents or a good friend. The more you know your material or the topic you are speaking about, the easier it will be.

If someone asked you about the last time you competed, could you describe it? Could you explain what happened, round by round, what the score was, what your opponent was like, and what your coach said afterward? You probably could. That's because you are so used to competing in Muaythai that you know it well. Think about it like that.

If you find you are nervous or not confident public speaking, don't be discouraged. Keep trying. You will find that you will grow comfortable as you get used to it, and your sense of confidence grows.

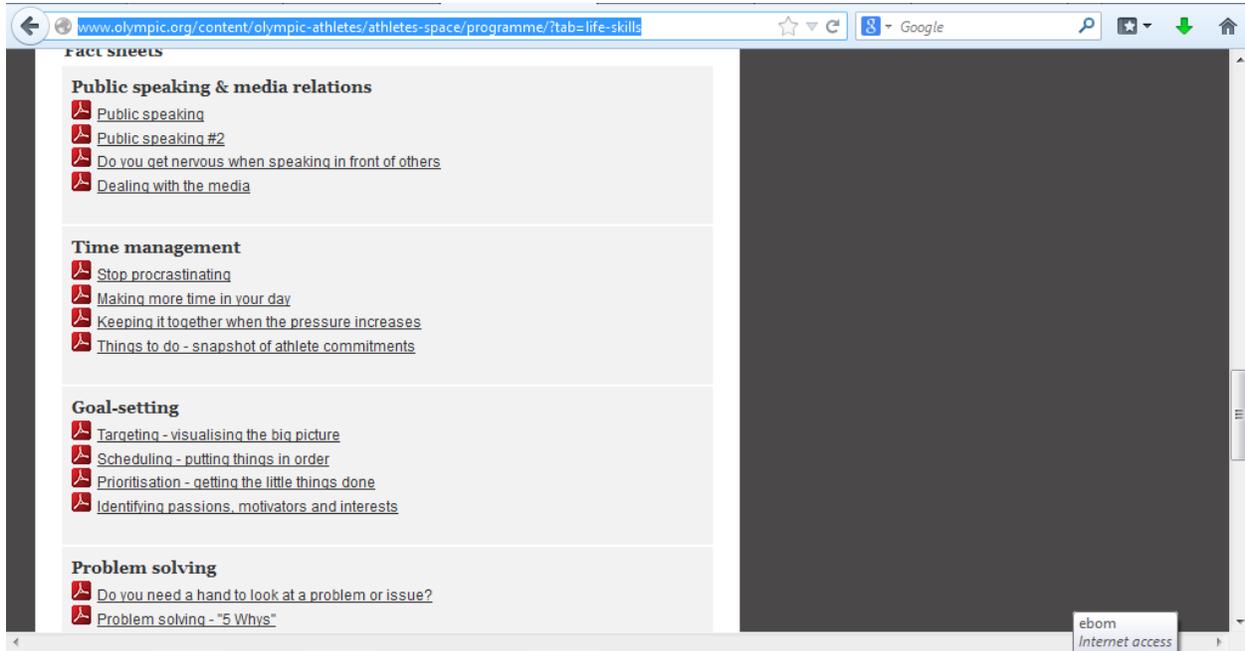
In the work place, being able to express yourself clearly and confidently is a valuable skill.

For more resources, please visit:

<http://www.olympic.org/content/olympic-athletes/athletes-space/programme/?tab=life-skills>

The IOC Life Skills page lists resources on Public speaking & media relations, Time management, Goal-setting, Problem solving, and Planners (Budget and Time planners).

Under each section are downloadable factsheets in pdf format, which you can interact with. Click to download each pdf.



Screenshot of some of the IOC Athlete Career Programme e-content under “Life skills”

4. How do I find a job and what tools do I need?

Finding employment often occurs via connections and contacts you have made and people you know. This is what is meant by the term “networking”: You build a collection of contacts in order to increase your options and choices in a variety of fields.

However, you may also find out about jobs through the newspaper or online. Job placement agencies can help you in your search for a job. If you have a clear, targeted idea of what you want to do, it is easier to narrow down the field and pursue jobs that are the right fit for you.

When you are pursuing a job, work experience can be a key factor. Think about the work that you can do while you are an athlete, and the work you want to do when you cease being an athlete.

The first question to ask is: What kind of job do I need?

a) Do you need a job to support yourself while you are an athlete? To pursue your sporting career, you may need to work in order to keep up with equipment, training and basic living costs. Your main goal is to be able to train, compete and live.

In this case, you are probably not seeking a full-time career. Instead, you are looking for a support job, perhaps even part-time work. It may not be highly paid or the job you’ve always dreamed of, but if it helps you to pay the bills, and is flexible, this is the correct fit in helping you to meet your goals.

b) Perhaps your sport is able to subsidize your costs and can support you. In this case, maybe you can work part time or pursue an internship (unpaid work designed to give you exposure to a career)

c) Perhaps your circumstances change. For example, you may suddenly gain a sponsor, or lose a sponsor. Changing contexts means your employment situation can shift as well, to adapt to your needs.

d) Are you retiring from your sports career and deciding what to do next? In this case, you will want to consider the networks of connections and contacts you have developed during your sporting career. By now, you probably have some idea of what you want to do, and you may have work or training experience in the field. Now is the time for you to seriously pursue your career.

Be aware that the career job you want may not come along right away. You may need to work other jobs in order to meet your living expenses. Be prepared for this and don’t get discouraged. Find the job you need to support you while you keep searching for the right career fit for you.

There are a few basic tools that can help you in obtaining employment:

1. Know how to prepare a Curriculum Vitae (CV)/ Resume

A CV lists your work and academic experience and any other qualifications or skills which make you suitable for employment. A good CV explains who you are briefly, and precisely. It is designed to show that you fit the job you are applying for. Although circumstances vary, in general a CV should not be longer than one page.

In most CVs, you are expected to provide your full name, address and contact information such as telephone number and email. In some countries, it is normal to include a picture of yourself, and to list your nationality and birthdate on your CV. However, in other countries, this would be considered unprofessional.

Do research into the standards of the country you are applying for work in. Business practices vary from place to place.

Some job postings will ask that you list references (former employers or other contacts who can confirm your character and level of skill), or else your salary history (how much you earned at your past jobs). Unless you are specifically asked to include these in your CV by the job posting, it is better to leave them out.

Most CVs begin with a list of your relevant work experience, work that is related to the job you are applying for. Then you should list your academic qualifications and skills. Make it clear that you are, or have been, an athlete. Explain how this has provided you with skills that you can use in the workplace.

Before you send your CV anywhere, proofread it. Then, proofread it again! Employers are often turned off by basic spelling or other errors. Have someone you know review your CV and give you their opinion. Be prepared to take criticism. Use your contacts to find the person you know in your chosen field to give you their opinion of your CV. Be ready to make changes.

2. Know how to prepare for a job interview

One of the most exciting, but also nerve-wracking experiences, can be getting a call back from a potential employer. If it is for a job that you really want, you may feel nervous.

Being asked for an interview means that you are being considered as one of several candidates for a job. Your CV has been successful in getting you noticed.

An interview can take place in person, on a conference call over the phone, or even via skype. If your interview is taking place in person, dress appropriately for the kind of job it is.

One basic rule for an interview is not to be late. Be on location for the meeting or ready for the call about 10-15 minutes before it has been scheduled to happen. This is enough time that you will not feel rushed when the interview begins. Being calm and confident will probably help your interview better than being flustered or stressed.

Know about the background of the company, business, or organisation to which you are applying, as well as the position you are interested in. Research ahead of time and think of relevant questions you can ask, if you are given the opportunity in the interview.

They may ask about your strengths and weaknesses. Be ready to give short, precise examples of both, and in the case of weaknesses, explain your strategy for dealing with the weakness.

They may ask what kind of salary you are expecting. If you do not already know what an appropriate salary would be from previous work exposure or experience in the same field, be sure that you have researched this.

Make your history as an athlete a dynamic part of your interview. Keep it short, simple and powerful.

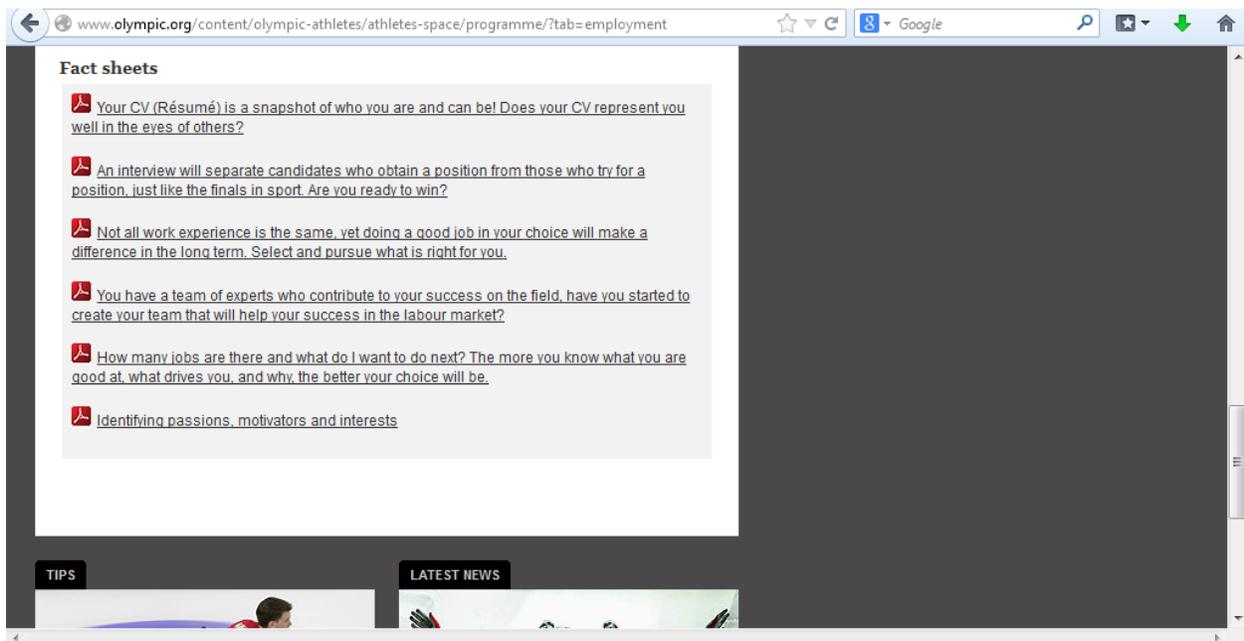
For more resources, please visit:

<http://www.olympic.org/content/olympic-athletes/athletes-space/programme/?tab=employment>

The “Employment” page lists the following resources:

- *Your CV (Résumé) is a snapshot of who you are and can be! Does your CV represent you well in the eyes of others?*
- *An interview will separate candidates who obtain a position from those who try for a position, just like the finals in sport. Are you ready to win?*
- *Not all work experience is the same, yet doing a good job in your choice will make a difference in the long term. Select and pursue what is right for you.*
- *You have a team of experts who contribute to your success on the field, have you started to create your team that will help your success in the labour market?*
- *How many jobs are there and what do I want to do next? The more you know what you are good at, what drives you, and why, the better your choice will be.*
- *Identifying passions, motivators and interests*

Each is a downloadable factsheet in pdf format, which you can interact with. Click to download each pdf.



Screenshot of some of the IOC Athlete Career Programme e-content under “Employment”

5. What difficulties may I encounter?

There are two areas as a young athlete where you may be more vulnerable than you think: The first is knowing how to budget, and the second is having realistic expectations. A more experienced athlete may have already learned these lessons, sometimes by watching others, sometimes through personal experience.

How to budget

Before we talk about how to budget, what is a budget? Why is it important?

A budget is a financial plan for a quantified period of time. For example, it could be the plan of how much money you spend in a week, month, or year.

A budget takes into account your assets (salary/wage, other source of income) and expenses (all the things you spend money on). When you make a budget, you are able to see how you spend the money you earn and if you have any left over at the end of every planned period. If you spend more than you earn, you will have debt (money you owe to other people). If you spend less than you earn, you will have a surplus (extra money for yourself).

If you make a budget and discover that you are frequently in debt, you must see how you can make changes to your lifestyle. If, on the other hand, you see that you have a surplus, you must decide what you are going to do. Any surplus that you do not spend becomes your savings. You can invest it, as part of a longer term plan, or keep it in your account in case you think you may need it later (for example, if you know that the month after next you will have higher expenses).

Making a budget is important because it allows you to plan financially for your future. Rather than wondering if you will have enough money to do something in the future, you will know whether or not you do, because you have planned it. This is part of setting financial goals. If you budget, you will be aware when you are spending more money than you have, and you will know exactly how much money you should be spending.

In order to make a budget, list all your sources of income over a fixed period of time (week, month, year). Then list all your expenses over the same fixed period of time. You will be able to see the state of your finances. Some of your costs are living expenses, such as rent, utilities, food. Some are transport costs.

When you list all the things you spend money on, it may surprise you. You may see ways in which you can cut your spending and increase your savings. It could be as simple as having one less meal in a restaurant every month, or taking public transport instead of a taxi. It could be more complex, like finding an apartment with cheaper rent, or finding a part time job to meet your costs.

Why is planning financially for the future so important? Why do you need to save? The simple fact is, that while you are an athlete, perhaps there are sources of income that you are taking for granted, sponsorships, grants, etc. You may think it is more worthwhile to live expensively now, while your cash flow is strong. However, what happens when that income source is no longer available? Will you be able to adjust your lifestyle? Will you wish you had savings you could rely on?

As you age, you may gain responsibilities in your life, and may have bigger expenses: a car, a house, school fees for your children, etc. These future possibilities are what you can be saving for now.

A detailed budget calculator is available on the IOC Athlete Career Programme website, here:

http://www.olympic.org/Documents/Elite_Athletes/BUDGET_PLANNER_CALCULATOR.pdf

How to be realistic

What does it mean to be realistic? It means knowing what you can really achieve. For example, if you think that you can win the World Championships without training for them, this is unrealistic. Although there are many athletes practising Muaythai at the amateur level, there are not as many who can really make it with a successful career in professional Muaythai. This is a common trend in all sports.

You must be realistic about your chances as a professional Muaythaiathlete, if that is something you want for yourself.

Often the athletes who make it at the professional level have had to sacrifice some things along the way, the opportunity to pursue further education, other work experience, etc.

Don't make those sacrifices unless it is realistic. There are some many ways to keep Muaythai a part of your life while you pursue other career options.

If a promoter or agent makes you an offer that sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Don't believe in unrealistic promises, and don't sign a contract that you haven't read or don't understand.

At the end of the day, no one can decide for you. You must know yourself and your abilities. Hopefully you will be surrounded by people you trust, who can give you good advice.