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Identifying the Dimensions of a Lifestyle Management Model for Sports Champions: A Qualitative Approach

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to identify and explain the dimensions of a lifestyle management model for sports champions using a qualitative grounded-theory approach. This qualitative study was conducted using classical grounded theory with Glaser's emergent approach. The participants consisted of experts and knowledgeable stakeholders in the fields of lifestyle, sports culture, championship sport, sport management, and related policy and executive domains. Sampling initially followed a purposive strategy and subsequently continued theoretically in accordance with emerging concepts and categories. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with 15 eligible participants and continued until theoretical saturation was achieved. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed concurrently with data collection. Data analysis was conducted through constant comparison, theoretical memo writing, theoretical sampling, and open, selective, and theoretical coding. The dependability of the coding process was further examined through intercoder agreement. The analysis resulted in 90 refined initial codes, which were organized into 30 subcategories and 15 main categories. These categories were integrated into five overarching dimensions: structural factors, behavioral factors, contextual factors, intervening factors, and expected outcomes. Structural factors included cultural policymaking, institutional support, and the educational system; behavioral factors comprised daily self-care, ethical behavior, and consumption moderation; contextual factors included family context, cultural context, and life circumstances; intervening factors consisted of support from significant others, social influence, and situational conflict; and expected outcomes included individual well-being, life sustainability, and cultural credibility. The integrated findings indicated that lifestyle management among sports champions is a multidimensional process involving the coordinated organization of sporting and non-sporting aspects of life. Effective lifestyle management among sports champions requires an integrated and context-sensitive approach that simultaneously addresses institutional structures, daily behaviors, family and cultural circumstances, interpersonal influences, situational challenges, and long-term personal, professional, and social outcomes.

Keywords: Sports Champions, Lifestyle Management, Grounded Theory, Elite Sport, Athlete Development, Qualitative Research

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Introduction

Elite sport has progressively evolved into a highly demanding professional environment in which athletic success is no longer determined solely by technical skill, physical conditioning, or competition-specific preparation. Contemporary champions are expected to sustain optimal performance while simultaneously managing recovery, nutrition, psychological pressure, family responsibilities, financial decisions, public

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visibility, social relationships, media exposure, ethical expectations, and preparation for life beyond sport. As a result, the lifestyle of elite athletes has become an increasingly important component of performance sustainability and long-term well-being. Evidence from high-performance settings indicates that successful athletic development depends on complex interactions among biological, psychological, behavioral, environmental, and organizational factors rather than on isolated performance variables (1-3). This perspective suggests that the management of champions' lifestyles should be understood as a multidimensional process through which athletes coordinate sporting and non-sporting domains of life under continuously changing professional and social conditions.

The traditional performance-centered model of elite sport has largely emphasized measurable indicators such as strength, endurance, anthropometric characteristics, genetic predispositions, physiological adaptation, and technical performance. Such indicators undoubtedly remain central to competitive excellence. Research on elite athletes has demonstrated the relevance of physiological characteristics, body composition, genotype, cardiac adaptation, autonomic regulation, and sport-specific physical requirements to high-level performance (4-7). Similarly, contemporary analyses of world-class performance trajectories indicate that successful champions often emerge through prolonged, carefully managed processes of training adaptation, competition exposure, recovery, and progressive specialization rather than through short-term preparation alone (8, 9). These findings are important, yet they also reveal the limitations of defining athletic excellence only through physical or technical dimensions, because the athlete's everyday lifestyle can either support or undermine the physiological and performance adaptations developed through training.

Lifestyle factors such as sleep, nutrition, recovery, stress regulation, daily routines, social interaction, and behavioral discipline can substantially influence the athlete's ability to perform consistently. Systematic evidence has increasingly linked mindset and lifestyle-related behaviors with sport performance, indicating that psychological orientation, health behaviors, and everyday choices interact with athletic preparation in meaningful ways (1, 2). The relevance of lifestyle management becomes particularly pronounced in elite sport because athletes experience repeated cycles of intensive training, competition, travel, recovery, media exposure, and social evaluation. Even relatively small disruptions in sleep, nutrition, or emotional regulation may accumulate over time and influence recovery, readiness, decision-making, and adaptation. Moreover, some evidence suggests that long-term participation in high-level sport may be associated with distinctive trajectories of biological aging and physical adaptation, further emphasizing that the athlete's health profile is shaped by sustained interactions between sport demands and lifestyle patterns (10). Therefore, lifestyle management should be considered not merely an adjunct to training but an integral component of the broader system supporting elite performance.

Psychological sustainability constitutes another major dimension of champions' lifestyles. Elite athletes regularly face performance anxiety, public scrutiny, uncertainty, injury, selection pressures, identity challenges, and high expectations from coaches, organizations, sponsors, families, and audiences. Under these conditions, psychological resilience becomes essential for maintaining both performance and well-being. Research has highlighted the importance of mental strength and coping strategies in helping athletes manage stressful and disruptive circumstances (11). The COVID-19 period, for example, demonstrated how rapidly athletes' routines, competitions, training environments, and social support systems could be disrupted, exposing the need for stronger psychological resilience and accessible mental-health resources

(12). More recent work has emphasized psychological sustainability as a central concern in elite sport, particularly in relation to long-term preparation, high-pressure competition, and the preservation of athletes' mental resources across demanding performance cycles (13). Evidence from other high-pressure professions has similarly drawn lessons from elite athletes regarding preparation, emotional control, attentional regulation, and performance under stress (14, 15).

The transition into elite sport itself can create substantial psychological and lifestyle challenges. Athletes moving from developmental levels into professional or elite environments often experience increased training demands, reduced autonomy, performance uncertainty, social relocation, new expectations, and intensified identity investment in sport. These changes may increase vulnerability to stress and mental-health difficulties if adequate support structures are absent. Accordingly, recent scholarship has argued for system-level approaches that prepare athletes for the psychological and practical demands of entering elite sport rather than placing responsibility entirely on the individual athlete (16). Such preparation should include not only psychological support but also lifestyle education, social support, career guidance, and institutional mechanisms that enable athletes to maintain balanced lives while progressing within demanding performance systems.

Athletes' personal characteristics can also influence how they respond to elite-sport environments. Personality traits, autonomy, emotional regulation, and individual differences may affect training behavior, responses to pressure, interpersonal relationships, risk-taking, and lifestyle choices. Studies have demonstrated meaningful associations between personality factors and competitive sport performance, suggesting that psychological characteristics contribute to how athletes interpret and manage performance environments (17). Research among competitive bodybuilders has likewise shown differences in perceptions of personality and autonomy across sporting-age categories, indicating that athletes' psychological and lifestyle profiles may change across stages of their sporting careers (18). Personality-related patterns have also been identified among top-level referees, reinforcing the broader proposition that psychological characteristics interact with professional roles and high-pressure sporting contexts (19). Therefore, any comprehensive model of champions' lifestyle management should be sufficiently flexible to account for individual differences rather than assuming that a single standardized lifestyle prescription is appropriate for all elite athletes.

The social environment surrounding the athlete is equally important. Family support, coach-athlete relationships, peer influence, organizational culture, and institutional structures can facilitate or obstruct healthy lifestyle management. Evidence from elite athletes indicates that parental support can contribute to achievement through motivational pathways and sustained involvement in the athlete's development (20). Coaches also play a decisive role because their influence extends beyond technical instruction to include communication, emotional support, discipline, role modeling, career guidance, and management of the athlete's developmental environment. Interview-based research on successful world-champion coaches has highlighted the complexity of coaching expertise and the importance of experience, communication, psychological understanding, and individualized management in high-performance contexts (21). Managerial approaches to coaching and scouting similarly emphasize that athlete development depends on coordinated systems of identification, training, support, and long-term management rather than isolated coaching interventions (22).

High-performance sport organizations and clubs also shape athletes' lifestyles through the opportunities, expectations, resources, and constraints they create. Local clubs can function as important components of the athlete-development value chain by connecting training, competition, coaching, organizational support, and career progression (23). Likewise, broader national talent-development systems influence how athletes are identified, supported, educated, and transitioned through different stages of elite sport (24). Research examining interactions between general sport participation and elite-sport development further demonstrates that elite performance systems must be understood within a broader sporting ecosystem rather than as isolated pathways (25). These findings indicate that champions' lifestyles are partly produced by institutional arrangements, meaning that effective lifestyle management requires organizational responsibility in addition to individual self-regulation.

Educational dimensions are also fundamental. Elite athletes frequently spend substantial periods within structured training systems in which coaches, clubs, federations, schools, and sports organizations contribute to their socialization and value formation. The educational project of high-performance sport therefore extends beyond athletic competence and includes identity development, social responsibility, behavioral norms, and preparation for adult life (26). Athlete-centered models increasingly argue that development systems should prioritize health, well-being, autonomy, and individual needs alongside competitive excellence (27). This perspective is especially relevant to lifestyle management because sustainable athletic development requires athletes to acquire competencies in self-care, decision-making, communication, financial management, emotional regulation, social responsibility, and career planning. Without these competencies, sporting success may coexist with substantial vulnerabilities in other domains of life.

Athlete voice is another essential consideration in the management of lifestyle and development systems. Policies and programs designed for elite athletes may fail when they are developed without meaningful athlete participation. Research examining athlete voice in sport organizations has shown that practitioners increasingly recognize the importance of incorporating athletes' experiences and perspectives into decision-making processes (28). This is particularly important in lifestyle management, where institutional recommendations must fit the realities of training schedules, travel, competition demands, family circumstances, cultural expectations, and personal values. Athlete-centered governance therefore requires mechanisms through which champions can communicate their needs and participate in the development of policies that directly affect their professional and personal lives.

The public and social dimensions of sporting life create additional complexity. Elite athletes often occupy visible cultural positions and may be expected to function simultaneously as competitors, public figures, role models, brand representatives, and symbols of collective identity. Sports events themselves can generate wider social and developmental effects, particularly when supported by local institutions and public authorities (29). Similarly, the use of sport as a mechanism for urban promotion and social development demonstrates that athletes and sporting institutions are embedded within broader cultural and economic systems (30). This public visibility can create opportunities for social influence but also impose pressures related to image management, consumption, media behavior, sponsorship obligations, and constant public evaluation. The growing importance of innovation and commercialization in sport further intensifies these

pressures, as athletes increasingly operate within environments shaped by business development, sponsorship, technology, and changing professional opportunities (31).

The athlete's career is also characterized by uncertainty and transition. Injury, declining performance, deselection, contract termination, aging, and retirement may rapidly alter the individual's professional identity and daily life. Research on professional aging in elite sport has demonstrated that injury can influence athletes' occupational trajectories and accelerate changes in their professional status (32). Studies of elite female athletes have likewise documented substantial challenges associated with career transition, including uncertainty regarding employment, identity reconstruction, financial stability, and adaptation to post-sport life (33). More recent research among former collegiate athletes has emphasized that healthcare and support needs often persist during and after sport transition, indicating that athlete-support systems should not end when competitive participation ceases (34). These findings underscore the importance of integrating post-career preparedness into lifestyle management during the athlete's active years.

A multidimensional approach is also supported by research demonstrating that elite performance emerges from complex interactions among multiple criteria rather than a single dominant determinant. Decision-support approaches in high-performance sport have incorporated physical, technical, tactical, and psychological criteria simultaneously to better explain athlete development and performance (35). Similarly, contemporary predictive methods increasingly combine diverse sources of information to identify pathways toward elite performance, highlighting the value of integrated rather than reductionist models (36). Although such predictive approaches may emerge from different sporting contexts, they reinforce the broader principle that excellence is produced by interacting systems of characteristics, environments, and developmental processes.

Despite this growing body of research, the literature on elite sport remains fragmented. Many studies focus separately on physiological performance, psychological resilience, coaching, social support, career transitions, organizational systems, or athlete development, while comparatively less attention has been devoted to integrating these domains within a coherent framework of lifestyle management. Yet champions do not experience these factors separately. Sleep patterns may be affected by travel and media use; dietary behaviors may be shaped by competition schedules and financial resources; psychological well-being may depend on family and coaching relationships; ethical decisions may be influenced by sponsorship and public expectations; and career sustainability may depend on the interaction between self-care, institutional support, financial planning, and preparation for post-sport life. Even training progression itself is embedded within complex personal and organizational contexts, as demonstrated by longitudinal analyses of world-class athletes and the long-term development processes required for sustained excellence (8, 24).

Moreover, high-performance sport cannot be separated from the cultural environment in which athletes live. Expectations regarding family relationships, social conduct, consumption, modesty, responsibility, religion, public behavior, and community engagement may differ across societies. Consequently, lifestyle-management models developed in one cultural setting may not adequately represent the experiences of athletes in another. Research on athlete development, social systems, sport organizations, and high-performance pathways increasingly emphasizes the contextual nature of sporting experiences (3, 26, 28). For Iranian sports champions, lifestyle management may be shaped by the intersection of elite-sport demands with family-oriented social structures, religious values, Iranian cultural traditions, expectations associated

with chivalry and sportsmanship, and public perceptions of champions as social role models. These features create a need for a context-sensitive model derived from the experiences and professional knowledge of those familiar with the realities of elite sport.

Accordingly, understanding champions' lifestyle management requires moving beyond a narrow conception of lifestyle as a collection of personal health behaviors. It should instead be conceptualized as a dynamic process involving structural supports, daily behavioral practices, family and cultural contexts, interpersonal influences, situational pressures, and long-term personal, professional, and social consequences. Such an integrated perspective is consistent with contemporary calls for athlete-centered and sustainable models of excellence that recognize both performance and human well-being (13, 16, 27). Developing such a model through qualitative inquiry can reveal dimensions and relationships that may remain hidden in predefined measurement frameworks and can provide a contextually grounded foundation for policy development, athlete education, coaching practice, organizational support, and future research.

Therefore, the aim of the present study was to identify and explain the dimensions of a lifestyle management model for sports champions through a qualitative grounded-theory approach.

Methods and Materials

Study Design and Participants

This study employed a qualitative research design based on classical grounded theory and the emergent approach proposed by Glaser to identify and conceptualize the dimensions of lifestyle management among sports champions. A qualitative methodology was considered appropriate because lifestyle management in elite sport is a multidimensional, context-dependent, socially constructed phenomenon that involves interactions among personal behaviors, professional demands, family circumstances, cultural expectations, institutional arrangements, and broader social conditions. Rather than beginning with predetermined variables or testing a pre-established theoretical framework, the study sought to generate an empirically grounded conceptual explanation from the experiences, interpretations, and professional knowledge of individuals familiar with sports champions and lifestyle-related issues. Consistent with the logic of grounded theory, data collection and analysis proceeded concurrently, and emerging concepts progressively guided subsequent sampling, questioning, and analytic decisions. The research process therefore remained flexible and responsive to the data until the major categories, their properties, and the relationships among them were sufficiently developed.

The target participants consisted of experts and knowledgeable stakeholders in the fields of lifestyle and sport, including members of the intellectual think tanks concerned with "Iranian-Islamic Lifestyle" and "Sports Culture" within the Cultural and Social Headquarters of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution. These individuals were considered appropriate information-rich participants because of their specialized academic, research, policy-making, managerial, cultural, or executive experience in areas related to lifestyle, elite sport, sports culture, and the social and organizational conditions affecting athletes. Eligibility for participation required relevant scientific, research, policy-making, managerial, or professional experience in lifestyle, sports culture, or championship sport; familiarity with the characteristics, needs, and lifestyle challenges of sports champions; knowledge or experience concerning structural, behavioral, cultural, social, or contextual factors affecting athletes' lifestyles; awareness of institutional and

organizational opportunities and constraints associated with lifestyle management in the national sporting environment; and the ability and willingness to provide detailed professional perspectives during an in-depth interview. Particular attention was given to selecting participants capable of discussing not only the personal behaviors of athletes but also the broader institutional, cultural, family, and social processes through which lifestyle practices are shaped and managed.

Sampling initially followed a purposive strategy in order to recruit participants who could provide rich and directly relevant information concerning the phenomenon under investigation. As data collection and analysis progressed, sampling became theoretical, meaning that subsequent participants and lines of inquiry were selected in response to the concepts, categories, ambiguities, and conceptual gaps emerging from the ongoing analysis. This iterative procedure enabled the researchers to further elaborate insufficiently developed categories, compare alternative perspectives, clarify relationships among emerging concepts, and examine variations in the conditions associated with lifestyle management among sports champions. Recruitment continued until theoretical saturation was achieved. Saturation was considered to have occurred when additional interviews no longer generated substantively new concepts, properties, dimensions, or theoretical relationships relevant to the core categories. In the present study, theoretical saturation was reached after interviews with 15 eligible experts and knowledgeable stakeholders, and these 15 participants constituted the final qualitative sample.

Throughout the study, attention was given to the ethical principles governing qualitative research. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, the use of interview data for research purposes, and their right to decline to answer any question or discontinue participation. Interviews were conducted after obtaining participants' informed consent. Permission was also obtained before audio recording the conversations. Confidentiality was maintained during transcription, coding, analysis, and reporting, and identifying information was excluded from the presentation of findings. The researchers additionally sought to maintain reflexive awareness throughout the inquiry so that emerging interpretations remained grounded in participants' accounts rather than being shaped by assumptions imposed in advance.

Data Collection Tools

Data were collected primarily through in-depth semi-structured interviews with experts and knowledgeable stakeholders in lifestyle and sport. Semi-structured interviewing was selected because it provided sufficient direction to ensure engagement with the central research problem while preserving the openness required by an emergent grounded theory design. This format allowed participants to explain their understandings, experiences, professional observations, and interpretations in their own terms, while enabling the interviewer to pursue issues that appeared theoretically significant during the conversation. The interview guide was therefore treated as a flexible framework rather than a fixed questionnaire. The order, wording, and depth of questions could vary across interviews depending on participants' expertise and the concepts emerging from previous interviews and concurrent analysis.

The initial interview guide was developed around broad domains directly related to the lifestyle of sports champions and its management. Participants were invited to describe what they considered to be the defining characteristics and components of sports champions' lifestyles; to explain structural,

organizational, institutional, and managerial factors influencing lifestyle management; to discuss how everyday behaviors, habits, self-care practices, ethical choices, and consumption patterns contribute to athletes' lifestyles; and to elaborate on the roles of family circumstances, cultural norms, social relationships, economic conditions, and living environments. Further discussion focused on how these different domains interact, which factors facilitate or hinder effective lifestyle management, what strategies may support healthier and more sustainable patterns of living among sports champions, and what consequences effective lifestyle management may have for athletes' personal well-being, sporting performance, social standing, professional continuity, and post-career life. In line with the emergent nature of the study, these broad questions were supplemented with probing questions such as requests for clarification, examples, comparisons, explanations of causes and consequences, and descriptions of experiences that appeared contradictory or especially informative.

The content appropriateness of the initial interview guide was reviewed by specialists familiar with lifestyle, sports culture, and elite sport. They considered the questions in terms of conceptual relevance, clarity, comprehensiveness, logical sequence, comprehensibility, and sensitivity to the cultural context of Iranian sport. Particular consideration was given to the extent to which the interview prompts allowed discussion of issues such as human dignity, family relationships, moderation, social responsibility, ethical conduct, and the cultural expectations associated with championship sport without directing participants toward predetermined or socially desirable responses. On the basis of this review, ambiguous, repetitive, or potentially leading formulations were revised. Nevertheless, because the research followed an emergent grounded theory logic, the resulting guide remained deliberately open and adaptable, allowing later interviews to be informed by concepts that arose during earlier stages of data collection and analysis.

With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes on average, although duration varied according to the depth and complexity of the participant's responses. Field notes and analytic notes were produced during and immediately after interviews to document contextual observations, initial interpretations, emerging questions, noteworthy expressions, possible conceptual relationships, and issues requiring further exploration. These notes were subsequently integrated into the analytic process and contributed to theoretical sampling and category development. Data collection continued concurrently with analysis until theoretical saturation was reached.

Several procedures were used to strengthen the credibility and dependability of the qualitative data. The simultaneous process of interviewing, coding, constant comparison, memo writing, and theoretical sampling allowed interpretations to be repeatedly checked against newly collected evidence. Peer review was also used during the analytic process to examine the consistency of coding decisions and the conceptual adequacy of emerging categories. To assess coding dependability more specifically, three interviews were selected and independently coded by the principal researcher and a second researcher familiar with qualitative coding and the subject area. The coding outputs were compared to identify agreements and disagreements. Across the selected interviews, 78 agreements were identified among 90 coded instances, corresponding to an intercoder agreement of 86.67%, which indicated an acceptable level of consistency in the coding process. Disagreements were subsequently reviewed in order to refine code definitions and improve conceptual

clarity. These procedures were used as supportive indicators of analytic consistency while preserving the interpretive and iterative character of grounded theory analysis.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed using classical grounded theory following Glaser's emergent approach. Analysis began immediately after the first interview and continued simultaneously with data collection throughout the study. This concurrent procedure was essential because findings from earlier interviews informed the direction of subsequent interviews, theoretical sampling decisions, and the progressive refinement of concepts and categories. Rather than imposing a pre-established conceptual framework on the material, the researchers allowed concepts and theoretical relationships to emerge inductively from repeated engagement with the data. Constant comparison, theoretical memo writing, theoretical sampling, and progressive conceptualization constituted the principal analytic procedures. At each stage, incidents were compared with incidents, codes with codes, codes with emerging categories, and categories with subsequent data in order to determine similarities, differences, variations, properties, dimensions, and possible theoretical relationships.

Analysis initially proceeded through open coding. Each interview transcript was read repeatedly, and meaningful segments were examined line by line and phrase by phrase. The researchers asked analytic questions concerning what was occurring in each segment, what problem or experience the participant was describing, what action or process was represented, under what conditions it occurred, and how it resembled or differed from other incidents in the dataset. Concise conceptual labels were assigned to meaningful segments, with an emphasis on remaining close to participants' accounts while gradually moving beyond simple description. Similar codes were continuously compared, combined, differentiated, or reorganized as the analysis developed. Repetitive codes and codes with substantial conceptual overlap were merged, whereas data unrelated to the central research problem were not carried forward into category development. Throughout open coding, theoretical memos were written to document analytic insights, questions, tentative relationships, possible category properties, contradictions, and areas requiring further data collection.

As the analysis progressed and a central concern began to emerge, selective coding was undertaken. At this stage, coding became increasingly focused on concepts and categories that were directly relevant to explaining the principal phenomenon of sports champions' lifestyle management. Earlier transcripts were revisited, and subsequent interviews were conducted with greater attention to the properties, variations, conditions, and relationships of the most analytically significant categories. Concepts sharing substantive similarity were integrated into broader subcategories and main categories, while insufficiently developed categories were examined through additional theoretical sampling. Constant comparison remained central throughout this phase and was used to determine whether apparently similar concepts represented the same underlying process or distinct dimensions of the phenomenon. Category development continued until the major categories were sufficiently dense in terms of their conceptual properties and supported by multiple instances in the data.

The final analytic stage involved theoretical coding and integration. At this stage, attention shifted from identifying and organizing categories to explaining how the major categories related to one another within a coherent conceptual model of lifestyle management among sports champions. The researchers repeatedly

returned to interview transcripts, open codes, selective codes, category structures, and theoretical memos to examine the nature and direction of relationships among the emerging dimensions. Potential theoretical connections were accepted only when they could be supported by the qualitative data, and no predetermined coding family or paradigmatic structure was imposed on the findings. Through this iterative process, structural conditions, behavioral practices, contextual circumstances, intervening influences, and perceived consequences were examined in relation to the broader process through which champions attempt to coordinate the sporting and non-sporting domains of their lives. Particular analytical attention was given to how institutional arrangements, daily self-management practices, family and cultural contexts, social influences, ethical considerations, and the demands of elite sport intersect in shaping lifestyle management.

Theoretical memo writing was maintained throughout the entire analytic process and functioned as an important bridge between coding and theory development. Memos recorded the researchers' evolving interpretations of categories, their properties, possible causal or processual connections, conceptual questions, and emerging explanations. These memos were periodically sorted and compared in order to identify higher-order conceptual relationships and support theoretical integration. Theoretical sampling was likewise continued until new data ceased to add meaningful properties, variations, or relationships to the principal categories. The analysis was considered complete when theoretical saturation had been achieved and the categories could be integrated into a coherent explanatory pattern grounded in participants' accounts. The final outcome of this process was a qualitative model identifying the principal dimensions and interrelationships involved in the management of sports champions' lifestyles within their professional, social, cultural, familial, and personal contexts.

Findings and Results

The qualitative sample consisted of 15 experts and knowledgeable stakeholders in the fields of lifestyle, sports culture, championship sport, cultural policy, sport management, and related areas. Participants included specialists and members of intellectual think tanks concerned with Iranian-Islamic lifestyle and sports culture who possessed relevant academic, research, policy-making, managerial, or executive experience. All participants had direct professional familiarity with the cultural, behavioral, organizational, social, and lifestyle-related issues affecting sports champions and were therefore able to provide information-rich perspectives concerning the phenomenon under investigation. Recruitment began purposively and continued theoretically as concepts emerged from the interviews. Data collection ceased after the fifteenth interview because subsequent analysis no longer generated substantively new conceptual properties or relationships and theoretical saturation was judged to have been achieved.

Open coding constituted the first stage of analysis. During this stage, the interview transcripts were repeatedly read and meaningful statements related to sports champions' lifestyle management, influential conditions, daily behaviors, contextual circumstances, and perceived consequences were identified. Each meaningful segment was assigned an initial conceptual code without forcing the data into predetermined classifications. Particular attention was also paid to concepts reflecting Iranian-Islamic cultural values when such meanings were explicitly present in participants' accounts. Illustrative interview excerpts and the corresponding initial concepts are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Illustrative Interview Statements and Initial Codes Extracted During Open Coding

Interview statement	Initial concept	Participant codes
"Cultural programs must fit the athlete's real circumstances. When most of the athlete's time is spent in training camps and competitions, a program that ignores these realities is practically unusable."	Alignment of cultural policies with championship-sport requirements	P1, P3, P6, P9
"Several organizations sometimes talk about athletes' lifestyles, but it is unclear who is actually responsible. Each institution must know what it is responsible for and for what it is accountable."	Clarification of responsibilities of institutions responsible for lifestyle management	P2, P4, P7, P10, P13
"The champion should participate in decision-making meetings. We may design a good program from outside, but the athlete knows better which parts are incompatible with real life."	Participation of champions' representatives in policy development	P1, P5, P8, P11, P14, P15
"Without a specified budget, cultural programs usually become limited to occasional events. Continuous education and counseling require protected resources."	Allocation of designated funding for cultural programs	P3, P6, P10, P12
"Approving a program is not enough; we must see what the club has actually implemented. The number of sessions matters less than whether the program addresses athletes' needs."	Evaluation of implementation of cultural policies in clubs	P2, P5, P7, P11, P15
"Every organization should report what it was supposed to do and how much it actually accomplished."	Requirement for institutional performance reporting	P1, P4, P6, P9, P12, P14
"Athletes should not have to move from one person to another to find a suitable counselor. Clubs need a clear referral pathway."	Organized access to lifestyle counseling	P3, P7, P10, P13
"A nutrition specialist may give one recommendation and a psychologist or family counselor another. These services should be coordinated."	Coordination of psychological, nutritional, and family services	P2, P4, P8, P12, P15
"If athletes fear that confidential information will be passed to the coach or manager, they will not speak openly."	Ensuring confidentiality in counseling services	P1, P5, P6, P9, P11, P14
"Contracts should not contain only the athlete's obligations; their rights should also be clearly stated."	Protection of individual rights in sports contracts	P2, P7, P10, P15
"Support should not end with the athlete's last competition. Insurance coverage for the post-career period should be anticipated."	Provision of insurance support for post-championship life	P3, P5, P8, P11, P13
"Champions should be able to make complaints without fearing exclusion."	Establishment of mechanisms for handling athletes' complaints	P1, P4, P6, P9, P12, P15
"Chivalric ethics should not be introduced only through slogans on club walls. Real situations should be discussed."	Inclusion of chivalric ethics in athlete education	P2, P5, P10, P14
"When we speak about Islamic values, their application in athletes' real lives should be made clear."	Practical education in Islamic values in sport	P1, P3, P7, P11, P15
"The same cultural content cannot be delivered to every athlete; age, experience, sport, and cultural understanding differ."	Audience-sensitive cultural education	P2, P4, P6, P8, P12, P13
"The coach is often the first person with whom athletes discuss a problem. Coaches should know when to guide and when to refer."	Empowering coaches to guide athletes' lives	P3, P6, P9, P14
"A coach should not be evaluated only by competition results. Their educational conduct should also matter."	Inclusion of educational competence in coach evaluation	P1, P5, P7, P10, P12
"Even correct advice becomes ineffective when delivered humiliatingly."	Training coaches in respectful educational dialogue	P2, P4, P8, P11, P13, P15
"An athlete's sleep should not be dictated every night by parties or mobile phones."	Maintaining regular sleep patterns	P1, P6, P10, P13
"Athletes should not copy someone else's diet without considering their own training load and competition schedule."	Nutrition adapted to sporting requirements	P3, P5, P8, P12, P14
"A supplement suitable for one teammate may not be suitable for another."	Avoidance of unsupervised supplement use	P2, P4, P7, P9, P11, P15
"Life planning is not only about training hours; shopping, personal tasks, and family relationships also require time."	Scheduling sporting and non-sporting daily activities	P1, P5, P9, P12
"Some athletes fill the intervals between training sessions with exhausting activities. Rest must have a place in the plan."	Allocation of sufficient daily rest	P2, P6, P8, P11, P14
"Champions also need recreation; life cannot consist entirely of training."	Provision of appropriate time for healthy leisure	P3, P4, P7, P10, P13, P15
"Fairness matters when athletes have the opportunity to exploit a situation."	Fairness toward competitors	P1, P7, P11, P15
"Championship should not make someone feel superior to everyone else."	Maintaining humility after sporting success	P2, P5, P8, P10, P13
"When athletes make mistakes, they should not always blame the referee or teammate."	Acceptance of responsibility for mistakes in competition	P1, P3, P6, P9, P12, P14
"A champion's promise matters, even in small matters."	Commitment to promises in social relationships	P4, P7, P10, P14

“Fame is not permission to ignore other people’s rights.”	Respect for others’ rights in public conduct	P1, P5, P8, P11, P15
“Champions can participate voluntarily in charitable activities in their communities.”	Voluntary participation in local charitable activities	P2, P3, P6, P9, P12, P13
“Income may be high in one season but uncertain in the next.”	Matching personal expenditure to actual income	P2, P6, P11, P14
“Moderation means purchasing according to need, not buying everything that becomes fashionable.”	Avoidance of extravagance in everyday purchases	P1, P4, P7, P10, P15
“Before making major purchases, athletes should consider upcoming essential expenses.”	Prioritization of essential needs in purchasing	P3, P5, P8, P9, P12, P13
“Social media may be part of an athlete’s work, but it should not consume all of their time.”	Limiting time spent on social networks	P1, P8, P12, P15
“Before publishing someone’s image or information, the athlete should consider their consent.”	Respect for others’ privacy in content publication	P2, P4, P6, P10, P14
“With many followers, incorrect information can spread rapidly.”	Verification of information before reposting	P1, P3, P5, P7, P11, P13
“The circumstances of a single athlete differ from those of someone with a spouse and children.”	Marital status and number of children	P3, P7, P9, P12
“Someone living alone manages daily life differently from someone living with family.”	Independent living versus living with family	P1, P4, P8, P11, P15
“An athlete may be responsible for caring for parents or other relatives.”	Presence of dependent family members	P2, P5, P6, P10, P13, P14
“Part of one’s understanding of right and wrong comes from family upbringing.”	Ethical upbringing in the family of origin	P1, P6, P11, P14
“Someone who had age-appropriate responsibilities in childhood enters professional life with different experiences.”	Childhood experience of responsibility	P3, P5, P8, P10, P15
“Some people participated in family decisions from adolescence, whereas others always waited for others to decide.”	Previous participation in family decision-making	P2, P4, P7, P9, P12, P13
“For some families, religious beliefs strongly guide decisions; for others, they play a different role.”	Place of religious beliefs in the living environment	P2, P7, P12, P15
“Even members of the same family may understand religiosity differently.”	Diversity of religious interpretations within the family	P1, P4, P6, P9, P13
“Religious rituals are prominent in some environments and less so in others.”	Importance of religious rituals in the social environment	P3, P5, P8, P10, P11, P14
“Family ceremonies and gatherings have an important place in many Iranian families.”	Place of family rituals in social life	P1, P5, P10, P13
“In some cities, narratives of chivalry and sportsmanship remain very strong.”	Presence of chivalric traditions in local culture	P2, P6, P8, P12, P15
“Respect for elders can take different forms across families.”	Place of respect for elders in social interaction	P1, P3, P4, P7, P11, P14
“When the athlete’s income is the family’s primary source of livelihood, professional decisions take on a different meaning.”	Household dependence on sports income	P4, P8, P11, P15
“Some athletes or families have income outside sport, whereas others depend entirely on sport.”	Availability of non-sport income	P1, P3, P6, P10, P14
“Income alone is not enough; installments, rent, and fixed expenses also matter.”	Fixed household financial obligations	P2, P5, P7, P9, P12, P13
“Professional life in individual and team sports is not the same.”	Individual versus team sport	P1, P7, P10, P14
“The needs of a newcomer to professional sport differ from those of an experienced champion.”	Stage of professional sporting career	P2, P4, P8, P11, P15
“In some sports, body weight is itself part of the competitive requirement.”	Dependence of the sport on body-weight control	P3, P5, P6, P9, P12, P13
“When athletes’ schedules become crowded, practical family assistance can make daily tasks easier.”	Family assistance during periods of heavy responsibility	P2, P6, P9, P13
“Sometimes athletes need to be heard more than advised.”	Emotional family support during difficult personal decisions	P1, P5, P7, P11, P14
“If an athlete wants to change unhealthy eating or sleeping habits, family support at home matters.”	Family support in changing unhealthy habits	P3, P4, P8, P10, P12, P15
“The coach must accept that athletes also have responsibilities outside the field.”	Coach recognition of athletes’ family needs	P1, P8, P11, P15
“When an athlete is trying to correct an unhealthy habit, the coach’s attitude can help.”	Coach support for changing unhealthy habits	P2, P5, P6, P10, P13
“Some athletes worry that seeing a psychologist will be regarded as weakness.”	Coach support for seeking professional help	P1, P3, P4, P7, P12, P14
“Friends may insist on late-night entertainment even when the athlete plans to rest early.”	Peer encouragement of incompatible leisure activities	P3, P7, P12, P14

“Athletes may be mocked for maintaining personal values.”	Ridicule of adherence to personal values	P1, P4, P8, P10, P15
“Teammates may normalize use of uncertain supplements.”	Teammate encouragement of unsafe supplement use	P2, P5, P6, P9, P11, P13
“Some audiences expect champions always to display luxurious lifestyles.”	Audience pressure to display luxury	P2, P8, P11, P14
“Photographs or information about private life may be published without consent.”	Unauthorized exposure of private life	P1, P3, P6, P10, P15
“Champions are sometimes expected to explain every personal decision.”	Constant public accountability for private choices	P4, P5, P7, P9, P12, P13
“An athlete may receive a financially attractive offer to promote a product inconsistent with personal beliefs.”	Requests to promote products inconsistent with beliefs	P1, P6, P9, P15
“Athletes may be asked to overlook something they consider ethically wrong in order to achieve results.”	Pressure to disregard personal ethical principles	P2, P4, P8, P11, P14
“Mandatory programs may conflict with religious observances important to the athlete.”	Conflict between attendance requirements and religious practices	P1, P3, P5, P7, P10, P12
“Sudden illness of a family member can disrupt all previous plans.”	Sudden illness of a family member	P3, P8, P12, P15
“Unexpected interruption of income changes many decisions.”	Unexpected interruption of income during the season	P1, P4, P6, P9, P13
“A crisis may suddenly force an athlete to relocate.”	Forced relocation due to crisis	P2, P5, P7, P10, P11, P14
“More orderly sleep, rest, and daily routines are expected to reduce persistent fatigue.”	Reduction of persistent everyday fatigue	P1, P5, P10, P14
“When life is no longer dominated by delayed tasks and conflicting schedules, some tension may decline.”	Reduction of stress caused by life disorganization	P2, P6, P8, P11, P15
“One expected result is more regular and continuous sleep.”	Improvement in quality and continuity of nighttime sleep	P1, P3, P4, P7, P12, P13
“A champion may be successful but dissatisfied with everyday life.”	Greater satisfaction with everyday lifestyle	P3, P6, P9, P13
“Champions should not evaluate their worth only through medals and results.”	Greater sense of self-worth independent of medals	P1, P4, P7, P10, P14
“Life should not be reduced to the next competition.”	Greater sense of meaning in personal life	P2, P5, P8, P11, P12, P15
“If the time and quality of family relationships improve, greater family satisfaction can be expected.”	Increased satisfaction with quality of family relationships	P2, P7, P11, P15
“When responsibilities are clear and manageable, disputes over shared duties may decrease.”	Reduced conflict over shared family responsibilities	P1, P3, P6, P9, P14
“When family members see that accepted commitments are being fulfilled, mutual trust may increase.”	Increased mutual trust among family members	P4, P5, P8, P10, P12, P13
“Correcting unhealthy habits may reduce preventable interruptions in sport.”	Reduction of interruptions caused by unhealthy habits	P1, P8, P10, P13
“If athletes plan ahead for skills, income, and future roles, they may enter post-career life better prepared.”	Improved preparedness for post-championship life	P2, P4, P7, P11, P15
“Better life management may reduce pressures leading to premature withdrawal from sport.”	Reduced inclination toward premature sport retirement	P1, P3, P5, P6, P9, P14
“When consistency between champions’ words and behaviors is observed, public trust may increase.”	Increased public trust in champions’ behavior	P3, P7, P12, P14
“Families notice athletes’ behavior, not only their medals.”	Increased ethical credibility of sport among families	P1, P5, P8, P10, P15
“When champions make social commitments and follow through, people may take their words more seriously.”	Increased credibility of champions’ social commitments	P2, P4, P6, P9, P11, P13
“Young people may learn not only sporting techniques but also behavior from admired champions.”	Increased youth modeling of responsible behavior	P2, P6, P11, P15
“When chivalry is visible in real behavior, it can become meaningful to adolescents.”	Strengthened voluntary acceptance of chivalric values	P1, P3, P7, P10, P14
“If champions demonstrate moderate consumption, adolescents may reflect more carefully on their own choices.”	Increased adolescent attention to moderation in consumption	P2, P4, P5, P8, P12, P13

Table 1 demonstrates that the open-coding process generated a broad spectrum of concepts extending beyond athletes’ personal habits to encompass organizational structures, institutional support, cultural expectations, family circumstances, economic conditions, social pressures, ethical conduct, and anticipated

personal and social outcomes. The repeated appearance of similar meanings across different participants indicated that lifestyle management was understood as an integrated phenomenon rather than as a narrow issue of physical self-care. Participants consistently emphasized that champions' lifestyles are shaped through the interaction of personal agency with club policies, family arrangements, coaching relationships, cultural and religious values, media exposure, financial conditions, and career-specific demands. The presence of convergent statements across multiple interviews also provided the basis for comparing, consolidating, and progressively abstracting the initial codes during the subsequent stage of selective coding.

Following open coding, the initial codes were repeatedly reviewed and compared. Codes with equivalent or closely related meanings were integrated, whereas codes lacking a clear relationship to the central phenomenon were excluded from further conceptual development. Through this process, 90 refined initial codes were organized into 30 subcategories and subsequently integrated into 15 main categories. Table 2 presents the results of selective coding.

Table 2. Refined Initial Codes, Subcategories, and Main Categories

Main category	Subcategory	Refined initial codes
Cultural policymaking	Policy coherence	Alignment of cultural policies with championship-sport requirements; clarification of responsibilities of institutions responsible for lifestyle management; participation of champions' representatives in policy development
Cultural policymaking	Implementation assurance	Allocation of designated funding for cultural programs; evaluation of implementation of cultural policies in clubs; requirement for institutional performance reporting
Institutional support	Specialized services	Organized access to lifestyle counseling; coordination of psychological, nutritional, and family services; ensuring confidentiality in counseling services
Institutional support	Professional rights	Protection of individual rights in sports contracts; provision of insurance support for post-championship life; establishment of mechanisms for handling athletes' complaints
Educational system	Cultural education	Inclusion of chivalric ethics in athlete education; practical education in Islamic values in sport; audience-sensitive cultural education
Educational system	Coach education	Empowering coaches to guide athletes' lives; inclusion of educational competence in coach evaluation; training coaches in respectful educational dialogue
Daily self-care	Biological discipline	Maintaining regular sleep patterns; nutrition adapted to sporting requirements; avoidance of unsupervised supplement use
Daily self-care	Activity regulation	Scheduling sporting and non-sporting daily activities; allocation of sufficient daily rest; provision of appropriate time for healthy leisure
Ethical behavior	Chivalric conduct	Fairness toward competitors; maintaining humility after sporting success; acceptance of responsibility for mistakes in competition
Ethical behavior	Social commitment	Commitment to promises in social relationships; respect for others' rights in public conduct; voluntary participation in local charitable activities
Consumption moderation	Economic consumption	Matching personal expenditure to actual income; avoidance of extravagance in everyday purchases; prioritization of essential needs in purchasing
Consumption moderation	Media consumption	Limiting time spent on social networks; respect for others' privacy in content publication; verification of information before reposting
Family context	Family structure	Marital status and number of children; independent living versus living with family; presence of dependent family members
Family context	Educational background	Ethical upbringing in the family of origin; childhood experience of responsibility; previous participation in family decision-making
Cultural context	Religious beliefs	Place of religious beliefs in the living environment; diversity of religious interpretations within the family; importance of religious rituals in the social environment
Cultural context	Iranian traditions	Place of family rituals in social life; presence of chivalric traditions in local culture; place of respect for elders in social interaction
Life circumstances	Economic conditions	Household dependence on sports income; availability of non-sport income; fixed household financial obligations
Life circumstances	Sport characteristics	Individual versus team sport; stage of professional sporting career; dependence of the sport on body-weight control
Support of significant others	Family support	Family assistance during periods of heavy responsibility; emotional family support during difficult personal decisions; family support in changing unhealthy habits
Support of significant others	Coach support	Coach recognition of athletes' family needs; coach support for changing unhealthy habits; coach support for seeking professional help

Social influence	Peer pressure	Peer encouragement of incompatible leisure activities; ridicule of adherence to personal values; teammate encouragement of unsafe supplement use
Social influence	Fame pressure	Audience pressure to display luxury; unauthorized exposure of private life; constant public accountability for private choices
Situational conflict	Value conflict	Requests to promote products inconsistent with beliefs; pressure to disregard personal ethical principles; conflict between attendance requirements and religious practices
Situational conflict	Sudden crisis	Sudden illness of a family member; unexpected interruption of income during the season; forced relocation due to crisis
Individual well-being	Sustainable health	Reduction of persistent everyday fatigue; reduction of stress caused by life disorganization; improvement in quality and continuity of nighttime sleep
Individual well-being	Personal satisfaction	Greater satisfaction with everyday lifestyle; greater sense of self-worth independent of medals; greater sense of meaning in personal life
Life sustainability	Family stability	Increased satisfaction with quality of family relationships; reduced conflict over shared family responsibilities; increased mutual trust among family members
Life sustainability	Professional continuity	Reduction of interruptions caused by unhealthy habits; improved preparedness for post-championship life; reduced inclination toward premature sport retirement
Cultural credibility	Social trust	Increased public trust in champions' behavior; increased ethical credibility of sport among families; increased credibility of champions' social commitments
Cultural credibility	Cultural role modeling	Increased youth modeling of responsible behavior; strengthened voluntary acceptance of chivalric values; increased adolescent attention to moderation in consumption

As shown in Table 2, selective coding reduced the large set of initial codes into a more coherent conceptual structure comprising 30 subcategories and 15 main categories. The emerging structure indicated that sports champions' lifestyle management cannot be explained exclusively in terms of individual discipline. Three categories—cultural policymaking, institutional support, and the educational system—captured the formal structures surrounding athletes; daily self-care, ethical behavior, and consumption moderation reflected athletes' behavioral practices; family context, cultural context, and life circumstances represented the settings within which those practices occurred; support of significant others, social influence, and situational conflict represented conditions capable of facilitating or disrupting lifestyle management; and individual well-being, life sustainability, and cultural credibility represented the principal expected outcomes. The progressive abstraction of codes therefore revealed a multidimensional pattern in which organizational, behavioral, contextual, interpersonal, and outcome-related elements were theoretically interconnected.

In the final stage of theoretical integration, the 15 main categories were organized into five overarching dimensions. The relationships among the categories were examined through repeated comparisons of interview material, refined codes, subcategories, and theoretical memos. This process resulted in a qualitative model encompassing structural factors, behavioral factors, contextual factors, intervening factors, and expected outcomes. The integrated conceptual structure is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Overarching Dimensions, Main Categories, Subcategories, and Initial Concepts of the Lifestyle Management Model

Overarching dimension	Main category	Subcategory	Initial concepts
Structural factors	Cultural policymaking	Policy coherence	Alignment of cultural policies with championship-sport requirements; clarification of responsibilities of institutions responsible for lifestyle management; participation of champions' representatives in policy development
Structural factors	Cultural policymaking	Implementation assurance	Allocation of designated funding for cultural programs; evaluation of implementation of cultural policies in clubs; requirement for institutional performance reporting
Structural factors	Institutional support	Specialized services	Organized access to lifestyle counseling; coordination of psychological, nutritional, and family services; ensuring confidentiality in counseling services

Structural factors	Institutional support	Professional rights	Protection of individual rights in sports contracts; provision of insurance support for post-championship life; establishment of mechanisms for handling athletes' complaints
Structural factors	Educational system	Cultural education	Inclusion of chivalric ethics in athlete education; practical education in Islamic values in sport; audience-sensitive cultural education
Structural factors	Educational system	Coach education	Empowering coaches to guide athletes' lives; inclusion of educational competence in coach evaluation; training coaches in respectful educational dialogue
Behavioral factors	Daily self-care	Biological discipline	Maintaining regular sleep patterns; nutrition adapted to sporting requirements; avoidance of unsupervised supplement use
Behavioral factors	Daily self-care	Activity regulation	Scheduling sporting and non-sporting daily activities; allocation of sufficient daily rest; provision of appropriate time for healthy leisure
Behavioral factors	Ethical behavior	Chivalric conduct	Fairness toward competitors; maintaining humility after sporting success; acceptance of responsibility for mistakes in competition
Behavioral factors	Ethical behavior	Social commitment	Commitment to promises in social relationships; respect for others' rights in public conduct; voluntary participation in local charitable activities
Behavioral factors	Consumption moderation	Economic consumption	Matching personal expenditure to actual income; avoidance of extravagance in everyday purchases; prioritization of essential needs in purchasing
Behavioral factors	Consumption moderation	Media consumption	Limiting time spent on social networks; respect for others' privacy in content publication; verification of information before reposting
Contextual factors	Family context	Family structure	Marital status and number of children; independent living versus living with family; presence of dependent family members
Contextual factors	Family context	Educational background	Ethical upbringing in the family of origin; childhood experience of responsibility; previous participation in family decision-making
Contextual factors	Cultural context	Religious beliefs	Place of religious beliefs in the living environment; diversity of religious interpretations within the family; importance of religious rituals in the social environment
Contextual factors	Cultural context	Iranian traditions	Place of family rituals in social life; presence of chivalric traditions in local culture; place of respect for elders in social interaction
Contextual factors	Life circumstances	Economic conditions	Household dependence on sports income; availability of non-sport income; fixed household financial obligations
Contextual factors	Life circumstances	Sport characteristics	Individual versus team sport; stage of professional sporting career; dependence of the sport on body-weight control
Intervening factors	Support of significant others	Family support	Family assistance during periods of heavy responsibility; emotional family support during difficult personal decisions; family support in changing unhealthy habits
Intervening factors	Support of significant others	Coach support	Coach recognition of athletes' family needs; coach support for changing unhealthy habits; coach support for seeking professional help
Intervening factors	Social influence	Peer pressure	Peer encouragement of incompatible leisure activities; ridicule of adherence to personal values; teammate encouragement of unsafe supplement use
Intervening factors	Social influence	Fame pressure	Audience pressure to display luxury; unauthorized exposure of private life; constant public accountability for private choices
Intervening factors	Situational conflict	Value conflict	Requests to promote products inconsistent with beliefs; pressure to disregard personal ethical principles; conflict between attendance requirements and religious practices
Intervening factors	Situational conflict	Sudden crisis	Sudden illness of a family member; unexpected interruption of income during the season; forced relocation due to crisis
Expected outcomes	Individual well-being	Sustainable health	Reduction of persistent everyday fatigue; reduction of stress caused by life disorganization; improvement in quality and continuity of nighttime sleep
Expected outcomes	Individual well-being	Personal satisfaction	Greater satisfaction with everyday lifestyle; greater sense of self-worth independent of medals; greater sense of meaning in personal life
Expected outcomes	Life sustainability	Family stability	Increased satisfaction with quality of family relationships; reduced conflict over shared family responsibilities; increased mutual trust among family members
Expected outcomes	Life sustainability	Professional continuity	Reduction of interruptions caused by unhealthy habits; improved preparedness for post-championship life; reduced inclination toward premature sport retirement
Expected outcomes	Cultural credibility	Social trust	Increased public trust in champions' behavior; increased ethical credibility of sport among families; increased credibility of champions' social commitments

Expected outcomes	Cultural credibility	Cultural role modeling	Increased youth modeling of responsible behavior; strengthened voluntary acceptance of chivalric values; increased adolescent attention to moderation in consumption

Table 3 presents the final integrated structure derived from theoretical coding and demonstrates that lifestyle management among sports champions was conceptualized through five interrelated overarching dimensions: structural factors, behavioral factors, contextual factors, intervening factors, and expected outcomes. Structural factors provided the institutional and educational infrastructure through cultural policymaking, organizational support, and educational systems. Behavioral factors represented athletes' everyday actions in self-care, ethical conduct, financial moderation, and media use. Contextual factors reflected relatively enduring characteristics of family, culture, economic conditions, and sporting circumstances that shaped the meaning and feasibility of lifestyle choices. Intervening factors explained why similar intentions or lifestyle decisions could produce different experiences under different interpersonal and situational conditions, particularly through family and coach support, peer and fame-related pressures, value conflicts, and unexpected crises. Finally, the expected outcomes suggested that coherent lifestyle management could extend beyond athletic functioning to encompass personal well-being, family stability, professional continuity, social trust, and cultural role modeling. Across the categories, the underlying theoretical logic pointed toward the integrated organization of sporting and non-sporting life as the central process connecting the various dimensions of sports champions' lifestyle management.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present qualitative study sought to identify and explain the dimensions of lifestyle management among sports champions through a grounded-theory approach. The findings revealed a multidimensional model composed of five overarching dimensions: structural factors, behavioral factors, contextual factors, intervening factors, and expected outcomes. These dimensions incorporated 15 main categories and 30 subcategories, demonstrating that lifestyle management in elite sport extends far beyond individual habits and should instead be understood as an integrated process involving institutions, everyday behaviors, family and cultural environments, interpersonal influences, situational pressures, and long-term consequences. The findings therefore support a systemic understanding of elite-athlete lifestyle management in which sustainable performance and personal well-being emerge from the interaction of multiple levels of influence rather than from isolated athlete characteristics.

The first overarching dimension concerned structural factors and included cultural policymaking, institutional support, and the educational system. Participants emphasized that effective lifestyle management requires coherent policies aligned with the practical realities of elite sport, clear allocation of institutional responsibilities, athlete participation in policy formulation, sufficient financial support, implementation monitoring, and accountability mechanisms. These findings are consistent with research indicating that elite-athlete development depends on coordinated systems and organizational structures rather than solely on individual talent or motivation. National and institutional talent-development systems shape the opportunities, resources, expectations, and developmental pathways available to athletes (24). Similarly, research on the role of local clubs has shown that clubs function as critical elements within the value chain of high-performance athlete development by connecting coaching, organizational support,

competition, and broader developmental resources (23). The present findings extend this perspective by showing that institutional structures also influence how athletes manage their personal lives, cultural obligations, rights, and access to supportive services.

Institutional support emerged as a particularly important structural category and included access to lifestyle counseling, coordination among psychological, nutritional, and family services, confidentiality, professional rights, insurance coverage, and formal mechanisms for handling complaints. These findings align with recent calls for more comprehensive athlete-support systems that continue beyond immediate performance demands. Athletes entering elite sport may face psychological and practical difficulties that require coordinated institutional preparation rather than fragmented support delivered only after problems arise (16). Likewise, healthcare and support needs may persist during and after athletes transition away from competitive sport, emphasizing the importance of continuity in institutional care (34). The importance of coordinated support is also consistent with athlete-centered approaches that prioritize health, well-being, and individual needs alongside sporting excellence (27). Thus, the findings suggest that lifestyle management should be embedded within the organizational architecture of elite sport and not treated as an exclusively private responsibility.

The educational system constituted another structural component of the model. Participants highlighted the importance of teaching chivalric ethics, translating Islamic values into practical sporting situations, tailoring cultural education to athletes' characteristics, and strengthening coaches' educational competencies. These findings are supported by the argument that high-performance sport also functions as an educational environment in which athletes develop identities, values, responsibilities, and social behaviors beyond sport-specific skills (26). Coaches are especially important in this respect because they often function simultaneously as performance specialists, authority figures, mentors, and sources of informal guidance. Research on successful world-champion coaches has shown that effective coaching involves not only technical expertise but also communication, individualized management, psychological understanding, and accumulated experiential knowledge (21). Broader managerial frameworks for sport development similarly indicate that coaching should be viewed as part of an integrated developmental process rather than as a narrowly technical activity (22). The findings therefore suggest that coach education should include competencies related to athletes' personal development, communication, ethical guidance, and appropriate referral to specialized services.

The second overarching dimension involved behavioral factors, including daily self-care, ethical behavior, and consumption moderation. Daily self-care encompassed regular sleep, sport-appropriate nutrition, avoidance of unsupervised supplement use, balanced scheduling of sporting and non-sporting activities, sufficient rest, and healthy leisure. These findings strongly align with research showing that lifestyle-related behaviors are integral to sports performance rather than peripheral to it. Systematic reviews have demonstrated that lifestyle factors and mindset interact with athletic performance through mechanisms involving recovery, health, stress management, and behavioral consistency (1, 2). Longitudinal studies of world-class athletes also indicate that elite performance develops through carefully managed interactions among training, recovery, adaptation, and competition exposure over time (8). Physiological research further highlights the importance of competitive experience, autonomic regulation, body composition, and sport-specific physical characteristics in sustaining high performance (5, 6). The present findings add that these

physiological demands are inseparable from everyday decisions concerning sleep, nutrition, rest, and time management.

Ethical behavior represented another behavioral domain and incorporated fairness, humility, responsibility for mistakes, respect for others' rights, fulfillment of social commitments, and voluntary charitable participation. This result is noteworthy because it positions lifestyle management as a moral and social process in addition to a health-related one. Elite athletes occupy highly visible social positions, and their behavior may influence how sport is perceived by families, young people, and wider communities. This role becomes more pronounced in contexts where champions are viewed not merely as performers but also as cultural representatives. Research on sport development and the wider social functions of sport suggests that athletes and sporting institutions are embedded in broader cultural, economic, and community systems (29, 30). The current findings therefore imply that ethical conduct is part of sustainable lifestyle management because public credibility, interpersonal trust, and athletes' own sense of integrity may be affected by the consistency between their values and behaviors.

Consumption moderation was expressed through both economic and media-related behaviors. Participants emphasized matching expenditures to actual income, avoiding unnecessary consumption, prioritizing essential needs, limiting social-media exposure, respecting others' privacy, and verifying information before dissemination. These findings reflect the changing environment of elite sport, in which athletes increasingly interact with sponsorship, social media, commercialization, and public image management. The contemporary sporting environment is increasingly shaped by innovation, branding, digital visibility, and new professional opportunities (31). Such opportunities can enhance athletes' careers but can also create pressures toward conspicuous consumption, constant online engagement, and image-based self-presentation. The present findings therefore broaden conventional understandings of athlete self-management by including financial prudence and responsible media use as important components of sustainable lifestyle management.

The third overarching dimension concerned contextual factors and comprised family context, cultural context, and life circumstances. Family context included marital status, dependent family members, living arrangements, ethical upbringing, childhood responsibility, and previous participation in family decision-making. These findings indicate that athletes enter elite sport with pre-existing relational and developmental histories that shape their current decision-making and lifestyle patterns. The role of family support in elite sport has been demonstrated in previous research, including evidence that parental support can contribute to sporting achievement through motivational pathways (20). The current findings add depth to this evidence by suggesting that family influence is not limited to encouragement but also includes early socialization, responsibility development, moral education, and the practical organization of adult life.

Cultural context emerged through religious beliefs, variation in religious interpretations, religious practices, family rituals, local chivalric traditions, and respect for elders. This dimension is particularly significant because it highlights the culturally embedded nature of lifestyle management. Athlete-development systems and support models cannot be assumed to operate identically across cultural environments. Athlete voice research has emphasized the importance of understanding athletes' lived realities and incorporating their perspectives into organizational decision-making (28). Similarly, the broader literature on athlete development recognizes that elite performance pathways are shaped by

contextual and system-level conditions rather than universal prescriptions (3, 24). The present study therefore suggests that lifestyle-management models should be culturally sensitive and should accommodate different interpretations of religion, family obligations, social traditions, and public expectations rather than imposing homogeneous standards.

Life circumstances, including economic conditions and sport-specific characteristics, also shaped lifestyle management. Household dependence on sporting income, availability of alternative income sources, financial obligations, type of sport, career stage, and weight-control demands were all identified as influential contextual conditions. This finding is compatible with research demonstrating that elite athletes differ considerably in their developmental pathways, sport-specific demands, personality characteristics, and career circumstances (17, 18). Sport-specific physiological requirements also vary substantially, as indicated by research on body composition, genetic profiles, cardiovascular characteristics, and performance demands across sporting disciplines (4, 7). The current findings imply that lifestyle recommendations should therefore be individualized according to both the athlete's sporting discipline and broader life situation.

The fourth dimension, intervening factors, included support of significant others, social influence, and situational conflict. Family and coach support were identified as important facilitators, particularly during periods of high responsibility, difficult personal decisions, lifestyle change, family conflict, or help-seeking. These results support the broader literature emphasizing the importance of relational environments in sustaining elite athletes. Coaches can either facilitate or inhibit adaptive behavior depending on their communication style, responsiveness, and willingness to acknowledge athletes' broader life responsibilities (21). Family support can similarly strengthen athletes' ability to maintain motivation, make difficult decisions, and manage competing demands (20).

At the same time, participants identified peer pressure, fame-related expectations, privacy intrusion, ethical conflicts, religious conflicts, family illness, financial disruption, and forced relocation as factors that could destabilize otherwise well-organized lifestyles. These findings are consistent with research highlighting the importance of coping capacity and psychological resilience in high-pressure and rapidly changing conditions (11, 12). Psychological sustainability has increasingly been recognized as essential to elite-sport preparation because athletes must repeatedly adapt to stress, uncertainty, public evaluation, and changing professional demands (13). The relevance of performance under pressure has also been emphasized in work drawing on elite athletes' experience to inform other high-stress professional environments (14, 15). The present findings therefore suggest that lifestyle management should include adaptive capacity for disruption rather than assuming stable conditions.

The final overarching dimension concerned expected outcomes and included individual well-being, life sustainability, and cultural credibility. Participants expected effective lifestyle management to reduce persistent fatigue and disorganization-related stress, improve sleep, increase satisfaction and meaning, strengthen family relationships, support professional continuity, improve readiness for post-career life, and reinforce public trust and positive role modeling. These outcomes closely correspond with contemporary concerns about the long-term sustainability of elite athletic careers. Psychological well-being and resilience are increasingly considered essential to both competitive success and athletes' broader quality of life (12, 13). Similarly, lifestyle-related behaviors may contribute to both immediate performance and longer-term health outcomes (1, 10).

The emphasis on life sustainability and post-career preparedness is particularly important. Injury, aging, declining performance, retirement, and loss of athletic identity may substantially disrupt athletes' lives. Research has shown that injury can influence professional aging and career trajectories in elite sport (32), while career transition can create major challenges involving identity, employment, financial security, and adaptation to life beyond competition (33). The continued healthcare needs of former athletes further demonstrate that the consequences of elite-sport participation extend beyond the end of active competition (34). Accordingly, lifestyle management should begin preparing athletes for post-sport life during their active careers rather than treating retirement planning as a late-stage intervention.

Overall, the findings support an integrated interpretation in which sports champions' lifestyle management is best understood as the coordinated organization of sporting and non-sporting life. This interpretation is compatible with evidence that athletic excellence emerges from multiple interacting factors rather than a single performance determinant (3, 35). Contemporary predictive approaches also increasingly recognize the value of combining diverse sources of information when seeking to understand elite performance trajectories (36). The present model extends this multidimensional logic beyond performance prediction by incorporating organizational, behavioral, cultural, interpersonal, and life-course considerations. In this sense, sustainable championship performance appears to depend not only on the athlete's ability to train and compete but also on the capacity to organize daily life coherently, receive appropriate institutional and relational support, respond adaptively to contextual pressures, maintain ethical and social integrity, and prepare for future life transitions.

The present study has several limitations. First, the findings were derived from interviews with 15 experts and knowledgeable stakeholders rather than from sports champions themselves; therefore, the resulting model reflects informed professional interpretations of athletes' lifestyles and may not capture all aspects of champions' first-person experiences. Second, the study was conducted within a specific cultural and institutional context, which may limit the transferability of some categories to elite-sport systems operating under different social, religious, organizational, or economic conditions. Third, although theoretical sampling and saturation were used, some specialized sporting environments may not have been represented equally, particularly sports characterized by highly distinctive training, travel, financial, or weight-management demands. Finally, as with all qualitative grounded-theory studies, interpretation was influenced to some extent by the researchers' analytic judgments despite the use of constant comparison, memo writing, peer review, and intercoder assessment to strengthen analytic consistency.

Future research should examine the proposed model directly from the perspectives of sports champions across different sports, competitive levels, genders, career stages, and geographical regions. Comparative qualitative studies may clarify which dimensions are common across elite-sport contexts and which are culturally or sport-specifically dependent. Longitudinal studies would also be valuable for examining how lifestyle-management needs change across the athlete's career, from entry into elite sport through peak performance, injury, transition, and retirement. Future studies could additionally explore each major category in greater depth, including financial management, social-media behavior, family relationships, coach influence, ethical conflicts, and post-career preparation. Participatory studies involving athletes, families, coaches, managers, health professionals, and policymakers may further refine the model and

provide a more comprehensive understanding of how different stakeholders contribute to sustainable lifestyle management.

From a practical perspective, sports organizations should treat lifestyle management as an integrated component of athlete development rather than as an optional educational activity. Clubs, federations, and governing bodies should establish coordinated support systems that include confidential access to psychological, nutritional, family, career, and financial guidance; clarify institutional responsibilities; and ensure that athletes have meaningful opportunities to participate in decisions affecting their lives. Coach-development programs should incorporate communication, ethical guidance, lifestyle support, and referral competencies alongside technical training. Athletes should also receive practical education in sleep, recovery, nutrition, time management, financial planning, responsible media use, interpersonal relationships, and preparation for post-sport life. Finally, lifestyle-management programs should remain flexible enough to reflect athletes' family situations, cultural values, sporting disciplines, and individual career stages so that support is relevant to their actual lived circumstances.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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