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## The Relationship Between the Athlete Identities of Footballers and Their Level of Commitment to Sports

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to evaluate the relationship between the athlete identities and their commitment to sports in terms of whether amateur and professional licensed footballers who are playing football in local and amateur football clubs differ according to various demographic characteristics. Footballers of the 1st Amateur, 2nd Amateur, and Regional Amateur Leagues registered in the Elazığ Amateur Sports Clubs Federation participated in the research. "Athlete Identity Scale" was developed by Brewer and Cornelius (2001) and adapted to Turkish by Öztürk and Koca (2013) and "Athlete Commitment Scale" was developed by Kayhan, Bardakçı, and Caz (2020) developed by Guillen and Martinez-Alvarado (2014) were used as data collection tools in the study. As a result of the research, while there was a significant difference in the athlete identity according to the license level variable of the football players, there was no significant difference in the level of commitment to sports. While there was a significant difference according to the league level, infrastructure training, age variable, and education status variable of the footballers, there was no significant difference according to the athlete year variable.

**Keywords:** Athletic Identity, Football. Sport Engagement



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## INTRODUCTION

Many professions and sports activities in society impact our lives because they have become an important part of our identity over time, contribute to humanity's development, and affect society's progress. Achieving and maintaining success in sports is closely related to the athlete's identity and level of commitment to the sport, as well as the physical competence of the athlete.

Sports is physical activity that includes competition, sports activities are carried out in an organized structure with a certain framework that includes rules and objectives (Temel & Tükel, 2021). Sport is an important element that is deeply involved in the social life of today's people and shapes the sociological structure. For this reason, sports are increasingly attracted by people, attracting and connecting many people (Uslu, 2016). In addition to the physiological and psychological benefits of sports, it has also been proven that it limits the possibility of developing obesity, reduces the occurrence of cardiovascular diseases and increases the quality of life of individuals (Pennington, 2021). Sports are body movements or intense muscle efforts performed in the form of individual or collective games, habits aimed at providing physical, spiritual, nervous, and intellectual relaxation and development, or competitions organized within a formal framework, in a certain order or precise rules, according to scientific methods (Tek, 2020). Sport refers to the psycho-social concept that helps the socialization of the individual by giving people a sense of personal and social identity and a sense of group membership, as well as being a set of physical activities. Sport refers to the competitive use of the ability to increase one's self-development, self-actualization, physical and mental skills. Sports can also support social and cultural identities and the construction of national identities (Küçük & Koç, 2015).

There are many types of sports; one is football, which has an important place in our lives. Undoubtedly, the characteristics of the footballers who play the game in a popular sport and their athlete identities are also very important.

Identity, which is a subject handled from different angles in many sciences, is defined by the Turkish Language Association as the whole of the signs, qualities, and characteristics that show what kind of person a human being is as a social being (TLA, 2022). Identity is a concept related to the social roles adopted by individuals in societies where people lead their lives and how people express themselves depending on these roles (Özdil, 2017). Erikson defined identity as a process that unites personality and connects the individual to the social world, and theories on identity development have led to research into how identity changes over time (Erikson, 1968). Identity development is inextricably linked to the essence of the individual as well as to the essence of the individual's common culture (Kidwell et al., 1995). Beamon emphasizes that one's identity consists of selfness, self-view, social identity, and how others look at you. Elite athletes are largely linked to their identity as an athlete, especially as they receive praise and appreciation from others for their physical abilities and the only way they see themselves as successful (Beamon, 2012). Athlete identity is defined as "the degree to which an individual identifies with the role of an athlete". This concept is an important aspect of sports participation, as it influences the relationships with teammates and the experiences that one can have in sports, in addition to both current and future efforts with sports. Athlete identity is also a strong indicator of one's sustainability in a sport (Griffith & Johnson, 2002). Athlete identity is the individual's acceptance of sports by transforming it into a way of life or seeing it as a part of his life as a result of internalizing it (Ercic, Wylleman & Zupancic, 2004).

Sports psychology research on athlete identity began seriously in the 1990s, and Britton Brewer was one of the first researchers to propose the concept of athletic identity and systematically examine this area of interest. Athlete identity refers to the degree of power and

privilege with which a person identifies with the role of an athlete, or the degree of special interest in sports relative to other pursuits or activities in life (Brewer, Van Raalte, Linder, 1991). According to the perceptions of people, athlete identity plays a social role. People who are valued, approved, and have athlete characteristics by society increase their self-confidence of athletes when this situation is explained to them and they feel more like athletes, which contributes to the formation of the identity of the athlete (Reifsteck, 2011).

Athlete identity is also one of the psychological determinants of sports commitment, that is, the level at which the person identifies with the role of the athlete is directly related to the amount of one's commitment to sports.

The term commitment is used in psychology to describe a number of factors that may explain why people maintain relationships or engage in certain activities (Eccles, Harold, 1991). Commitment has been understood as a psychological tendency that represents a desire' and a decision to continue participating in sports' (Hassell, Sabiston & Bloom, 2010). Previous research in the field of sports psychology shows that "commitment to sports is related to participation and permanence in sports" and is defined as "a general psychological condition that represents the desire and determination to continue participating in a particular athletic program, a particular sport or sport"(Hagiwara & Isogai, 2014). Engagement is an integral part of sports participation, as athletes need to desire to learn and feel connected to their sport to continue to be part of the team.

To bring out commitment, athletes need to enjoy what they are doing and also make a personal investment in the sport in terms of time, finances, or effort. It is also important that in sports there is social support from others and opportunities to benefit from sports, as well as a social structure and atmosphere that creates norms within the sport, creating a sense of obligation to return. These benefits can include things like relationships with others, health and fitness benefits, and mastery of a skill (Chu & Wang, 2012).

Studies examining the relationship between athletes' athlete identity and level of commitment to sports are quite limited in the literature. Studies are mostly focused on students and young athletes.

Martin et al. examined how the social identities of young athletes who were students had an impact on their commitment to sport and effort. It has been reported that commitment and effort are important in identifying the athlete with a group in the individual and group analysis (Martin et al., 2018).

Chen examined the impact of athletic participation on university students by examining the impact of athlete identity, commitment to sports, and sports participation, emphasizing that further support of student-athletes and increasing athletic participation are important for participants to build a personality and improve performance (Chen, Snyder & Magner, 2010).

Edison compiled the studies on athlete identity in young athletes and determined that burnout was less common in athletes with high athlete identity and that they had a higher game history (Edison, Christino & Rizzone, 2021).

Mitchell emphasized the importance of the good psychological status of athletes in professional sports in his study to determine the athlete identity levels of elite British football referees. (Mitchell et al., 2014).

Siyataş et al.; To determine the differences between the levels of sports commitment of athletes engaged in individual and team sports and the relationship between their age and sports commitment, it was found that athletes who engaged in sports individually had higher

sports commitment than athletes engaged in team sports and that their sports commitment decreased as their age increased (Siyahtaş et al., 2020).

In the study conducted by Sivrikaya and Biricik; The level of commitment of ski athletes, known as individual sports, and the loyalty of footballers in the football branch from Kelecek and Koruç team sports to sports were investigated. When the results obtained were examined according to the averages, it was seen that the loyalty of individual athletes to the team athletes, that is, the commitment of ski athletes to sports was higher than that of footballers (Sivrikaya & Biricik 2019; Kelecek & Koruç, 2017).

Sivrikaya and Biricik (2019) In their study on athlete loyalty in elite skiers at the national team level, they found that female athletes had higher athlete engagement in the sub-dimension of dedication and enthusiasm compared to male athletes.

The Sportsmanship Identities and Sportsmanship Orientations of Kick Boxing Athletes made by Turan were examined with variables such as different education levels, age, sports year, and whether national athlete, it was determined that the perceptions of athlete identity increased in favor of national athletes and athletes participating in competitions at national level (Turan, 2021).

Yanar et al. examined the differences between the athlete identity perception and success motivation levels of tennis and badminton athletes in terms of gender, age groups, and sports year groups. While the athlete identity perception of tennis athletes was higher than that of badminton athletes, there was no significant difference in the athlete identity perception of the athletes in terms of gender (Yanar, Kırandı & Can, 2017).

As a result, Continuing sports, being successful, and being successful in sports today depend on both their athlete identities and their level of commitment to sports. The aim of this study is; To evaluate the relationship between the athlete identities and their commitment to sports of amateur and professional licensed footballers who play football in local and amateur football clubs in terms of whether they differ according to various demographic characteristics. Thus, it is thought that it is valuable in terms of contributing to the knowledge in the field of sports and guiding the way in terms of the findings obtained. In addition, our study is considered to be important in terms of showing that the athlete's identity and level of commitment to sports are important factors for teams aiming for success.

## METHOD

### Scope and Method of Research

The universe of this research consists of 1st Amateur, 2nd Amateur, and Regional Amateur League footballers registered to the Elazığ Amateur Sports Clubs Federation. According to the letter dated 08.06.2022 and numbered 2022/53 from the Elazığ Amateur Sports Clubs Federation, it was determined that the number of 1st Amateur, 2nd Amateur, and Regional Amateur League players were 606 in the 2021-2022 football season. The study's sample size was calculated as 235 in the main universe sample size within the limits of 95% reliability with a margin of error of 5% (surveysystem.com access date, 10.10.2022) and the quantitative research method was used. The research data were obtained by applying the survey method to 254 people voluntarily to football players. The permission of the ethics committee required for the conduct of this study was obtained from the Munzur University Non-Interventional Research Ethics Committee with the decision dated 10.05.2022 and numbered 51985.

### Data Collection Tools

The quantitative research method was used in this study. The data in question were obtained by applying face-to-face to 1st Amateur, 2nd Amateur, and Regional Amateur League players voluntarily with the survey method. The questionnaire was designed from a total of three sections and consisted of a total of 23 questions. The first part of the survey consists of 6 questions to determine the participants' demographic information.

In the second part of the questionnaire, the athlete identity scale with a 7-point Likert-type scale consisting of 3 sub-dimensions and 7 items developed by Brewer and Cornelius (2001) and adapted to Turkish by Öztürk and Koca (2013) was used. The athlete identity scale has 3 sub-dimensions: social identity, sports limitation, and negative affectivity. The scale was general reliability (Cronbach-Alpha:0.81) and the first sub-dimension was social identity (Cronbach-Alpha:0.69), the second sub-dimension was limited to sports (Cronbach-Alpha:0.79), and the third and last sub-dimension, negative affectivity (Cronbach-Alpha:0.59) (Öztürk ve Koca 2013). Footballers are asked to evaluate the survey questions as 1- I do not agree at all, 7- I completely agree.

In the third part of the survey, the sports commitment scale with a 7-point Likert-type scale consisting of 2 sub-dimensions and 10 items adapted to Turkish by Kayhan, Bardakçı, and Caz (2020) developed by Guillen and Martinez-Alvarado (2014) was used. The sub-dimensions of the sports commitment scale are focusing and being vigorous. The scale was general reliability (Cronbach-Alpha:0.91) and the first sub-dimension was the focusing (Cronbach-Alpha:0.91) and the second sub-dimension was vigorous (Cronbach-Alpha:0.77) (Kayhan, Bardakçı, Caz, 2020). Footballers are asked to evaluate the survey questions as 1- Never, 7- Always. General reliability ( $\alpha$ ) coefficients of our work on Elazığ 1st Amateur, 2nd Amateur, and Regional Amateur League players.

**Table 1.** Reliability Level

Dimensions	Cronbach Alpha
Athlete Identity	0,827
Social Identity Sub-Dimension	0,760
Sports Limitation Sub-Dimension	0,802
Negative Affectivity Sub-Dimension	0,652
Commitment to Sport	0,921
Focusing Sub-Dimension	0,898
Vigorous Sub-Dimension	0,849

### Data Collection and Statistical Analysis

The research data were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) for Windows 22.0 program. First, descriptive statistical evaluations of demographic data were made, and then  $n > 30$  Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests were performed to see whether the data were distributed normally. After the test, it was seen that the data were not distributed normally. Non-parametric tests (Mann-Whitney you and Kruskal Wallis) were used to determine whether the opinions of footballers about their athlete identity and sports commitment levels differed significantly according to various variables. Then, the discussion, conclusion, and suggestions section was included.

**FINDINGS**

In this section, statistical evaluation of the data was made and the results of the evaluation were shown in tables. The demographic characteristics of the participants are shown in the Table 2.

**Table 2.** Sampling Information

<b>Variables</b>		<b>N (254)</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>License Level</b>	Amateur	218	85,8
	Professional	36	14,2
<b>League Level</b>	1st Amateur	92	36,2
	2nd Amateur	99	39
	Regional Amateur	63	24,8
<b>Have you received Infrastructure Training?</b>	Yes	173	68,1
	No	81	31,9
<b>Age</b>	14-17	53	20,9
	18-21	59	23,2
	22-25	74	29,1
	26-29	26	10,2
	30-33	16	6,3
	34 and older	26	10,2
<b>Education Status</b>	Primary Education	19	7,5
	High school	84	33,1
	Associate Degree	21	8,3
	License	118	46,5
	Graduate	12	4,7
<b>Year of Licensed Sportsmanship</b>	1-3	96	37,8
	4-6	80	31,5
	7-9	32	12,6
	10 Years and above	46	18,1

When Table 2 is examined, 85.8% of the participants are amateurs and 14.2% are professionals. When we look at the league level of the footballers, it is seen that 36.2% are at the 1st Amateur level, 39% are at the 2nd Amateur and 24.8% are at the regional amateur league level. Regarding infrastructure education, we see that 68.1% have infrastructure education and 31.9% do not. While 20.9% of the footballers are in the 14-17 age range, 23.2% are in the 18-21 age range, 29.1% are in the 22-25 age range, 10.2% are in the 26-29 age range, 6.3% are in the 30-33 age range and 10.2% are 34 years or older. In terms of educational status, 7.5% were in primary education, 33.1% were in high school, 8.3% had an associate degree, 46.5% were at undergraduate, and 4.7% were at the graduate level. When we examine the licensed sportsman year, it is seen that 37.8% have been licensed athletes for 1-3 years, 31.5% for 4-6 years, 12.6% for 7-9 years, and 18.1% for 10 years or above.

**Normality Test**

The result of the statistical test to see whether the data was distributed normally in the research was given in the Table 3.

**Table 3.** Normality Test Results

Concepts	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig	Statistic	df	Sig
<b>Athlete Identity</b>	,196	254	,000	,852	254	,000
<b>Social Identity Sub-Dimension</b>	,192	254	,000	,838	254	,000
<b>Sports Limitation Sub-Dimension</b>	,205	254	,000	,857	254	,000
<b>NegativeAffectivity Sub-Dimension</b>	,243	254	,000	,782	254	,000
<b>Commitment to Sport</b>	,161	254	,000	,834	254	,000
<b>Focusing Sub-Dimension</b>	,188	254	,000	,807	254	,000
<b>Vigorous Sub-Dimension</b>	,154	254	,000	,880	254	,000

\*p&lt;.05

When Table 3 is examined, the data were normally distributed and the results of the normality test were shown. Since  $n > 30$ , Kolmogorov Smirnov was taken into account, and according to the results obtained, since  $p < 0.05$ , the distribution was not normal and non-parametric tests were used.

The comparison of the opinions of the footballers on the scale of athlete identity and sports commitment levels according to the license level variable was shown in the Table 4.

**Table 4.** Comparison of Footballers' Views on Athlete Identity and Sports Commitment Levels Scale According to License Level Variable

	License Level	N	$\bar{X}$	Sd	Z	p
<b>Athlete Identity</b>	Amateur	218	5,66	1,08	-2,700	,007
	Professional	36	6,12	,78		
<b>Sport Commitment Levels</b>	Amateur	218	5,89	1,08	-1,957	,050
	Professional	36	6,21	,92		

\*p&lt;.05

In Table 4, a significant difference was found between the athlete identity groups in comparing the answers given by the footballers to the athlete identity questions according to the license level variable. In contrast, no significant difference was found between the sports commitment level groups.

The comparison of the opinions of the footballers on the scale of athlete identity and sports commitment levels according to the league-level variable was shown in the Table 5.

**Table 5.** Comparison of Footballers' Views on Athlete Identity and Sports Commitment Levels Scale According to League Level Variable

	League Level	N	$\bar{X}$	Sd	X <sup>2</sup>	p
<b>Athlete Identity</b>	Amateur	92	5,94	,78	7,537	,023
	Amateur	99	5,64	1,25		
	Regional Amateur	63	5,52	1,01		
<b>Sports Commitment Levels</b>	Amateur	92	6,05	,89	9,386	,009
	Amateur	99	6,00	1,17		
	Regional Amateur	63	5,65	1,09		

\*p&lt;.05



In Table 5, there was a significant difference between the groups in comparing the license level and sports commitment levels of the answers given by the footballers to the athlete identity questions according to the league-level variable.

The comparison of the opinions of the footballers on the scale of athlete identity and level of commitment to sports according to the infrastructure education variable was shown in the Table 6.

**Table 6.** Comparison of Footballers' Views on Athlete Identity and Sports Commitment Levels Scale According to the Infrastructure Education Variable

	<b>Infrastructure Education</b>	<b>N</b>	<b><math>\bar{X}</math></b>	<b>Sd</b>	<b>Z</b>	<b>p</b>
<b>Athlete Identity</b>	Yes	173	5,91	,95	-4,232	,000
	No	81	5,33	1,15		
<b>Sports Commitment Levels</b>	Yes	173	6,17	,84	-4,821	,000
	No	81	5,43	1,29		

\*p<.05

When Table 6 was examined, there was a significant difference between the groups in comparing the answers given by the footballers to the questions of athlete identity and sports commitment levels scale according to the infrastructure education variable.

The comparison of the opinions of the footballers on the scale of athlete identity and sports commitment levels according to the age variable was shown in the Table 7.

**Table 7.** Comparison of Footballers' Opinions on Athlete Identity and Sports Commitment Levels Scale According to Age Variable

	<b>Age Variable</b>	<b>N</b>	<b><math>\bar{X}</math></b>	<b>Sd</b>	<b>X<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>p</b>
<b>Athlete Identity</b>	14-17 Years	53	6,30	,63	41,942	,000
	18-21 Years	59	5,78	1,01		
	22-25 Years	74	5,40	1,15		
	26-29 Years	26	5,57	,22		
	30-33 Years	16	5,23	,97		
	34 and Older	26	5,77	,94		
<b>Sports Commitment Levels</b>	14-17 Years	53	6,48	,51	24,051	,000
	18-21 Years	59	6,00	,99		
	22-25 Years	74	5,64	1,27		
	26-29 Years	26	5,81	1,24		
	30-33 Years	16	5,51	1,12		
	34 and Older	26	5,90	,81		

\*p<.05

When Table 7 was examined, a significant difference was seen between the groups in comparing the athlete identity and sports commitment levels of the answers given by the footballers to the questions of athlete identity and sports commitment levels scale according to the age variable.

The comparison of the opinions of the footballers on the scale of athlete identity and sports commitment levels according to the variable of education status was shown in the Table 8.

**Table 8.** Comparison of Footballers' Opinions on Athlete Identity and Sports Commitment Levels Scale According to Education Status Variable

	<b>Education Status</b>	<b>N</b>	<b><math>\bar{X}</math></b>	<b>Sd</b>	<b><math>X^2</math></b>	<b>p</b>
<b>Athlete Identity</b>	Primary Education	19	6,32	,90	20,095	,000
	High school	84	5,78	1,04		
	Associate Degree	21	5,69	1,21		
	Undergraduate	118	5,56	1,07		
	Graduate	12	6,07	,23		
<b>Sports Commitment Levels</b>	Primary Education	19	6,56	,42	14,737	,005
	High school	84	6,05	1,05		
	Associate Degree	21	5,78	1,06		
	Undergraduate	118	5,77	1,14		
	Graduate	12	6,05	,64		

\*p<.05

When Table 8 was examined, there was a significant difference between the groups in comparing the answers given by the footballers to the questions of athlete identity and sports commitment levels scale according to the educational status variable.

The comparison of the opinions of the footballers on the scale of athlete identity and sports commitment levels according to the variable of the year of licensed sportsmanship was shown in the Table 9.

**Table 9.** Comparison of Footballers' Opinions on Athlete Identity and Sports Commitment Levels Scale According to the Variable of Licensed Sportsmanship Year

	<b>Licensed Sportsmanship Year</b>	<b>N</b>	<b><math>\bar{X}</math></b>	<b>Sd</b>	<b><math>X^2</math></b>	<b>p</b>
<b>Athlete Identity</b>	1-3 Year	96	5,78	1,08	2,229	,513
	4-6 Year	80	5,58	1,14		
	7-9 Year	32	5,74	,84		
	10 Years and Above	46	5,82	,94		
<b>Sports Commitment Levels</b>	1-3 Year	96	5,97	1,06	2,037	,565
	4-6 Year	80	5,92	1,13		
	7-9 Year	32	6,08	,85		
	10 Years and Above	46	5,78	1,12		

\*p<.05

When Table 9 was examined, there was no significant difference between the groups in comparing the answers given by the footballers to the questions of athlete identity and sports commitment levels scale according to the variable of licensed sportsmanship year.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this study, to evaluate the relationship between the athlete identities and their commitment to sports of amateur and professional licensed footballers who play football in local and amateur football clubs in terms of whether they differ according to various demographic characteristics. Although various studies on athlete identity and sports commitment levels have been seen in the literature research, it is seen that the number of studies examining them together is limited.

According to the data obtained in the research, it is seen that the perceptions of the athlete identity and sports commitment levels of the footballers show a significant difference in the athlete identity according to the undergraduate level variable they have, and when the averages are examined, it is seen that the averages of the footballers with professional licenses are higher than the amateur license footballers. There was no significant difference between the levels of commitment to sports. According to the results of the research, the study conducted by Işık, (2018) on the athlete identity variable is not similar. It is seen that the footballers show significant differences in both their athlete identity and sports commitment levels according to the league level variable, and the average of the athlete identity and sports commitment levels of the 1st Amateur League footballers is higher. While this result obtained from the research shows similarity to the studies of Ermisket (2022), it does not show similarity to the studies of Menteş (2022). According to the infrastructure education variable, it is seen that the footballers show a significant difference in both their athlete identity and sports commitment levels and that the average of the athlete identity and sports commitment levels of the footballers who receive infrastructure training is higher. According to the age variable of the footballers, there was a significant difference between the athlete identity and the level of commitment to the sport and it was seen that the average of the footballers in the 14-17 age range was higher than the others. In their study, Siyahtaş et al. (2020) stated that the level of commitment to sports decreases as the age of the athletes increases. In parallel with the results of the research, Uluç and Akçakoyun (2021), Siyahtaş et al. (2020), Horton, and Mack (2000) show similarities in their studies, while Peke (2020), Yerlikaya (2019), Madak et al., (2021) do not show similarities in their studies. In the study conducted by Weiss and Weiss. (2013), the level of commitment to sports in gymnasts in an age group similar to football players was higher than in other age groups. According to the variable of the educational status of the footballers, there was a significant difference between the athlete identity and the level of commitment to sports, and it was seen that the average of those whose education status was primeri education was higher than the others. In parallel with the results of the research, Ermisket (2022), Peke (2020), and Yerlikaya (2019) show similarities in their studies, while Madak et al. (2021), Uzgür, Pekel, Aydos (2021) do not show similarities in their studies. According to the variable of the licensed sports year of the footballers, there was no significant difference between the athlete identity and sports commitment levels. This result shows that the year of sportsmanship does not affect athlete identity and sports commitment levels. This result is similar to Yanar, Kiranardı, Can (2017), Işık (2018), and Çetinkaya (2015), while Uluç and Akçakoyun (2021), Ermisket (2022) are not similar. Uluç and Akçakoyun (2021), in their study, stated that among Bocce athletes, those who have a sports age of 11 years or more have a higher level of commitment to sports. Ermisket, on the other hand, found a significant difference in the dimension of commitment to sports according to the basketball players' basketball playing time in his study. This result does not show parallelism with our study.

### Limitations and Recommendations

As a result, since the studies on athlete identity and athlete loyalty are quite limited, these studies can be carried out on other amateur and professional athletes, and different results

can be reached and contribute to the literature. In addition, this qualitative research can be obtained from other research methods to obtain more in-depth results. Since athlete identity and athlete loyalty are factors that affect each other, it is recommended to evaluate these concepts among coaches and managers, who are other actors in sports, and to carry out studies to strengthen athlete identity and athlete loyalty.

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