



Career Pathway Management (CPM): A New Professional Practice for Navigating Fragmented/Disjointed Sports Ecosystems

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Keywords: Career Pathway Management, Sports Reform, Athlete Development, Systems Thinking, Sustainable Sports Ecosystems

October 2025

Abstract

This paper introduces Career Pathway Management (CPM) as a new conceptual and professional framework designed to address the challenges of fragmentation and disorganization within sports ecosystems. Drawing on over four decades of field experience and ecosystem analysis, CPM is presented as a structured, lifecycle-oriented approach that helps athletes and entrants navigate their careers through complex institutional landscapes. The framework integrates mapping, decision support, resource coordination, holistic development, and transition management across the athlete's journey—from talent identification through post-career reintegration. CPM aims to professionalize athlete guidance and create a transparent, ethical, and sustainable support system that bridges the gap between fragmented/disjointed stakeholders in modern sports.

1. Introduction

The fragmentation of sports ecosystems—especially in Africa and similar regions—has long hindered sustainable growth and professionalization. Athletes and coaches navigate systems marked by political interference, inconsistent governance, and poor career continuity. Career Pathway Management (CPM) seeks to provide a structured, professional approach to guiding athletes across their entire lifecycle.

2. Conceptual Background

Traditional career support in sports focuses narrowly on performance or contract negotiations. CPM differentiates itself by integrating lifecycle management—from entry and development, to elite competition, transition, and post-career reintegration.

3. Definition of Career Pathway Management

Career Pathway Management (CPM) is an emerging professional practice dedicated to supporting athletes and new entrants in navigating fragmented/disjointed sports ecosystems. It integrates mapping, decision support, stakeholder coordination, holistic development, and transition planning to ensure sustainable success throughout the athlete's lifecycle.

4. CPM Conceptual Framework

The CPM framework is built around five lifecycle stages: Entry, Development, Elite Career, Transition, and Post-Career. Across these stages, five intervention domains—Mapping & Navigation, Decision Support, Resource Coordination, Holistic Development, and Transition Management—provide structure and continuity. The framework engages multiple stakeholders, including families, clubs, federations, sponsors, and policymakers.

5. Discussion

The ethical foundation of CPM is athlete-centered design. It prioritizes empowerment over control, sustainability over short-term success, and transparency over exploitation. While

skeptics may view CPM as redundant or resource-intensive, its integration of governance, analytics, and holistic development distinguishes it from traditional models.

6. Conclusion

Career Pathway Management (CPM) represents a transformative framework for modern sports. By offering a structured, integrative approach to athlete development and transition, it can restore coherence, accountability, and equity within fragmented/disjointed sports ecosystems. The establishment of CPM as a certified professional field is essential to ensuring a sustainable and ethical sports future.

Author Bio

Coach Umar Ibrahim Bala is a sports reform advocate, coach, and program director with over 30 years of experience in athlete development and sports governance across Africa and Asia.