

Recognition of talented children

Recommendations for Teachers



Background

The TALENT project emerges from a strategic collaboration between seven European countries, including Croatia, Italy, Greece, Malta, Cyprus, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Spearheaded by the Centre of Excellence of Split-Dalmatia County (CI SDZ), this project brings together a diverse consortium of universities, non-governmental organisations, and network organisations. This partnership leverages the unique strengths and experiences of each member to address the multifaceted challenges faced by young athletes pursuing dual careers in sports and academics.

Initiated on December 1st, 2022, and set to span over 30 months, the TALENT project is designed to foster a comprehensive approach to talent identification and development. By incorporating advanced educational techniques and innovative sports science technologies, the project aims to create a supportive ecosystem that facilitates the harmonious growth of young talents in both their educational pursuits and athletic endeavours.

This multinational collaboration is not just a pooling of resources but a fusion of cultural perspectives and expertise, which enriches the project's approach and enhances its applicability across different socio-economic contexts. The synergy of this diverse consortium is anticipated to set new standards in the detection and nurturing of sports talents, offering a model that can be adapted by other regions around the world.

Purpose of the project

The primary goal of the TALENT project is to seamlessly integrate sports and education to support young athletes in managing dual careers effectively. This integration is crucial as the demands of maintaining high performance in both academics and athletics can place significant stress on young individuals, often leading to burnout or early dropout from one or both fields.

Objectives of the project

- **Development** of methodologies for early talent identification
- **Adaptation** of educational programmes to meet the needs of athletes
- **Establishment** of a supportive environment that involves coaches, educators, and families.

Purpose of the TALENT Recommendations

Through the developed online platform, these recommendations are targeting teachers, parents, coaches, sports clubs and decision makers to better understand what the needs of talented children are, in order to support their development and prevent drop-out from school or from sports.

Introduction

As an educator, you play a crucial role in shaping the academic and personal development of young athletes who try to balance their passion for sports with their studies. Supporting talented students in managing dual careers requires flexibility, understanding, and tailored teaching strategies. This booklet provides practical recommendations on how to create an inclusive learning environment, accommodate training schedules, and foster motivation to prevent school drop-out. By recognising the challenges student-athletes face, you can help them succeed both in the classroom and in their sports careers.



The role of teachers in the talent development process

Teachers play a vital role in shaping young minds and fostering talent development. Their expertise, passion, and dedication provide the foundation for students to discover and nurture their abilities. While teachers typically care for children, fostering curiosity and basic skills, teachers guide students through primary education, helping them build academic foundations. By tailoring teaching methods to students' unique needs, providing encouragement through recognition and commendation, and incorporating experiential learning opportunities such as projects, experiments, and field trips, they can cultivate critical thinking and problem-solving skills essential for real-world success.

Beyond the classroom, teachers also play a crucial role in building strong relationships with parents to support students' growth. Regular meetings with parents help track students' progress, address challenges, and align support strategies at home and school. When a student demonstrates exceptional talent in a particular field, educators can facilitate connections with mentors who provide specialized guidance and encouragement. Ultimately, these professionals are pillars of the education system, equipping students with the tools, resources, and confidence they need to reach their full potential.

Here are some ways in which you can effectively support your student-athlete within the school setting, ensuring they thrive both academically and athletically.

1. Mentoring inclusive environments

Mentoring inclusive environments presents a multifaceted exploration of talent recognition, talent development, and support within educational settings. By recognising the signs of talents in classroom settings and understanding the nuances of talent identification, teachers can lay the groundwork for personalised learning experiences that cater to the unique strengths and interests of each student.

2. Signs of talent in classroom settings

Teachers play a crucial role in identifying and nurturing students' talents, distinguishing between natural giftedness and developed talent. Giftedness refers to innate abilities in intellectual, creative, socio-affective, or sensor-motor domains, while talent emerges when these abilities are systematically refined to an advanced level. Although all students possess unique strengths, those who are gifted often stand out from their peers, requiring targeted support and opportunities to help them cultivate their potential.

Being different from others underscores the critical need for an inclusive approach in education. An inclusive educational approach ensures that every student, regardless of their abilities or differences, has the chance to develop and apply their talents. By creating a supportive learning environment, teachers can encourage students to explore their skills, engage in meaningful learning experiences, and receive the guidance they need to progress. This approach not only benefits gifted students but also fosters a culture of growth and development for all learners.

3. Inclusive practices for talent recognition

Talent recognition should be integrated into the learning process through inclusive practices that nurture cognitive abilities such as:

Reflection

Concentration

Decision-making

Problem-solving

Leadership

Vigilance

Quick thinking

These practices should encourage active participation and research while considering environmental and intrapersonal factors like motivation, self-management, and adaptability. Recognising talent, particularly in sports, should extend beyond physical abilities and include perceptual-cognitive skills that allow individuals to excel in multiple domains. By fostering interactions with their environment, inclusive practices enable talented individuals to apply their skills beyond their primary area of expertise, ensuring holistic development. Rather than being confined to a specific field, talent development should provide opportunities for growth across various disciplines, allowing gifted athletes to maximise their potential in diverse areas.

When working with a potentially gifted or talented individual look for the following signs:

- A. Reflecting** on the issue at hand included self-initiated analysis of the problem, critical review, and detailed evaluation of phases in the process to determine the best course of action
- B. High level of concentration** to the task at hand, paying attention to details and asking for clear explanations and justifications
- C. Taking responsibility** for their own actions and decisions
- D. Not deflecting** from problems, but looking at them as challenges which lead to quick problem-solving solutions
- E. Exhibiting initiative** to lead the team and taking into consideration each team members thoughts and ideas
- F. Paying close attention** to the actions of their team members and rarely losing concentration and motivation.



4. Implementation of Personalised Learning Plans (PLP)¹ for talented students

The system develops personalised learning methods and educational content for students with unique characteristics and interests. Dual-oriented learning is becoming relevant in the context of increasing creativity, social significance, and cultural value of the result, thereby contributing to the self-organisation of the cognitive activity system, goal setting, and the change of semantic attitudes.

Implementing Personalised Learning Plans (PLPs) for sport-talented students can contribute to the student's self-organisation and goal setting and requires close collaboration between educators, coaches, parents, and students.

You, as teachers, need to be aware (in close cooperation with coaches and parents) on how to recognise the special needs of talents in order to successfully implement PLPs for talented students. Here are five points you should have in mind:

A. Recognition of talents

You need to be aware of the characteristics and behaviours associated with giftedness to accurately identify talented students who may benefit from PLPs. Without this awareness, talented students may go unnoticed, and PLPs may not be initiated for those who need them.

¹ For more information on Personalised Lesson Plans here:

www.researchgate.net/publication/320587985_Key_Features_of_Personalized_Learning

B. Understanding diverse needs

Gifted students have diverse needs and may require different approaches to learning compared to their peers. You must be aware of these diverse needs to tailor PLPs effectively. Without this understanding, PLPs may not address the specific needs of talented students, resulting in suboptimal outcomes.

C. Individualisation of support

PLPs are designed to provide individualised support and resources to help gifted students reach their full potential. If you are aware of the unique needs of talents, then you can personalise PLPs to address specific strengths, interests, and challenges of each student. This individualised approach maximises the effectiveness of PLPs and ensures that talented students receive the support they need.

D. Collaboration and advocacy

In order to have a collaborative and supportive school environment, you need to advocate for the needs of talented students. You need to understand the importance of PLPs, while collaborating with colleagues, administrators, and parents to ensure their successful implementation. This collaborative effort enhances the effectiveness of PLPs and promotes positive outcomes for talented students.

E. Monitoring and adjustment

You play a key role in monitoring the progress of talented students and adjusting PLPs as needed. Awareness of talents enables you to recognise signs of progress or areas requiring modification in PLPs. By actively monitoring and adjusting PLPs, you can ensure that talented students continue to receive appropriate support and opportunities for growth.

5. Provision of enrichment opportunities within the classroom

For talents to emerge, it is essential to provide a range of enrichment activities that enhance motivation, self-regulation, a willingness to learn, cognitive skills, and emotional control. For talented or gifted athletes, enrichment programmes should facilitate the transfer of their sport-related abilities to classroom activities, allowing them to apply discipline, focus, and perseverance in an academic setting.

Sport naturally fosters satisfaction, confidence, high engagement, and meaningful learning experiences. Integrating these skills into the classroom as enrichment opportunities can help keep talented individuals motivated and support their continued development. Activities should be designed to stimulate their ability to take initiative, make decisions, and lead, ensuring they can apply their talents across multiple domains.

Here are some proposed activities:

A. Team building activities to induce interaction and collaboration with others in the classroom

B. Challenging tasks which ask for detailed analysis, decision-making and reflection on good and bad decisions

C. Activities with a planning phase (e.g. project-oriented activities) which require a set of preparatory actions such as a to-do-list, scheduling and consulting with other team members

D. Developing negotiation skills reflecting on a win-win scenario

E. Introducing goal-oriented projects to promote collaboration, communication, teamwork, dedication, focus and evaluation.

6. Social and emotional support

As a teacher, promoting the social and emotional well-being of talented individuals requires understanding their unique emotional needs and social expectations. Developing emotional intelligence has been identified as a key factor in fostering emotional growth and resilience among gifted students, as it helps them manage stress, adapt to challenges, and integrate their thoughts, emotions, and behaviours in both academic and everyday settings. Emotional intelligence is essentially the skill of recognising one's own emotions, as well as recognising the emotions of others, and based on that, appropriately regulating one's emotions and behaviour, which allows us to have successful relationships (with ourselves and others). While some research suggests that gifted students do not struggle with social exclusion, others argue that they often feel invisible, leading to a lack of coping mechanisms when set apart from their peers. Recognising these specific emotional traits and addressing them through targeted support can enhance their cognitive potential, social adaptation, and overall well-being.

It's important to promote the development of the following skills:

- A. 3 Selves (self-efficiency, self-confidence and self-esteem)
- B. Autonomy
- C. Ability to connect with others and build healthy relationships
- D. Sense of belonging
- E. Emotional intelligence

Peer-interaction is another component which needs to be promoted within the classroom. Here are some questions that can be used in the classroom which promote positive peer interactions:

- A. How do I feel about my peers' thinking and feelings?
- B. How do I feel about my thinking and feelings?
- C. How do I expect others will react to my intentions?
- D. What could others misinterpret about my intentions?
- E. How would I formulate the intent of others based on their actions and words?



7. Promote cooperative learning

Within the classroom environment, **formal cooperative learning** consists of students working together over several weeks to achieve shared learning goals and jointly complete specific tasks and assignments.

Through this teaching-learning methodology, the teacher becomes the director of the learning process, and the student becomes the actor. The role of the teacher is fundamental because they oversee the structure of the learning environment, construct the activities according to the learning and socialisation objectives and teach the social skills required to deal effectively with cooperative activities.

More specifically, the teacher:

- **Provides** the groups with feedback in itinerary
- **Guides** questions posed by the students
- **Relaunches** the issues with further stimuli
- **Helps** the group explore all possible avenues
- **Monitors** the processes by leading the groups to reflect on activities based on their experiences making reflective analyses of both learning and socialisation.

When emphasis is given on flexible scheduling, group collaboration, and peer support it may improve academic performance, enhance time management skills, and increase the sense of belonging among student-athletes.

8. Career and life skills development

You can support student-athletes by helping them prepare for their future, whether in sports, academics, or professional careers.

A. **Guidance on higher education opportunities** – You could inform student-athletes about scholarships, university sports programmes, and academic pathways that align with their interests.

B. **Career counselling** – You could provide guidance on alternative career options to ensure that student-athletes are prepared for life beyond sports.

C. **Teaching transferable skills** – You could emphasise skills such as teamwork, leadership, discipline, and goal setting helps student-athletes succeed in various life domains.

Conclusion

Teachers play a vital role in supporting student-athletes by offering academic flexibility, fostering a supportive environment, collaborating with coaches, and providing emotional and career guidance. By adopting these approaches, you can help student-athletes balance their dual responsibilities effectively, ensuring their holistic development and long-term success. Schools must recognise the importance of this role and provide teachers with the necessary resources and training to support student-athletes in the best possible way.

Further information can be found on the project's website

www.talent-edu.eu





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Recommendations for Sports Clubs



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Through the developed online platform, these recommendations are targeting teachers, parents, coaches, sports clubs and decision makers to better understand what the needs of talented children are, in order to support their development and prevent drop-out from school or from sports.



Introduction

Sports clubs are essential in creating an environment where young athletes can excel without having to choose between education and their sporting careers. By implementing policies that support dual careers, clubs can ensure that athletes receive the necessary academic flexibility and personal development opportunities. This booklet offers strategies for fostering collaboration with schools, providing academic support services, and promoting well-being to help athletes sustain both their education and their sporting aspirations.

Sports clubs serve as the foundation of athletic development, providing the necessary infrastructure, coaching expertise, and a competitive environment for young athletes to grow. While talent develops successfully through structured training, clubs must take a more holistic approach that balances sports with education, health, and career development. The modern sports club is no longer just a place to train, therefore, it must be a support system that nurtures young athletes through every phase of their development.

The role of clubs extends beyond the pitch. More precisely, young athletes require guidance in managing academic commitments, handling mental pressures, and preparing for careers, whether in sports or beyond. Clubs must work closely with schools, policymakers, and families to establish structured dual-career programmes, financial support mechanisms, and inclusive environments that allow every athlete to succeed.

The role of sports clubs in talent development

Sports clubs play a pivotal role in shaping young athletes' futures. Their responsibility goes beyond technical training solely. They must create an environment where talent is recognised early, nurtured systematically, and provided with the resources to succeed in both sports and life. Club management may not have a direct influence on athletes, but they play a crucial indirect role by carefully selecting highly skilled professionals for their expert team and creating an environment that fosters excellence through adequate working conditions. This is especially important when working with children, the experts hired by the club should also have a high level of pedagogical skills in addition to the skills of coaching the chosen sport. The expert team in each club are essentially the people on whose quality of work the development of an athlete's career depends the most. Therefore, clubs should encourage coaches to continue their education with the aim of further development, especially in the area of positive youth development.

To effectively support young athletes, clubs should focus on:

- A. Talent identification and early development:** Clubs must develop scouting programmes and partnerships with schools to recognise promising young athletes early and provide structured training from a young age.
- B. Holistic athlete support:** Training programmes should integrate sports science, mental health support, and injury prevention strategies to ensure long-term development.

C. Education and career planning: Clubs must collaborate with schools and institutions to create dual-career pathways that enable athletes to balance education with their sporting ambitions.

D. Sustainability and financial stability: Clubs must diversify funding sources through sponsorships, government support, and community engagement to ensure long-term growth.

Sports clubs do not just provide training and competition opportunities. In addition to that, they shape the entire athletic journey of a young athlete. Their environment plays a fundamental role in developing discipline, work ethic, and perseverance in players. Beyond training sessions, clubs are responsible for instilling core values such as teamwork, resilience, and leadership, which contribute to both sporting excellence and personal growth.

To effectively support talent development, sports clubs must create individualised training programmes that cater to athletes at different stages of development. Young athletes require different forms of coaching, support, and motivation than elite-level players. Clubs should provide progressive training models gradually increasing intensity while ensuring that players develop technical, tactical, and psychological skills in a structured way.

Additionally, a critical aspect of sports club development is mental well-being and athlete psychology. Many young athletes face high expectations from coaches, parents, and themselves, which can lead to stress and burnout. Clubs must employ sports psychologists, mentorship programmes, and educational workshops to help athletes manage pressure, stay motivated, and avoid overtraining.

Injury prevention and recovery are also crucial in talent development. Clubs must work with medical professionals, physiotherapists, and strength and conditioning experts to implement injury prevention programmes, ensure safe training environments, and facilitate rehabilitation processes when necessary. Promising athletes may suffer long-term setbacks that hinder their progression without proper medical support.

Furthermore, career guidance is an essential part of sports club responsibility. While many young athletes dream of becoming professionals, the reality is that only a small percentage achieve elite-level careers. Clubs must prepare athletes for alternative career paths in sports management, coaching, sports science, or even completely different fields. Career counseling programmes, internships, and education on financial management should be included in club structures.

Community involvement and social responsibility are also becoming increasingly important for sports clubs. Clubs that actively engage in community programmes, charity events, and youth outreach initiatives build stronger relationships with the public and develop athletes who are not only skilled but also socially responsible and connected to their surroundings.

Clubs can create an environment where young athletes thrive both on and off the field by expanding their role beyond physical training. A well-structured club nurtures long-term athletic, academic, and career success, ensuring that young talent reaches its full potential.

Strengthening club-school partnerships

Collaboration between sports clubs and educational institutions is essential for supporting young athletes. Many players leave sports prematurely due to academic pressures or a lack of structured dual-career support. Sports clubs can mitigate this issue by establishing strong partnerships with schools.

Sports clubs can take several proactive steps to build successful partnerships with schools:

- A. First, clubs should introduce flexible training schedules that align with school hours and academic calendars. By adapting training programmes around peak academic periods, clubs can reduce conflicts between education and sport, allowing athletes to perform well in both areas.
- B. Another crucial approach is offering academic support within the club environment. By hiring tutors or creating study centers within club facilities, student-athletes can complete assignments and prepare for exams before or after training sessions. This ensures they do not fall behind in their studies while maintaining high training loads.

- C. Shared resources and facilities are another avenue for strengthening cooperation. Schools and clubs should co-develop and share training fields, gym spaces, and rehabilitation centers, reducing costs and ensuring young athletes have access to top-quality facilities.
- D. Additionally, sports mentorship programmes can be established where professional athletes or former student athletes provide guidance and motivation to young players. These mentorship initiatives offer invaluable career advice and help young athletes navigate the challenges of balancing education and sport.
- E. Lastly, sports clubs must actively engage with parents and teachers, educating them about the benefits of dual careers. Hosting seminars and workshops for parents on how to support student-athletes can lead to stronger family involvement in the athlete's development journey.



Table 1. Examples of strategies for strengthening partnerships

Strategy	Description
Academic support programmes	Clubs provide access to tutoring services, learning centres, and online education platforms within club facilities to help athletes keep up with their studies.
Dual-career scholarships	Joint initiatives between schools, local governments, and clubs to offer financial assistance for young athletes who need support to continue both their education and sports training.
Internships and career development	Clubs collaborate with companies, universities, and sports federations to offer work experience programmes, preparing athletes for potential careers beyond professional sports.
Parental engagement seminars	Clubs organise information sessions for parents, educating them on how to support their child's dual-career pathway without adding excessive pressure.

Sport clubs, in cooperation with schools and policy makers, should enable not only talented children to develop their potential to the maximum, but also enable every child who wants to play sports to be able to train within school sports clubs and/or in club sports for all within recreational groups that are also monitored because a child who shows competitive potential and interest can be redirected to a competitive group at any time.

One of the biggest challenges sports clubs face is long-term financial stability. To maintain high-quality programmes, clubs need sustainable funding strategies beyond just membership fees. Several approaches can help secure financial stability:

- A. Sponsorship and corporate partnerships:** Clubs should actively seek sponsorship deals with local businesses, sports brands, and large corporations that align with their values.
- B. Government and federation grants:** Many national sports federations and governments offer funding programmes for grassroots and youth development initiatives.
- C. Community engagement and fundraising:** Clubs should engage their communities by hosting fundraising events, tournaments, and initiatives that generate additional revenue.
- D. Scholarship and financial aid programmes:** Establishing financial aid systems ensures that talented athletes from all economic backgrounds can participate without financial strain.

Conclusion

Sports clubs are at the forefront of athlete development, education, and career preparation. Clubs can create an environment where young athletes can excel on and off the field by fostering strong school partnerships, ensuring financial sustainability, and offering comprehensive athlete support. With the right policies and initiatives, clubs can truly become hubs of excellence in both sports and education.

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As a parent, you are a pillar of support in your child's journey to balance sports and education. Managing a dual career for your child can be demanding, requiring emotional resilience and a strong support system. This booklet offers guidance on how to encourage your child's academic and athletic ambitions, establish open communication with teachers and coaches, and recognise early signs of stress or burnout. By understanding their unique challenges, you can help them go through this journey successfully and ensure they have a well-rounded future.

It is essential that you, as parents, understand that while your support can be instrumental in your child's success and confidence, certain parental behaviours can also hinder their growth. Your support should empower rather than pressure, fostering both ambition and independence. Finding the right balance between guidance and autonomy allows your child to build resilience, self-motivation and a healthy relationship with both sports and academics. By creating a positive and nurturing environment, you can help them reach their full potential and thrive both academically and athletically.

Here are some ways in which you can effectively support your child's talent development while maintaining a healthy balance between sports and education:

1. Understanding dual careers

A dual career refers to the pursuit of both sports and academic success simultaneously. Young athletes often face intense schedules, including training, competitions, travel, and schoolwork, which can lead to stress, exhaustion, and sometimes the difficult choice of prioritising one over the other. You can act as facilitators by providing structure, encouragement, and practical solutions to help your child excel in both domains. Your support in arranging and helping them follow their schedule is pivotal as well as making sure they follow a balanced nutrition schedule in between obligations.

2. Recognising talents

The second step is **recognising a child's talents**, which may appear in different ways—not just academically or athletically, but also creatively, socially, emotionally, or even spiritually. You should actively observe your child, listen to their interests, and pay attention to recurring patterns of enthusiasm and dedication. A child's natural curiosity and passion for certain activities often serve as early indicators of their hidden potential.

It is important to note that your positive involvement, as a parent, fosters self-confidence, resilience in competitive environments, and a deep commitment to one's talent. Creating a strong parent-child relationship also can enhance intrinsic motivation and the feeling of being supported and understood. But, if at any time you feel overwhelmed or unsure on how to provide this support to your child, seek help from professionals who can guide you to navigate your child's specific talent and emotions in order to create a more effective developmental environment.

3. Teaching prioritisation and goal setting

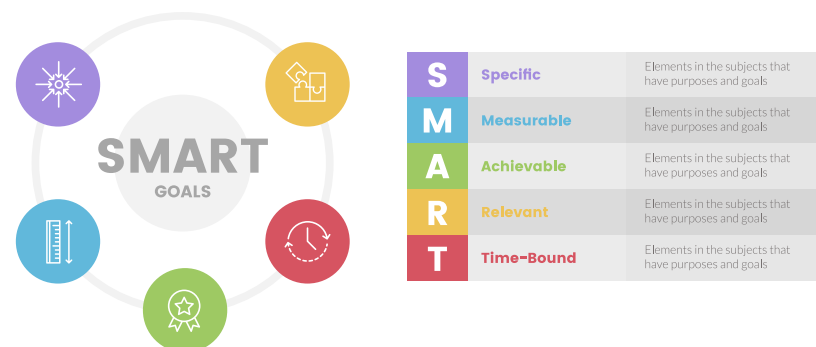
Your role is to encourage a developmental mindset by noting persistence and focus in achieving set goals. If your child declares that he or she cannot do something, emphasize the word “YET”, which indicates that it is only a current state that will change when energy is invested in the right way in the process of progress. Help your child establish short-term and long-term goals for both their academic and athletic pursuits. Encourage them to prioritise tasks effectively so they can stay on track without feeling overwhelmed.

Here are some ways you can do that:

A. Encourage your child to set SMART goals¹ (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound). These goals could be short-term (weekly or monthly) or long-term (yearly).

SMART GOALS

The SMART in SMART goals stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound. A SMART goal is used to help guide goal setting and makes it easier to track progress.



¹ More information on S.M.A.R.T. goals here:
www.ucop.edu/local-human-resources/_files/performance-appraisal/How+to+write+SMART+Goals+v2.pdf

- B. **Encourage daily and weekly planning** by using planners or digital apps for their class schedule, training sessions, upcoming exams. Some tools you can use are a simple planner or apps such as Google Calendar, Trello or Notion.
- C. **Teach them how to prioritise** by helping them rank their tasks based on urgency and importance. In this way, your child will have a clear picture of their responsibilities and their tasks which could make them feel in control of their time.
- D. **Create a balance** between academics and sports by keeping an open communication with teachers and coaches and emphasise that rest and recovery for your child are as important in order to avoid physical exhaustion or fatigue.
- E. **Monitor and adjust goals** over time by regularly reviewing your child's set goals, celebrating small achievements to keep them motivated and feeling valued and encouraging flexibility.

4. Encouragement and support

Once talents are identified, **encouragement and support** become essential. Providing children with the right resources—whether it's a musical instrument, books, or access to specialised training—can help them explore and refine their abilities. However, while recognition and praise can be strong motivators, they must be genuine and balanced to prevent overconfidence or dependency on external validation. Encouragement should foster intrinsic motivation rather than pressure to meet external expectations.

5. Setting boundaries

At the same time, **setting boundaries** is necessary to maintain a well-rounded life. While pursuing excellence in a particular field is commendable, children also need time for social interactions, relaxation, and unstructured play. Learning to manage both success and failure is a crucial part of personal growth, and shielding children from setbacks can hinder their resilience. You, as parents, should embrace failure as a natural part of the learning process, helping your child develop problem-solving skills and perseverance rather than fear of making mistakes.



6. Communication with experts

Engaging with professionals can further support a child's development. **Communicating with experts**, such as teachers, coaches, or mentors for specific areas of interest, provides valuable insights into strengths and areas for improvement. However, this collaboration should be child-centred—forcing mentorship upon a child without considering their readiness or interest can lead to burnout rather than progress. Similarly, while teachers can offer important perspectives, their views should complement, not replace, a child's own experiences and preferences.

Below we provide some strategies which you, as parents, can use to maintain strong and productive communication with your child's coaches and/or mentors:

- A. Share** your child's goals from the beginning
- B. Make sure** to regularly check in with your child's coaches and mentors to understand expectations, challenges and areas of improvement.
- C. Collaborate and communicate** with your child's teachers to enable maintaining their academic progress.
- D. Advocate** for flexible learning arrangement wherever possible (either at school or at sports) to achieve a balanced approach to both.
- E. Be respectful** to the coaches' and mentors' approach and engage in discussions with a problem-solving mindset instead of blaming one side.

7. Providing psychological support

Beyond academic and skill development, **psychological support** is equally important. Fostering self-confidence helps children believe in their abilities, but you should be mindful of not instilling arrogance or an inflated sense of superiority. Talent development can also be stressful, and excessive pressure or unrealistic expectations can lead to anxiety and mental health struggles. This means that your role is to be present and included but not the main actor and in charge of the talent development process.

As a parent, you need to develop active listening skills in which you affirm compassion and attention through statements while listening, recognizing and encouraging the child's speech and avoid a corrective style that will result in defensiveness in children. You should also avoid giving advice to your children immediately after the competitions and avoid criticising them all together. Always opt for the encouragement and positive statements, e.g. "I always enjoy watching you play".

Establishing a balanced daily routine that accommodates schoolwork, training, rest, and recreation ensures they do not feel overwhelmed. Additionally, helping them develop time management skills can prevent overload and exhaustion, promoting a healthy balance between their commitments. By maintaining a stress-free and emotionally supportive home atmosphere, you can provide the reassurance and guidance they need to thrive both academically and athletically. However, if you notice that your child is anxious, remind them of techniques that can be used to manage anxiety (slow rhythmic breathing, positive self-talk, changing posture, accepting anxiety as a normal human emotion that can help us be more successful in sports).

8. Preparing for transitions and future planning

Dual careers often come with changes—shifting between competitive levels, academic stages, or career pathways. Guide your child in exploring future options, whether in professional sports, higher education, or alternative career paths. Having a long-term vision can reduce anxiety about the future.

Here are some ways you can do that:

- A. Discuss **long-term goals** early: Start having conversations with your child about their long-term academic interests and potential career paths beyond sports. This will encourage them to think whether they would like to pursue professional athletics or continue sports recreationally. **Goals focusing on results** in any activity should be further broken down into several process goals, as we never have control over the result, but we do have control over our thoughts and activities, so process goals should be related to them).
- B. Support the child's **emotional readiness** for transitions: Some student-athletes may face emotional challenges when they change school setting or move from amateur to professional sports. You could reassure your child that their worth is not solely tied to their athletic or academic success, encouraging their resilience and adaptability.
- C. Teach your child to make decisions and be **independent**: Encourage them to research and weigh their options, teach them how to handle setbacks and make informed decisions and let them take responsibility for their choices.

9. Negative impact of parental involvement

However, while parental involvement is essential, it can also have **negative consequences** if not managed thoughtfully. Overbearing or “helicopter” parenting² can suppress independence, creativity, and self-discovery. Some parents unconsciously project their own unfulfilled ambitions onto their children, pushing them toward achievements they once desired rather than respecting the child's own aspirations. Be aware that constant comparisons with peers can further damage self-worth, leading to feelings of inadequacy rather than motivation.

Conclusion

Ultimately, you serve as guides in your child's journey of talent development. By recognising abilities, providing the right level of support, fostering resilience, and respecting individuality, you can help your child grow into a confident, well-rounded individual who pursues their passions with enthusiasm and balance.

Further information can be found on the project's website

www.talent-edu.eu

² More information on “helicopter” parenting here: www.parents.com/parenting/better-parenting/what-is-helicopter-parenting/



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Recognition of talented children

Recommendations for
Decision makers



Background

The TALENT project emerges from a strategic collaboration between seven European countries, including Croatia, Italy, Greece, Malta, Cyprus, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Spearheaded by the Centre of Excellence of Split-Dalmatia County (CI SDZ), this project brings together a diverse consortium of universities, non-governmental organisations, and network organisations. This partnership leverages the unique strengths and experiences of each member to address the multifaceted challenges faced by young athletes pursuing dual careers in sports and academics.

Initiated on December 1st, 2022, and set to span over 30 months, the TALENT project is designed to foster a comprehensive approach to talent identification and development. By incorporating advanced educational techniques and innovative sports science technologies, the project aims to create a supportive ecosystem that facilitates the harmonious growth of young talents in both their educational pursuits and athletic endeavours.

This multinational collaboration is not just a pooling of resources but a fusion of cultural perspectives and expertise, which enriches the project's approach and enhances its applicability across different socio-economic contexts. The synergy of this diverse consortium is anticipated to set new standards in the detection and nurturing of sports talents, offering a model that can be adapted by other regions around the world.

Purpose of the project

The primary goal of the TALENT project is to seamlessly integrate sports and education to support young athletes in managing dual careers effectively. This integration is crucial as the demands of maintaining high performance in both academics and athletics can place significant stress on young individuals, often leading to burnout or early dropout from one or both fields.

Objectives of the project

- **Development** of methodologies for early talent identification
- **Adaptation** of educational programmes to meet the needs of athletes
- **Establishment** of a supportive environment that involves coaches, educators, and families.

Purpose of the TALENT Recommendations

Through the developed online platform, these recommendations are targeting teachers, parents, coaches, sports clubs and decision makers to better understand what the needs of talented children are, in order to support their development and prevent drop-out from school or from sports.



Introduction

Ensuring that young athletes can pursue both education and sports requires systemic support through policies that promote dual career pathways. As a policymaker, you have the ability to shape frameworks that encourage cooperation between educational institutions, sports organisations, and families. This booklet highlights key policy recommendations to prevent school and sports dropout, promote flexible learning pathways, and enhance funding opportunities for dual career initiatives.

The success of young athletes does not rely solely on their effort, talent, or coaching, it is also deeply influenced by the broader policies and structures that govern sports and education. Policymakers hold the key to creating environments where young talents can thrive, ensuring they are not forced to choose between athletic ambition and academic success. By developing well-structured policies, providing financial and institutional support, and integrating sports into the educational system, policymakers play a pivotal role in securing the future of talented athletes.

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of dual-career pathways, which allow young athletes to combine their sports training with academic pursuits. However, many student-athletes still struggle with inflexible school schedules, limited financial aid, and inadequate career planning for life beyond sports. To address these issues, policymakers must design and implement comprehensive, sustainable, and inclusive policies that support young athletes throughout their development.

This booklet provides an in-depth guide on the role of policymakers in talent development, dual-career support, inclusivity in sports, and long-term sustainability. By ensuring that young athletes receive the necessary institutional backing, we can create a system where talent flourishes, participation grows, and sport becomes a lasting pillar of personal and professional success.

The role of policymakers in talent development

Well-designed policies ensure that young athletes can access quality education, structured sports training, and comprehensive psychological and financial support. Policymakers must take a strategic approach to talent development, ensuring that young athletes have the necessary infrastructure, funding, and institutional support to balance their academic and sporting commitments. Establishing pathways from grassroots participation to elite competition while integrating sports into education systems is essential for long-term success.

Moreover, policy decisions directly influence how well young athletes transition from junior to professional levels. Without a structured framework, many talented individuals struggle to maintain their performance while managing their education. Governments can ensure that sports development is both inclusive and sustainable, allowing athletes to thrive beyond their competitive years through implementing evidence-based policies.



Key responsibilities of policymakers in talent development include:

- A. Creating and enforcing** dual-career policies that support young athletes in balancing academic and sports commitments. This includes flexible schooling options, online learning platforms, and adjusted curricula for student-athletes.
- B. Investing** in sports infrastructure and grassroots programmes to provide accessible training facilities and development pathways for young athletes from all backgrounds.
- C. Ensuring** financial support mechanisms such as scholarships, grants, and sponsorship incentives to help cover the costs of training, competition travel, and academic support for student-athletes.
- D. Monitoring and evaluating** sports policies through data-driven research, stakeholder engagement, and continuous policy assessment to improve talent development initiatives.

Developing dual-career frameworks

Balancing academic and athletic commitments is one of the greatest challenges for young athletes. A well-designed dual-career framework ensures that they are not forced to choose between their education and sports ambitions. To achieve this, policymakers should implement policies that allow greater flexibility in academic schedules for student-athletes. Schools should provide hybrid learning models, where athletes can access online education while traveling for competitions or training.

Furthermore, financial aid and scholarship programmes should be introduced to support student-athletes, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Many young athletes face financial barriers that prevent them from fully committing themselves to their training. Policymakers can ensure that no talented individual is excluded due to financial constraints by providing targeted funding.

Career guidance programmes should also be established to educate athletes about post-sports career opportunities. These programmes can help athletes develop alternative career paths while maintaining their passion for sports, ensuring they are prepared for life after competition.



Table 1. Interesting facts and evidence on dual-career frameworks

Fact	Evidence
Dual-career athletes perform better academically	Studies show that student-athletes often achieve higher academic results than their non-athlete peers due to enhanced time management skills.
A lack of dual-career support leads to dropout	Research indicates that many young athletes drop out of either school or sport due to an inability to balance both commitments effectively ¹ .
Hybrid learning models improve athlete retention	Countries with well-developed hybrid education models for athletes report higher retention rates in both education and sports.
Financial barriers are a major obstacle	Surveys reveal that financial concerns are one of the primary reasons why young athletes quit competitive sports before reaching their full potential ² .

Strengthening school-sports club partnerships

An effective school-sports club collaboration plays a fundamental role in talent development. Many young athletes struggle to manage their school responsibilities alongside their training schedules. A well-integrated system that connects schools with sports organizations can help create structured training schedules without compromising academic performance.

1 Jiang, X., & Wang, K. (2025). Exploring relationships between identities, dual career competency, and burnout among young talented athletes. *BMC psychology*, 13(1), 190.
 2 Pandya N. K. (2021). Disparities in Youth Sports and Barriers to Participation. *Current reviews in musculoskeletal medicine*, 14(6), 441–446.

Table 2. Examples of how policymakers can strengthen school-sports club partnerships

Strategy	Description
Shared facilities	Schools and sports clubs can collaborate by allowing shared use of sports fields, gyms, and training centers, ensuring young athletes have access to high-quality facilities.
Integrated curriculum	Schools can adapt their academic curriculum to include sports training modules, making it easier for student-athletes to balance education and sports commitments.
Joint coaching programmes	Schools and clubs can employ shared coaching staff, ensuring that training methodologies are aligned and athletes receive consistent coaching in both environments.
Flexible scheduling	Schools can implement flexible timetables, allowing student-athletes to attend training sessions without negatively impacting their academic progress.
Mentorship programmes	Schools and sports clubs can introduce mentorship initiatives where elite or retired athletes provide guidance and career advice to young talents.
Scholarship and funding support	Clubs and schools can collaborate on scholarship programmes to financially support promising athletes, helping them cover education and training costs.

School coaches should also receive additional training to support student-athletes effectively. Governments should invest in teacher-coach training programmes, equipping educators with the necessary skills to understand and support the needs of young athletes.

Long-term sustainability in talent development

A sustainable sports development model requires long-term investment and continuous policy evaluation. Policymakers should implement multi-year sports funding models rather than relying on short-term grants. A predictable funding structure ensures that sports academies, training centers, and school programmes have the stability needed to operate efficiently.

Encouraging corporate sponsorship and public-private partnerships can also strengthen financial support for talent development programmes. Many businesses are willing to invest in grassroots sports initiatives, provided there are clear incentives such as brand visibility and community engagement opportunities.

Moreover, data-driven policy evaluation should be prioritized. Governments must continually assess the effectiveness of their sports policies through regular impact studies, stakeholder consultations, and performance metrics. By collecting and analyzing data on participation rates, athlete progression, and programme outcomes, policymakers can make informed decisions that lead to sustainable sports development.

Conclusion

Sports clubs are at the forefront of athlete development, education, and career preparation. Clubs can create an environment where young athletes can excel on and off the field by fostering strong school partnerships, ensuring financial sustainability, and offering comprehensive athlete support. With the right policies and initiatives, clubs can truly become hubs of excellence in both sports and education.

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Recognition of talented children

Recommendations for Coaches



Background

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The primary goal of the TALENT project is to seamlessly integrate sports and education to support young athletes in managing dual careers effectively. This integration is crucial as the demands of maintaining high performance in both academics and athletics can place significant stress on young individuals, often leading to burnout or early dropout from one or both fields.

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- **Development** of methodologies for early talent identification
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Purpose of the TALENT Recommendations

Through the developed online platform, these recommendations are targeting teachers, parents, coaches, sports clubs and decision makers to better understand what the needs of talented children are, in order to support their development and prevent drop-out from school or from sports.



Introduction

As a coach, you shape young athletes' athletic, personal and academic growth. Your support can make a significant difference in supporting children to balance their training with their education. This booklet provides insights on how to collaborate with teachers and parents, adjust training loads during critical academic periods, and encourage a long-term perspective on education and sports. By adopting a holistic approach, you can help young athletes achieve their full potential while preventing early dropout from either school or sport.

The TALENT project acknowledges that coaches are not just instructors but mentors who help young athletes navigate the pressures of competitive sports and academic commitments. This booklet provides evidence-based recommendations for recognising and nurturing young talent, building inclusive coaching environments, and fostering collaboration with schools, families, and policymakers. By implementing these approaches, you can contribute significantly to the holistic development of your athletes and ensure their success in both education and sports.

The role of coaches in the talent development process

Coaches are often the first to recognise an athlete's potential. Their observations during training sessions, matches, and informal interactions provide valuable insights into a player's abilities, mindset, and adaptability. Talent in sports does not merely refer to technical skill or physical attributes but includes cognitive skills, emotional intelligence, and a strong work ethic. A coach's role is to nurture these aspects holistically.

An athlete's potential is not always immediately evident. Some may show early signs of technical brilliance, while others display resilience, problem-solving skills, or leadership traits. Identifying and nurturing these qualities requires patience and a keen eye. Coaches must go beyond assessing immediate performance and consider an athlete's long-term development. This involves designing training sessions appropriate to individual needs, fostering intrinsic motivation, and encouraging self-reflection among athletes. In the talent identification process, biological age refers to the level of physical and physiological maturity of an individual, which can vary significantly among athletes of the same chronological age (the actual number of years since birth). Biological age is influenced by factors such as growth rate, hormonal development, and skeletal maturation, meaning that two athletes of the same chronological age can differ in strength, speed, endurance, and overall physical performance. Recognizing these differences is crucial in talent identification, as early or late maturers may have temporary advantages or disadvantages that do not necessarily reflect their long-term potential. A well-structured identification process considers biological age to ensure fair evaluation and long-term development strategies for young athletes.

Moreover, coaches play a crucial role in managing dual-career pathways, ensuring that talented young athletes do not have to choose between education and sports. A well-structured training regimen should support academic commitments rather than hinder them. Successful talent development requires a collaborative effort between coaches, educators, and parents. This means that a coach must actively engage with these stakeholders, ensuring that young athletes receive well-rounded support.

Identifying and supporting talent

Recognising talent requires a structured approach. A talented athlete does not only exhibit outstanding physical capabilities but also demonstrates strong cognitive and emotional attributes. These include quick decision-making under pressure, adaptability to different tactical situations, and perseverance in overcoming setbacks. Coaches must assess these aspects systematically and by doing so, understand that talent identification is a process and it can not be done at one point in time.

Some key methods for identifying and supporting talent include:

- A. Observation during training and competition:** Watch how athletes react under pressure, how they adapt to different tactical situations, and their ability to solve problems in the field.
- B. Assessing cognitive and emotional attributes:** Talent is not just physical. Athletes who show high resilience, motivation, and leadership qualities often have long-term potential.
- C. Encouraging self-reflection and goal setting:** Give athletes opportunities to evaluate their own performances and set improvement goals. This fosters independence and accountability.
- D. Using individualised assessments:** Every athlete has unique strengths. Regular one-on-one discussions and performance evaluations help tailor training to their needs.

- E. Providing structured feedback:** Feedback should be clear, constructive, and focus on both strengths and areas for improvement. Encouraging a growth mindset is key.

Feedback should be clear, constructive, and focused on both strengths and areas for improvement. Encouraging a growth mindset is key to helping talented students maximize their potential. According to Dweck (2014)¹, a growth mindset is the belief that abilities and intelligence can be developed through effort, learning, and persistence. When providing feedback, it is essential to emphasize progress and effort rather than just innate talent.

For example, instead of saying, “You are naturally talented at dribbling,” a more effective approach would be, “Your dribbling skills have improved significantly because you’ve been practicing different techniques and applying them in game situations.” This type of feedback reinforces the idea that ability is not fixed but can grow through dedication and effort.

Additionally, structured feedback should be specific and actionable. Instead of general praise like “Good job!”, educators and coaches should provide targeted guidance, such as “Your passing accuracy has improved because you’re positioning your body better before making a pass. Keep working on quick decision-making under pressure.”

- F. Monitoring consistency and commitment:** Talent alone is not enough; the ability to consistently train, improve, and handle setbacks is equally important.

¹ A growth mindset is when students understand that their abilities can be developed,” (Dweck, 2014).

A key aspect of talent recognition is individualised assessment. Rather than applying a one-size-fits-all training method, coaches should take the time to evaluate each athlete's unique strengths and areas for improvement. This can be achieved through ongoing observation, one-on-one discussions, and performance analysis. Encouraging self-reflection is equally important. Athletes should be given opportunities to assess their own performances and set personal development goals. This fosters a growth mindset and encourages accountability.

Once talent is identified, the next step is structured talent development. Training should be designed in a way that nurtures both technical and mental skills. For instance, integrating game-based learning allows athletes to develop their tactical awareness naturally in a competitive setting. Providing regular, constructive feedback ensures that young athletes understand their progress and areas for improvement without feeling overwhelmed. Moreover, game-based learning aligns with self-determination theory, as it fosters intrinsic motivation by making training more enjoyable and meaningful. Athletes learn best when they are engaged in realistic and context-rich environments that promote decision-making under pressure. Studies have also suggested that game-based training leads to better retention of tactical concepts compared to traditional, drill-based methods. To ensure continuous improvement, game-based training should be complemented with regular, constructive feedback that helps young athletes understand their progress without feeling overwhelmed. This approach creates a positive learning environment that not only enhances technical skills but also fosters resilience, confidence, and game intelligence—key attributes for long-term talent development.

However, talent alone is not enough. Without proper support, young athletes may struggle with motivation, confidence, or balancing their dual careers. Coaches should implement goal-setting strategies to help athletes stay focused and motivated. This involves setting short-term, achievable goals that build towards larger milestones. Recognising and celebrating progress, no matter how small, keeps young athletes engaged and motivated.



Coaching for dual careers

The dual-career pathway is an essential aspect of a young athlete's development. A major challenge athletes face is time management, as they juggle academic responsibilities with demanding training schedules. Coaches must acknowledge these challenges and provide flexible training solutions that do not compromise an athlete's education.

Maintaining open communication with teachers and school administrators is key to successfully managing dual careers. Schools and sports clubs should work together to ensure that student-athletes receive the support they need. Coaches can advocate for flexible academic arrangements, such as rescheduling tests or allowing additional time for assignments. When athletes feel supported academically, they are more likely to perform well in both areas.

Another critical aspect of dual careers is psychological support. Many young athletes experience stress and anxiety due to high expectations from both their coaches and academic institutions. Coaches should encourage a healthy work-life balance, ensuring that athletes have time for recovery, social activities, and personal growth. Psychological resilience is just as important as physical endurance in sports.

Building an inclusive coaching environment

Inclusion in sports is vital for ensuring that every athlete, regardless of gender, socioeconomic background, or ability level, has the opportunity to thrive. Coaches must actively foster an environment where diversity is celebrated, and every athlete feels valued.

Creating an inclusive environment begins with adapting coaching strategies to meet the needs of diverse athletes. This may involve modifying training drills to accommodate different learning styles, ensuring that all team members are given equal opportunities to participate, and fostering a culture of mutual respect. Gender inclusivity is particularly important, as girls often face additional barriers in sports participation. Encouraging mixed gender training sessions and promoting female role models in coaching can help bridge this gap.

Another important aspect of inclusion is addressing discrimination and bullying. Coaches should set clear expectations regarding team conduct and enforce a zero-tolerance policy for any form of exclusion or mistreatment. Creating a safe space where athletes can express concerns without fear of repercussion is essential.



Supporting athletes' well-being

Athletes' well-being extends beyond physical fitness. Young athletes often experience significant pressure from competition, academics, and personal expectations. Coaches must adopt a holistic approach to well-being that includes mental health support, proper recovery protocols, and fostering a positive team culture. The positive development of athletes in general is influenced, implicitly by example and explicitly, for example, by organizing workshops in which skills in recognizing and managing emotions, communication skills, empathy, problem solving, teamwork and cohesiveness can be developed.

Some key aspects of supporting athletes' well-being include:

- A. Preventing burnout and overtraining:** Coaches must monitor athletes for signs of physical and mental exhaustion, ensuring that rest and recovery are integrated into training schedules.
- B. Providing mental health support:** Encouraging open discussions about mental health and creating a safe space for athletes to express concerns helps break stigmas and promotes emotional resilience.
- C. Balancing training and personal life:** Supporting young athletes in managing time for school, social activities, and rest is crucial for long-term success and personal development.

Collaboration with schools and parents

The role of a coach extends beyond the training ground. To ensure the success of young athletes, collaboration with schools and parents is essential. Establishing strong partnerships between schools and sports clubs allows for better scheduling coordination, ensures academic support, and creates an environment where athletes are not forced to choose between education and sports.

Communication with schools

Coaches should establish direct communication channels with schoolteachers and administrators to keep track of an athlete's academic progress and any challenges they may face. By understanding school expectations, coaches can adjust training schedules accordingly, ensuring that student-athletes do not fall behind academically.

It is also beneficial to arrange regular meetings between school representatives and club staff to discuss support strategies for dual-career athletes. This could involve adapting exam schedules for athletes participating in competitions or providing additional academic resources for student-athletes.



Engaging parents in the process

Parents play a significant role in shaping an athlete's mindset and balancing sports commitments with school responsibilities. Coaches should organise workshops or meetings to educate parents about the demands of a dual career and how they can best support their child. Parents should be encouraged to foster open communication with their children, helping them manage stress and maintain motivation in both sports and academics.

Implementing a support network

A structured support network consisting of coaches, teachers, and parents ensures that the athlete does not feel isolated. This network should:

- Provide mentorship opportunities, where experienced student-athletes or former athletes offer guidance.
- Offer academic support programmes, such as tutoring or flexible school timetables.
- Encourage mental well-being initiatives, where athletes are educated on stress management and self-care techniques.

If these partnerships are strongly developed, the likelihood of student-athletes thriving in both their academic and sporting careers increases. An integrated approach helps ensure that young athletes receive emotional, academic, and career support, allowing them to reach their full potential without compromising one aspect for another.

Conclusion

Coaches play an indispensable role in shaping young athletes' futures. They contribute to the holistic development of athletes by fostering talent, supporting dual careers, promoting inclusivity, and prioritizing well-being. Implementing structured training methodologies, collaborating with schools and parents, and ensuring mental resilience will empower young athletes to succeed in both sports and academics.

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