



# PROFESSIONAL SPORTS

**Northern Ireland has produced incredible sporting talent, with many of our sporting professionals gaining international recognition, such as footballer George Best, golf players Rory McIlroy, Graeme McDowell, and Darren Clarke, hockey player Katie Mullan, rugby player Claire McLaughlin, boxer Carl Frampton, snooker player Alex Higgins, Olympian Dame Mary Peters, and Formula One driver Eddie Irvine.**

The professional sports sector has a wide range of different career paths for both professional athletes and those involved behind the scenes. Advancements in innovative technologies are helping to monitor and improve the health and performance of athletes, making professional sports an exciting sector to work in.





## KEY FACTS

- **59%** of people in Northern Ireland participate in a sports activity at least once a month.

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- The number of gyms and leisure centres in the UK **more than doubled** between 2011 and 2022.

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- In 2021 there were approximately **106,000** people working in sports or fitness-related occupations in the UK.



## WHAT ARE THE OPPORTUNITIES?

The professional sports industry isn't just for those who dream of being a professional athlete. There are a variety of different careers and roles available, which are all important, and cater to a range of interests and skill sets.

Just some of the jobs available within this sector include:

- Professional Athlete
- Coach
- Personal Trainer
- Referee / Umpire
- Sports Journalist / Broadcaster
- Sports Scientist
- Physiotherapist
- Nutritionist
- Events Coordinator
- Sports Photographer
- Scout
- Talent Manager
- Statistical Analyst

...and more!





## SALARY EXPECTATIONS

Salaries within the professional sports sector will vary depending on the job, your experience level, and the organisation you work for.

Here are some **average salaries** for job roles within the sector:

Nutritionist  
Employed by the NHS  
earns approx.  
**£25,000 per year**

Physiotherapist  
Employed by the NHS  
earns approx.  
**£30,615 per year**

Sports Therapist  
Average salary  
**£28,000 per year**

Nutritionist  
Private practice  
earns approx.  
**£55,000 per year**

Physiotherapist  
Private practice  
earns approx.  
**£75,000 per year**

Sports Journalist  
Average salary  
**£24,000 per year**

### Professional Athlete/Sportsperson

The average salary for a professional athlete or sportsperson will vary considerably based on a range of factors including the type of sport they participate in, the level at which they compete, their ranking in the sport, and additional earnings made from prize winnings, corporate sponsorships, and endorsement deals, etc.

The average salary for a professional athlete/sportsperson is between £36,250 and £63,750 per year. Some very successful sporting professionals can earn a substantial amount over the course of their careers, though this tends to be those who rank in the top 10% of their sport.

In general, sporting professionals have a window of opportunity in their chosen sport, during which time they are physically at their peak. Many professional athletes and sportspeople will go on to have second careers as commentators, coaches, and in other roles after they retire from their sporting profession.



For further information, click the links highlighted in **blue**



## WHAT QUALIFICATIONS DO I NEED?

There are no required qualifications to be a professional athlete or sportsperson. However, having qualifications such as GCSEs, A Levels, and in some cases even a degree, can be useful depending on what career you would like to pursue in the future when you retire from professional sport. For a career as a professional athlete, talent, practice, experience, and passion for the sport are very important.

For other roles within the professional sports sector, there are specific qualifications or degrees required. For example:

- To become a Physiotherapist, Nutritionist, or Sports Scientist you will require a degree in a relevant subject.
- There are Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications required at a minimum to become a Personal Trainer.
- To become a Sports Journalist or Sports Broadcaster, there are a range of journalism qualifications available, and experience will be sought after by most employers.



## WHAT SKILLS ARE USEFUL?

Beyond the qualifications needed to pursue a career in professional sports (where relevant), there are a range of employability skills and personal attributes that are useful to have.

For those interested in becoming a professional athlete or sportsperson, these include:

- Athletic/technical ability
- Persistence
- Determination
- Ambition
- Self-belief
- Physical fitness and endurance
- Patience
- Team player (for team sports)
- Dexterity and physical coordination
- Flexible and adaptable
- Resilient

For other careers in the sector, useful employability skills and personal attributes may include:

- Flexible and adaptable
- Good communication skills
- Enthusiasm
- Time management
- Leadership
- Teamwork
- Using your own initiative
- Empathy





## WHERE CAN I GO TO FIND OUT MORE?

### **Sport NI**

Sport NI are the leading public body for the governance and development of sports in Northern Ireland. It helps with the funding of sports and leisure activities in Northern Ireland and promotes the health benefits of physical activity. Sport NI works to get more people involved with sports and physical activities.



### **Irish Football Association**

The Irish Football Association is the governing body for football in Northern Ireland. It promotes the game of football, encourages people to play, and helps to ensure that the game develops while maintaining its popularity.



For further information, click the links highlighted in **blue**