High Schools for Athletes Research Project
Case Study Two
Stiftung Sport-Gymnasium, Davos
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“Combining high school with high level sport”

Introduction

Founded in 1997 with an initial intake of 37 students, Stiftung Sport-Gymnasium has grown to a current size of 124 students, comprising solely of professional or competition-standard athletes.

The school aims to provide the best possible preparation for young athletes of exceptional talent, alongside a high quality high school education that prepares students for a life and career inside or outside of sport.

Admission to the school is dependent on the successful completion of an entrance examination, alongside a written recommendation from a national or regional sport association. The school is a private institution, charging 13,500 Swiss Francs for annual tuition, boarding, education and sport coaching.

Facilities

The school comprises of dormitories (95 students currently board), classrooms, social areas, a nutrition-focused dining facility, two weight rooms and a well-equipped gymnasium. Offsite, the school has access to nearby skiing and snowboarding training routes, tennis courts, golf courses and two ice rinks for sport training.

Additional support

The focus of Stiftung Sport-Gymnasium’s work is to balance a rounded, high-quality high school education with an expert level of sport coaching for gifted athletes. Specialist support includes:

- An option to extend the upper-secondary education course of study by an additional year to accommodate sport training and competition requirements

- The school has established a bespoke online distance learning and tutoring platform, to allow students to continue their studies with minimal disruption during extended periods of absence for sporting reasons.

- A recognition at all levels within the school that each athlete’s academic support needs will be unique. Regular one-to-one consultations are scheduled between each student and a designated member of staff to manage individual learning programmes. An efficient absence management process is in place to minimize any procedural
complications as students progress through the school’s grade years.

- A significant proportion of the school’s faculty teachers, including sport coach specialists and technical staff, are former high-level athletes. This contributes to a supportive culture within the school, where academic and sporting objectives are perceived as complimentary goals.

One current student, a skier, describes the ethos of the school as follows, “This school is **much more comfortable** (than a previous high school I attended) and you have more time for training. I appreciate the flexibility of the teachers and the school isn’t too big. **What I also like about Davos is that you get optimum (alpine) training conditions from October to April**”

**Curriculum**

Stiftung Sport-Gymnasium coordinates specialist coaching and athlete development programmes across seven sports: Alpine skiing, cross country skiing, snowboarding, unihockey, horse riding, golf, tennis and motor sports.

In addition to a five-year upper secondary education programme, pupils graduate with an adjoining diploma in one of two specialist vocational study options; business and law or professional sports theory.

**Partnerships**

The school maintains excellent links with a large range of sponsors, including finance institutions, sport companies and other corporations with a local presence. Other institutions contribute in-kind support, for example by donating equipment or use of sport services in the surrounding area.

**Suggestions**

Key to the success and appeal of the school is the consistent coordination of teamwork between academic and sporting outputs, to create a genuinely flexible, athlete-centred environment where high quality academic and sporting programmes not only coexist but also actively reinforce each other.

Variations of this model can be found in many sport high school institutions worldwide, however Sport-Gymnasium Davos appears to be an exemplar model of a relatively small, self-contained institution where both academic and athletic excellence is given an equal level of priority.

The location of Davos naturally lends itself to winter sports, and unsurprisingly a significant proportion of the school’s sport focus is centred on skiing, snowboarding and ice hockey. For institutions in other areas of the world, a detailed appraisal of the natural characteristics of the local sports market may present new opportunities to develop relatively small scale but highly focused and bespoke centres of high school sport training excellence.

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For further information the school’s website is http://www.sportgymnasium.ch

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