

# INQUIRY 6 CAREER

## PROFESSIONAL ATHLETE



### What is a Professional athlete?

What is an elite athlete? Well a quick google will give you the answer. A person who is currently or has previously competed as a varsity player (individual or team), a professional player or a national or international level player. Elite athletes are at increased risk of injury<sup>1</sup>. But what makes an elite athlete, what do you have to do to get to the top? Is it really only being the best or are there other things that go on behind the scenes that you don't see. I have talked to 1 professional athlete<sup>2</sup> in the mix of it right now, and another who has made their mark and gets to look back and say he made it<sup>3</sup>. Someone once said to me that a lot goes into racing, 364 days of training for 1 day of show. I think if you don't understand this as an athlete you will never make it to the top level, you need to remember that a lot goes in for just 1 chance. So you can think what you want of a professional athlete but what they are is very determined.

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<sup>1</sup> [Definition of elite athlete](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Matt Stuttard](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Lyndon Sheehan](#)

## What qualifications do I need?

To be true you don't **need** a qualification to become an athlete. But after you have done your dash you will need something to fall back on. Both of my experts have a job on the side of their sport. My first expert Mr Sheehan, has done his time and has fallen on his love for design and teaching/coaching and has become a DVC<sup>4</sup> at my school. All he did was get a teaching degree and add his passion for design from school and he was one of the top picks for the job. My other expert Matt, has worked for his parents company to help pay the bills when he was a privateer (not in a team). I would like to think I am going to get around 15-20 seasons at top level racing with some added at the start getting into the discipline and at the tail end of my career. I would like to take up a small job at a cafe to get some food skills under my belt. As I think that would be a really good job to do alongside sports.

After school am looking at taking 2 degrees, [Graduate Diploma in Sport and Exercise](#)<sup>5</sup> for a possible chance at coaching and a [Graduate Diploma in Human Nutrition](#)<sup>6</sup>. The sports diploma is in town at Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology. So I would be able to hopefully stay at home whilst I am completing the 1 year course. This could lead me into a coaching position. I have already coached for a number of years now and I have loved it. So I feel that it would be a great place to end up after a hard sporting career, teaching others and helping them to their form of success. As for the nutrition diploma it is down in Canterbury and I would have to rent down there for the 1 year course. I would like to take this course as I think that the food and nutrition industry is a good industry to work in after you have done your dash. You can come back and help young athletes and people with the food intake. In a nutshell you don't need a degree to be an athlete, but it would be good to have something you enjoy to fall back on.

In school I think that the subjects that I have chosen really suit where I want to go in life. ADP is great for the sports side of things, keeping fit and being able to go to the gym by myself and workout is a great thing to have. Food tech provides me with some nutrition knowledge so I can stay in good shape. Product tech is just a really fun subject and I get some really good skills in the workshop. Music and playing the saxophone, it is really just an outlet just jamming and playing some anger/stress out without hurting someone. You also get to make some cool sounds that I can ride and work out to.



<sup>4</sup> [Expert \(Design and visual communication\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Diploma 1](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Food Diploma](#)

## What skills and knowledge do I need to gain through those qualifications?

I feel through talking to my experts that being mentally strong is a very important factor<sup>7</sup>. ADP does a thing called a character session once a week and it pushes you not just physically but mentally as well. But it is not the only thing that I have done to improve mental strength. Going outside your comfort zone often and not being bothered by what other people think about you is where I started. I then got a bit more of the limelight and people started talking about me and trying to get inside my head and I tried not to break, but I did, And it feels good to know how to deal with it. You now know what you need to work on and you can start to push yourself more and more. Keeping calm under pressure, man I really need to work on this. I look calm but on the inside I'm \$#!??ing myself. I also get angry with things and people and I try to bring humor into it and try to take my mind off it. I would think APD, Food and music will do a good job at putting pressure on me but there is not much on the line and I can also talk to the teachers about what I can do to improve the process. I feel coming out of school I need to come up with a process that I do before anything that makes me feel a lot of pressure. At the moment I listen to music that I love so I feel comfortable with my surroundings then before I go out I go into my own place. Silent and I think about what my job is in the team/race, what result do we want from this game/race. After that I'm back to my bubbly self talking to every team to see how they are feeling and what they want to get done. For MTB I often take the climb up as my silent time. Seeing how the bike is feeling and how I'm feeling. But I feel that there are sometimes that you need more so I think talking to peers and team mates about what they do is really important to find out what makes them feel calm.

As for PTC and coaching I feel that they are going to give me something to let out as for all my subjects. They give me something to fall back on after the career. Being in the bike industry as a mechanic or building stuff for a racing team would be sick after my time and I would like to think that PTC would give me some basic skills to make me more employable than someone with just biking skills. As for coaching it will give me mostly the best communication practices you can get. Talking to 7-14 year olds for 3 hours a week gets you pretty good at talking to different people who learn differently and need it described in other ways and you have to understand that and be able to make those changes on the spot to make it work.



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<sup>7</sup> [Experts Matt and Mr Sheehan](#)



## What do sponsors look for in a person?

I really had to use my experts for the question. Matt being in the profession at the moment, said that it first has to be how well do they fit the company they are going to be the face of, for the time that they are there. Do they have a good history? Are they going to perform and not promote bad stuff on/with their products? He also said that he wants the field to be level, they get out of it what they put in. He used the quote “ If a company sent me a pair of socks I may do a post saying how sick their socks were. And then maybe tag them in his story a few times”<sup>8</sup>.

For companies that give him more support in the race and over the seasons he will give them more attention online and make more of it, enough to get them the exposure they deserve.

From Mr Sheehan he said “ being a role model” you have to make good decisions and make sure that you make being a good man and being someone that some kid wants to be when they grow up. Which he carried on to say is sometimes quite daunting. Some kid looks up to you and you make one slip up and they feel like the person that dreamed of being has left them and done something dumb. One of the biggest things and I don't think it needs much introducing but here we go, social media. It has to be the single most important thing to get right in the present

time. Everything is online and some contracts say you have to have a certain number of followers or subscribers to make the contracts happen. Matt has been working really hard to get to the top and he is getting paid less then some 90th places racer but they have a bigger presence so companies want their name on their shirt and page as they will get more out of it.

So what did I learn, sponsors are looking for someone to lead their company and be a good man/role model. Being responsible, getting events and getting good results are what a sponsor wants from a racer. But as Matt said it has changed a lot in the past 10 years so who knows where it will go in the next 10.



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<sup>8</sup> [Interview with Matt](#)



## What are the 21st Century skills I need to be successful?

Being an athlete and especially the type of athlete that I am aspiring to be you need every one of the 10 21st century skills that I found were most wanted by employees<sup>9</sup>;

I have Scored myself out of 10, where I feel I am 1 being not at all and 10 being an expert.

Skill	My Score	Comment
<b>Critical Thinking</b> - Finding solutions to modern day problems.	7/10	<p>Why do I need this as an athlete? This is just a good thing to have in general, but as an athlete finding things wrong with equipment and fixing stuff with what you have. On a day enduro you may snap a chain first run you have to fix it with what you have on you or limp it to an aid station.</p> <p><b>Deliberate steps</b> I have picked PTC as a subject which I have found to challenge me in critical thinking. I would think making a scooter would be a pretty good why to start the process of the deliberate steps in the skill.</p>
<b>Creativity</b> - Think out of the box.	6/10	<p>For mountain biking, creativity is why I ride. Finding new lines that make it fast. Finding a piece of track that I can't ride and finding a way why to ride it, It is one of the mega reasons I love the sport so much.</p> <p><b>Deliberate steps</b> Even though I don't like reading it is probably one of the best things to improve it. Talking to people that see/think differently to me. I have started to talk to older riders and see how they see lines and it has really helped me see differently.</p>
<b>Collaboration</b> - Working with others well and getting stuff done in a group.	8/10	<p>I feel that this is one of my strongest points as a person. Being a team player and getting stuff done it's one of the best feelings when you help someone get someone to do something that they could not have done by themselves.</p>

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<sup>9</sup> [21st century skills](#)

		<p><b>Deliberate steps</b></p> <p>PE &amp; ADP and Inquiries where I work with someone else. Listening to classmates and leading them in class. Working with others is a strong point but I think I need to learn how to listen better in a group.</p>
<p><b>Communication</b> - Talking to people and being confident to talk up in a group environment.</p>	9/10	<p>This is one of the biggest things in the modern world. If that is talking to someone face to face or texting them, you need to know how to get your point across and make sure that the person that is reading or listening gets it in the same way that you do.</p> <p><b>Deliberate steps</b></p> <p>Talking to people face to face. Different topics, and putting myself forward in big groups to let them know what I think. But also listening to people and understanding what they want.</p>
<p><b>Information literacy</b> - Understanding facts, figures, statistics and data.</p>	6/10	<p>I think this is something that I'm not as confident in. I understand that this would be very important for someone that works with numbers all day and has to work with graphs but I feel I only need a mid understanding on this topic as I will only really need to use this for training stats.</p> <p><b>Deliberate steps</b></p> <p>I think maths should take a big part of this, but I may take some time to look and understand the real meaning behind some graphs.</p>
<p><b>Media literacy</b> - Knowing where to find information in the present time. Also understand the methods of which information is present to the public.</p>	8/10	<p>I would like to think that Inquiry is doing a good job of covering this as it is basically what we do all day. I would think that there is a good chance that this will become increasingly important in the future. In terms of the job finding information on stuff like tracks and products is very important so I feel that would be where I would use this the most.</p>

		<b>Deliberate steps</b> Just being online, talking to people that have been on the app for longer and been on the internet longer and understanding how and where to post and get involved.
<b>Technology literacy</b> - Understanding the machines that make the Information Age possible.	5/10	This as I have said before is where I need to really work on. The world has never been so reliant on technology, Sponsors are looking for someone that has a good understanding of tech and social-media that they can use to get more sales. This is really too important and if you don't get this right you just as well leave. <sup>10</sup>  <b>Deliberate steps</b> I don't really have an idea of how I'm going to get better at this but I would like to think that I will get better with time.
<b>Flexibility</b> - Working with and around other commitments to get the end product done to a good standard and on time.	7/10	Being flexible can be taken in different ways. For me it is being able to move and adjust to what a person wants. If you have made a plan to be with someone but something else comes up you have to be flexible and work around it to still get the job/task done even with distractions. Racing that could be your mate has crashed and you need to stay with him on the track and you will need to do the run again and you need to work the run in to the rest of the day.  <b>Deliberate steps</b> This one is just trial and error. Finding out how you perform when something changes. I don't know you can really take any steps to improve this skill, but I can say if I find it I will be doing it.
<b>Leadership</b> - Leading a team to a big win, getting a big team to listen to you, but also listen to them and what they	9/10	Being the class leader shows me that I am a good leader and I need to keep doing that. Being an athlete you are someone's fantasies and you have to be a good leader so that they know how to act in the world. Being a good man is a form

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<sup>10</sup> [Interviews With Experts](#)



have to say about the subject.		<p>of leadership, just those little things younger people see that and copy that to the T.</p> <p><b>Deliberate steps</b> Coaching, Captain of the basketball team. These are 2 of my biggest goals to really develop this skill. People say I am a good leader but I always think that I can do more to improve.</p>
<b>Initiative</b> - Starting projects, strategies and plans on one's own.	6/10	<p>I see this as a bit more of an independence. As mountain biking is a singular sport you have to hold yourself up above the rest. Getting stuff done by yourself, finding the answer by yourself. This is good and all but you still need to talk to people as they may have come up with a better way and visa versa.</p> <p><b>Deliberate steps</b> This is another one where the subjects I have chosen will teach me to keep at it. PTC is for 2 terms and I get boarded very easily so I will have to learn to keep at it and not give up.</p>



EXPERTS IN THE ELEMENTS!!



## If given a second chance knowing what you know already would you have taken the same path?

This was really a question of doubt. Is being an athlete the dream that it is put out to the world to be. I was not really interested in the training, as I know that that is very difficult and not for the faint hearted. But more the lifestyle, How good is it? And that is really where the question came from. I thought of asking my experts if they had a second chance in life if they had taken the track. Well both said "YES". And really that was all I needed. But I asked them what would you have done differently? Disclosure: both the experts are late 20's to early 30's. Which Matt would have been 10 years old when Youtube was launched and Sheehan 17. Instagram was launched in 2010 when Matt was my age (15) and Sheehan was 4 years out of school at 22. If you are looking for a massive plot twist, yeah go look somewhere else as they both said "Picking up social-media earlier". I would say one of the best places to look if you are trying to find a good example of social-media changing someone's life, Tiktok. This platform without a doubt has changed so many lives. If you really need evidence go just click the link in the footnotes<sup>11</sup>. I would have to say that despite it being a very demanding job. Lots of athletes before me have made it work in a lot more difficult situations than me, so I feel that there is nothing that should be stopping me. I just have to work hard and I should get the right job. Yeah in an ideal world, but I am yet to hit the hard stuff I feel that is coming and I need to just keep working at the same rate. I know in my heart of hearts I can make it in this profession but more on that later in the report.

Good job for making it 3248 words through 🙌🙌

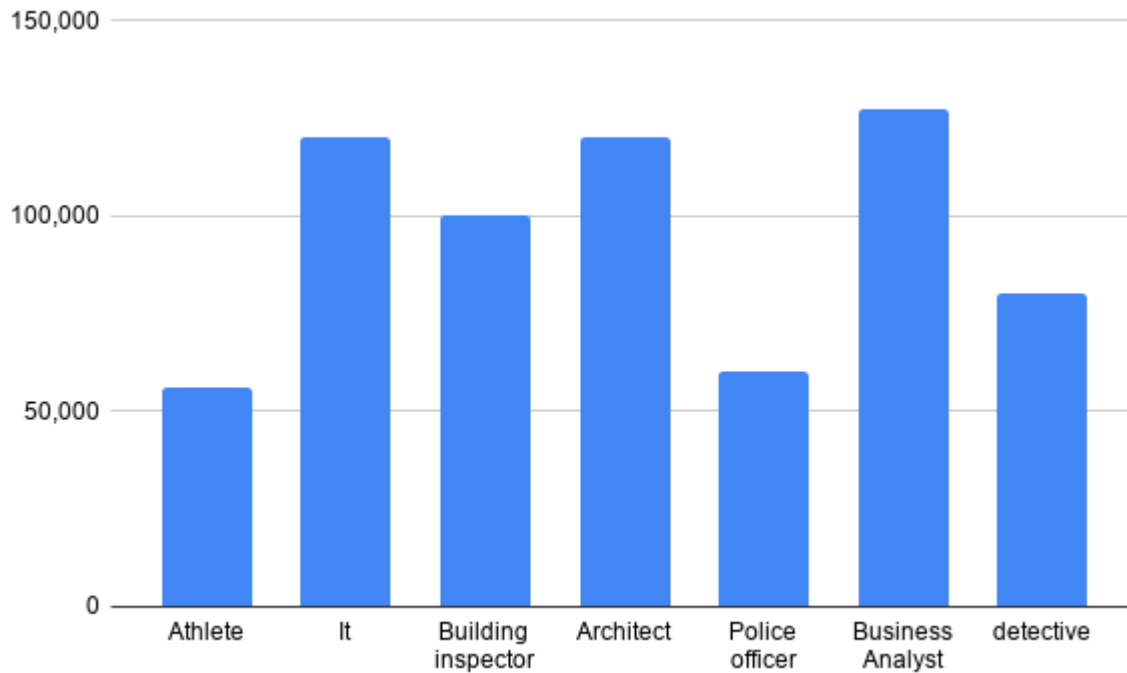


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<sup>11</sup> [TIKTOK](#)



## Is it a good paying profession?



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As you can probably tell, athletes are not at the top of the list of highest paying jobs. This graph is taken off the average income. Each job will have a bit of a fluctuation in it but an athlete is all over the place. Some athletes are on way over this like 50 million and others are a lot lower. Matt, my expert, said that it is really hard to find out the income of mountain bikers because it is all so secretive. He is on around 23,000 pounds (46k) a year plus prize winnings. Were as my other expert was on at his top, was on about 70,000. Which was 50% from snowsports NZ, 40% from sponsors and the other 10% ways from prize winnings. As all jobs go you start at the bottom and work your way up. Both of my experts had jobs on the side to keep the bills under control, so I would think working at a bike shop would be a pretty good side hustle. As I am going into the age where I can work I would like to see if I can get a job at a bike shop. To get some experience and make some money. Most people would not want to be an athlete since they look at the pay but I am not really doing it because I love the sport. Nothing else really, just the love of the sport.

## Conclusion

So, this has by far been my best report ever. I have worked really hard to get it to the point that it is at and I have learnt a lot. I now have a really good idea of where I want to go after school and what I have to do to get there. I have had tons of fun doing this Inquiry and talked to people that I aspire to be like. So I asked the question at the start of this report and I read it like this. What is an elite athlete? I told you the definition of that, but I know that it's a lot more than that. It is a lifestyle that I have to love. Talking to the experts was the best thing I have done in the Inquiry program, seeing how they feel about it and if they love it. There has been this feeling all the way though this inquiry that I need to get to the top to prove that I can do it. It may be a coincidence but I have started to get faster at racing and understand what I am feeling during races. At the start of the race year I was the nice guy who would let you pass, but now people who passed me, I'm passing them. I have a feeling in my heart that I have chosen a career that I suit and I need to grab it and run, and not stop till I have made it. Yes, they pay is on the lower side of the spectrum and the work is up there but I feel that athletes don't see it like that. I have been told my whole life that your job should not feel like a job. It should make you smile everyday, everytime I get on my bike I smile. It gives me a freedom that I can't get from basketball or rugby. I feel that me and the bike are one. I can ride till I fall off from exhaustion. I hope this report has done enough to explain my plan to get there and what I want to achieve on the way, and what the end goal is.

## Special Thanks

A very special thanks to my 2 experts Matt Stuttard 2x british enduro champ and Lyndon

Sheehan 9th at winter olympics 2014 for being the best experts I could have had and giving more than enough answers to write this report.

Also so shout out to HUNT Wheels for hooking me up with Matt.

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Stephanie Martelli Photography

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