



Paris JO 2024 – D5 – Champions & the 3 projects

In a pilgrimage (regardless of religion), pilgrims evoke three phases – a physical stage (the body must overcome an abnormal effort); a psychological stage (the mind takes over when the body is tired); and a spiritual stage (the body and the mind merge into perfect harmony). Olympic champions must go through all these stages to win a medal. High-performance athletes also have two projects to run in front of each other – their sports career takes up most of their time, often from adolescence and sometimes even childhood, the selection is increasingly early; and their professional career because they will not be able to prepare for a sporting deadline all their lives. Performance and sport preparation centres, such as INSEP in France, have the task of supporting athletes in this dual project.

The conversion of athletes can be directly linked to sport – they integrate sports organizations, international or national, often both. The examples of the British Sebastian Coe, athletics champion who led the organization of the London 2012 Olympic Games or Tony Estanguet, French Canoeing Kayak champion, who chairs the Paris 2024 Games Organizing Committee, remains exceptional. Many champions also become consultants for media (television or radio) to comment on competitions in their discipline, to share their experiences – they better understand the reactions of other athletes, or the strategy being implemented. Finally, champions can become national coaches, on a one-off basis (for a competition) or more permanently (by joining the ranks of a federation).

Conversions are sometimes very far from sport. Many former champions create their own business, their sports and professional networks (with their sponsors) are a good way to build up a clientele, their notoriety is also an effective advertising to the public. Some very charismatic champions are running conferences or training seminars for business leaders, who are amazed by their sporting record and listen with admiration to the long course, often fraught with pitfalls, that has allowed them to win a medal. Groupies are not just in sports clubs and associations. The language of sport is universal.

The third project of the champions is more transversal – they are formidable “role models” for many children and young people, amazed by the performances of their heroes/heroines they are more likely to listen than their parents or teachers. The discipline and humility that a sports career requires is a first lesson – young people understand very well that learning is an obstacle course. They can, and must, make mistakes to learn. They also know that success is short-lived and that they will always have to put their title back in play – you can’t just fall asleep on your laurels. To learn well, you also must lighten your body and mind, and make the balance of things; you must make choices that are sometimes sacrifices.

Therefore, the champions are under enormous pressure – they’re being watched, followed not just by their families & friends, their federations, or their sponsors, but by millions (and even billions at the Olympics) of groupies they must not disappoint.

- (1) Mickaël Gamrasni « Olympiques ! La France des Jeux », France, diffusé le 16 juillet 2024 sur France 2
- (2) Bénédicte Halba (1997) « Economie du sport », Paris : Economica
- (3) Bénédicte Halba , projet MITEC (2006-2007) – projet codirigé avec l’ANPE sur la mobilité professionnelle des bénévoles, des expatriés et des sportifs de haut niveau - <https://www.iriv-vaeb.net/projet.php?id=16>
- (4) Pierre-Emmanuel Luneau-Daurignac (2024) « Futurs champions, le prix de la gloire », diffusé sur Arte le 23 juillet 2024
- (5) Site officiel du COJO-<https://olympics.com/fr/>
- (6) Jules et Gédéon Naudet « Au cœur des jeux », France , 2024- **série de documentaires** diffusée sur France 2 (juillet 2024)

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