

Standards Innovative Research on the Cultivation Model of English Cultural Literacy for Sports-Talented Students from the Perspective of Integration of Sports and Education

Zhang Xinyu¹, Qin Shumei²

¹*School of Physical Education and Health, Guangxi Normal University, Guilin, Guangxi, China*

²*College of Foreign Studies, Guangxi Normal University, Guilin, Guangxi, China*

Abstract: Against the backdrop of the integration of sports and education rising to a national strategy, the cultivation goal for sports-talented students is shifting from a singular focus on competitive ability to that of 'sports+culture' compound talents. English cultural literacy, as a key factor for their participation in international sports affairs, sustainable career development, and enhancement of national sports soft power, urgently requires systematic innovation in its cultivation model. Based on the theoretical perspective of the integration of sports and education, this paper first elaborates on the contemporary value of innovating the cultivation model from five dimensions: serving the strategy of building a leading sports nation, promoting sustainable career development, resolving the 'academic-training conflict,' enhancing cross-cultural adaptability, and stimulating intrinsic learning motivation. Second, it analyzes the current practical dilemmas from five aspects: disconnected curriculum content, monotonous teaching methods, biased evaluation systems, insufficient teacher backgrounds, and conflicts between academic study and training schedules. Third, it proposes five corresponding governance pathways: developing modular English courses in sports contexts, implementing an integrated 'learning-training-competition' teaching method, constructing a 'process+performance' diversified evaluation system, forming interdisciplinary collaborative teaching teams, and establishing a flexible learning support system.

Keywords: Integration of Sports and Education; Sports-Talented Students; English Cultural Literacy; Cultivation Model

1. Introduction

In 2020, the General Administration of Sport of China and the Ministry of Education jointly issued the Opinions on Deepening the Integration of Sports and Education to Promote the Healthy Development of Adolescents, marking the entry of the integration of sports and education into a new stage of full implementation [1]. The core essence of this strategy lies in breaking down the long-standing barriers between the sports system and the education system, achieving an organic unity of sports talent development and cultural quality cultivation. Against this background, the cultivation goals for sports-talented students have undergone a fundamental transformation [2]. They are no longer viewed as athletes who are "physically strong but mentally simple"; instead, they should be shaped into compound talents who possess high-level competitive ability, profound cultural grounding, and an international perspective. English, as the common language of international sports affairs, the carrier of cutting-edge achievements in sports science, and a bridge for cross-cultural communication, is of self-evident importance to future sports elites. From interpreting official documents of international sports organizations to conducting tactical communication with foreign coaches, from participating in international sports academic conferences to protecting their rights and interests on overseas playing fields, English cultural literacy has become one of the core competencies for sports-talented students to break through career ceilings and step onto the world stage. However, for a long time, English teaching for sports-talented students has generally suffered from a tendency towards "general education" models, with teaching content seriously disconnected from sports practice and teaching methods neglecting their unique cognitive styles. This leads to a separation between learning and use, and students generally lack learning interest

and practical application ability [3]. This not only restricts the holistic development of sports-talented students but also runs counter to the strategic goals of the integration of sports and education. Therefore, from the perspective of the integration of sports and education, systematic innovation in the cultivation model of English cultural literacy for sports-talented students is no longer a mere issue of language teaching; it has become a major contemporary topic concerning the reform of China's sports talent cultivation system, the construction of a leading sports nation, and the international dissemination capacity of sports culture.

2. The Contemporary Value of the Innovation of the Cultivation Model of English Cultural Literacy for Sports-Talented Students from the Perspective of the Integration of Sports and Education

2.1 Serving the Strategy of Building a Leading Sports Nation and Enhancing the Capacity for International Discourse and Communication

The strength of a leading sports nation is reflected not only in the number of gold medals won in competitions but also in the soft power of sports culture and the possession of a voice in international sports affairs [4]. For a long time, the number and influence of Chinese representatives in international sports organizations have been disproportionate to China's status as a major sports country. One significant bottleneck has been the lack of language proficiency and cross-cultural communication skills. English, as the official working language of major sports organizations such as the International Olympic Committee and FIFA, serves as the fundamental tool for participating in rule-making, agenda setting, voting, and daily communication. Cultivating sports-talented students with outstanding English cultural literacy means making strategic talent reserves for China to supply fresh blood to international sports organizations in the future and to enhance its capacity for agenda-setting and rule discourse. Furthermore, in the era of globalized media, telling China's sports stories and spreading the spirit of Chinese sports require proactively setting agendas and expressing them in a language that international audiences can understand and empathize with. Athletes and sports practitioners with high-level English

literacy can directly engage with international media, accurately and confidently convey the positive energy of Chinese sports, and refute false reports, thereby effectively enhancing the national sports image and cultural soft power. Therefore, the innovation of the English cultural literacy cultivation model is a strategic choice to consolidate the linguistic foundation of a leading sports nation and enhance the capacity to participate in international sports governance.

2.2 Promoting the Sustainable Career Development of Athletes and Broadening the Pathways for Post-Retirement Transition

The career span in competitive sports is relatively short, and the issue of athletes' post-retirement transition has long been a focus of social attention [5]. Under the traditional sports school model, athletes often fall into re-employment difficulties after retirement due to a lack of cultural education. One of the core objectives of the integration of sports and education is to extend and enrich athletes' professional lives through the empowerment of cultural education. In this process, English cultural literacy plays a key role as a career catalyst and a transition accelerator. Good English proficiency enables athletes to directly access the most cutting-edge international training concepts, rehabilitation techniques, and sports nutrition knowledge, reducing reliance on interpreters and enhancing the scientific level and autonomy of their training. At the same time, it helps athletes independently handle media interviews, business networking, contract negotiations, and other scenarios when participating in international competitions, thereby enhancing their personal commercial value and brand image. After retirement, athletes with English proficiency have broader transition pathways. They can become international sports agents, event operations managers, sports English commentators, staff of international sports organizations, or apply for further studies in sports science or sports management at overseas universities. The support of English cultural literacy can effectively break the single, low-level transition pathway, helping athletes transform from elite competitors into compound international sports talents, and truly achieve sustainable career development.

2.3 Promoting the Deep Implementation of the Integration of Sports and Education and

Breaking the Traditional Perception of the Contradiction between Academic Study and Athletic Training

The contradiction between academic study and athletic training has long been a chronic problem troubling the cultivation of sports-talented students. Its essence lies in a zero-sum game of time, energy, and psychological resources between cultural learning and sports training. Traditional integration models often remain at the level of simply adding training to remedial tutoring, failing to find an intrinsic point of connection between the two. Innovating the cultivation model by taking English cultural literacy as a breakthrough is expected to provide a new paradigm for resolving this contradiction. The key is no longer to view English as an additional burden opposed to sports, but rather to design it as an organic component that can be embedded into training, competition, and rehabilitation processes. For example, learning specialized vocabulary by analyzing tactical videos in English, consolidating grammar by writing training logs in English, and practicing spoken English by simulating post-game press conferences for international competitions. This kind of project-based learning, which uses sports as the context and English as the tool, transforms academic study and athletic training from opposition to unity, and from a competitive relationship over time to a synergistic functional relationship. When students discover that English learning directly serves their athletic performance and career aspirations, intrinsic motivation is ignited, and passive acceptance turns into active absorption. This not only improves the effectiveness of English learning but, more importantly, reshapes the identity of athletes as individuals who also need cultural knowledge. It provides a replicable and scalable practical model for the integration of sports and education to move from formal amalgamation to connotative development, fundamentally dissolving the outdated perception of the opposition between academic study and athletic training.

2.4 Adapting to the Trend of Sports Internationalization and Enhancing Cross-Cultural Adaptation and Communication Skills

The very essence of modern sports is internationalization. Athlete transfers abroad, cross-border club collaborations, frequent

international events, and the arrival of foreign coaching teams have become the norm in the Chinese sports community. In such an environment, cultural conflicts and communication barriers have become practical issues that affect training effectiveness, team harmony, and even competition results. There are huge differences in the way coaches from different cultural backgrounds give criticism, the language used to motivate teams, and the meaning of body language. If not understood correctly, these differences can easily lead to misunderstandings and conflicts. Therefore, cultivating English cultural literacy goes far beyond acquiring listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills; its core lies in building cross-cultural understanding and adaptability. Through specially designed teaching content—such as comparing and contrasting Chinese and Western sports etiquette, exploring different cultural concepts of competition and cooperation, and simulating cross-cultural sports conflict cases—students can gradually establish a cultural relativism perspective and learn to understand, respect, and adapt to cultural differences. This ability enables them to communicate freely and collaborate effectively in multicultural teams, and to display the mature, open, and inclusive demeanor of athletes from a major country on the international stage. It can be said that English cultural literacy is an essential cultural asset for sports-talented students to obtain an international passport and integrate into the global sports community.

2.5 Stimulating Students' Intrinsic Learning Motivation and Constructing a 'Sports+English' Identity

For a long time, English classrooms for sports-talented students have been generally filled with a sense of powerlessness and frustration. The root cause lies in the severe disconnect between the teaching content and their life experiences, interests, and future aspirations. Topics such as family, campus, and technology found in general English textbooks fail to resonate with students who have devoted most of their lives to the training ground. An important value of model innovation is to reconstruct the sense of meaning in English learning through contextualized and relevant design. When students learn topics in class that are most familiar to them—such as basketball tactics, sports injuries, or anti-doping

regulations—English is no longer an abstract and tedious system of symbols but becomes a powerful tool for understanding, expressing, and improving their own professional field. This process of meaning construction is the most powerful engine for stimulating intrinsic learning motivation. More importantly, through long-term immersion in this integrated learning environment, students will gradually form a new and positive self-identity: the identity of not only being an athlete but also a professional who can communicate with international peers in English and read cutting-edge sports science literature. This compound 'Sports+English' identity greatly enhances students' self-efficacy and learning resilience, transforming their attitude from 'being forced to learn' to 'wanting to learn', and laying a solid psychological foundation for lifelong learning.

3. Practical Dilemmas of the Innovation of the Cultivation Model of English Cultural Literacy for Sports-Talented Students from the Perspective of the Integration of Sports and Education

3.1 Disconnection Between Course Content and Sports Practice, Lacking Contextualized Design

Currently, the vast majority of schools still use general English textbooks designed for regular students or simply lower the difficulty level for English teaching to sports-talented students. The topics covered in these textbooks are broad but lack specificity; the selected texts are mostly articles on literature, social life, or popular science, which have almost no connection to the real-life scenarios of sports-talented students such as training, competition, rehabilitation, and daily life. This severe disconnect leads to a strong sense of cognitive alienation among students. Knowledge cannot be transferred to real contexts, and learning becomes meaningless symbol manipulation. At the same time, the course content lacks in-depth exploration of sports contexts. For example, very few textbooks systematically present authentic tasks such as understanding English rulings from the Court of Arbitration for Sport, filling out international competition registration forms, or interpreting English labels on sports nutrition products. This decontextualized curriculum design prevents the language knowledge acquired in the classroom from being activated in the real world of training

and competition, ultimately resulting in students who, after years of study, can still only say 'good game' when speaking English, severely undermining their learning motivation.

3.2 Monotonous Teaching Methods That Neglect the Cognitive Styles and Learning Habits of Sports Students

Psychological and educational research has repeatedly proven that sports-talented students, as a unique group, generally possess kinesthetic and experiential cognitive preferences. They are accustomed to learning through physical perception, imitative practice, teamwork, and immediate feedback, and have low tolerance for static, abstract, and disembodied knowledge transmission. However, in today's English classrooms, teaching methods remain highly homogeneous, whether for regular students or sports-talented students. Instruction is teacher-centered, with grammar explanation, vocabulary copying, and test-preparation drills as the main forms. For energetic and easily distracted sports students, such tedious, lecture-based teaching is no less than mental torture; skipping class, sleeping, and playing on phones become the norm. More critically, the teaching process severely lacks interactive and experiential activities that match the learning styles of sports-talented students. For example, they could be asked to choreograph and demonstrate a stretching routine in English, or simulate an interview in the mixed zone after a match. These active tasks not only capture their attention but also enable efficient language internalization through learning by doing. In reality, however, due to teachers' lack of relevant awareness and design ability, these effective teaching methods remain unused, resulting in teaching outcomes that perpetually hover at a low level.

3.3 The Evaluation System Emphasizes Scores Over Competence, Neglecting Cultural Awareness and Pragmatic Ability

Evaluation is the baton of teaching; the nature of evaluation determines the nature of teaching and learning. Currently, the evaluation system for English learning of sports-talented students almost completely copies the general education model, with the final closed-book written examination at its core. The assessment content is highly concentrated on quantifiable and easily measurable aspects of language knowledge, such

as vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension. This score-oriented evaluation orientation has produced serious negative effects. On the one hand, it forces teachers and students to devote a great deal of energy to test preparation and rote memorization, while the most important communicative function, cultural connotations, and thinking qualities of language are marginalized. Students may get high scores but cannot speak in real situations, or they may speak grammatically correct sentences that are culturally offensive to others. On the other hand, the evaluation system completely overlooks the core components of English cultural literacy—cultural awareness and pragmatic competence. Do students understand the spirit of fair play behind sports competitions? Can they use appropriate language to show respect to opponents or offer post-game consolation? Can they identify and respect cultural differences in cross-cultural communication? These higher-order competencies, which cannot be assessed through multiple-choice questions, have no place in the current evaluation system. Consequently, they naturally fail to enter teachers' instructional goals or students' learning horizons.

3.4 The Teaching Staff Lacks a Sports Background, Resulting in Insufficient Teaching Relevance

Teachers are the key executors for the implementation of educational reforms. However, the vast majority of teachers responsible for English instruction to sports-talented students come from backgrounds in English language and literature or English education. While they have solid language skills and rich pedagogical knowledge, they know very little about the sports domain. This lack of a sports background presents them with numerous difficulties in teaching practice. First, when selecting materials, they are unaware of which sports topics are most needed by the students, and they have difficulty finding—or even understanding—authentic English materials related to sports. Second, when giving examples and explanations, they cannot connect to the sports scenarios familiar to the students, making their explanations detached from the students' experiential world. For instance, when teaching the comparative degree of adjectives, using 'LeBron James is taller than Stephen Curry' is obviously more likely to engage sports students

than 'My bag is bigger than yours.' Most seriously, when encountering sports-specific terminology or concepts such as 'offside trap,' 'pronation,' or 'doping control,' teachers without a sports background often have only a superficial understanding themselves and can only speak vaguely or even avoid the terms altogether, greatly undermining the professionalism and credibility of their teaching. This binary separation between language and sports makes it difficult for teachers to become genuine sports English experts, and teaching relevance naturally becomes impossible to achieve.

3.5 Conflict in the Allocation of Time and Energy: Training Squeezes the Space for English Learning

This is the most realistic and most difficult dilemma facing the integration of sports and education. For sports-talented students, training is a necessity, and competition is the core task. A high-level student-athlete must ensure at least 4-6 hours of professional training each day, in addition to substantial time spent on physical recovery, physiotherapy and massage, tactical analysis, travel to and from competitions, and so on. In comparison, cultural learning—especially English learning, which is perceived as having little short-term impact on performance improvement—is at an absolute disadvantage in terms of time allocation. The time available for learning is often the evenings after exhausting training sessions or fragmented rest periods. In this state of time poverty and mental exhaustion, learning efficiency is extremely low. Even worse, the existing teaching management system lacks flexibility, still requiring sports-talented students to complete the same class hours and assignments on time, just like regular students. This forces them to have their minds in the playground while their bodies are in the classroom, or to skip classes for training, creating a vicious cycle. Although some schools have tried offering evening self-study sessions or weekend remedial classes, this is essentially adding more workload, further increasing the physical and mental burden on students. How to organically and efficiently embed English learning into the daily rhythm of sports students without increasing or even encroaching upon training time is the core pain point that model innovation must directly address.

4. Governance Pathways for the Innovation of

the Cultivation Model of English Cultural Literacy for Sports-Talented Students from the Perspective of the Integration of Sports and Education

4.1 Developing Modular English Courses in Sports Contexts to Achieve Content Restructuring

Developing modular English courses in sports contexts to achieve content restructuring. Breaking free from the constraints of general English textbooks is the first step of the reform. We should organize a curriculum development team composed of English teachers, professional coaches, sports science researchers, and athletes to develop a new set of modular school-based textbooks titled Sports-Context English. This course is no longer organized according to the system of linguistic knowledge (e. g., verb tenses, attributive clauses) but instead constructs five to eight independent yet interconnected teaching modules centered around the authentic task scenarios in the real lives and future careers of sports-talented students, including tactics and the training ground (watching tactical analysis videos in English, reading English training plans, conducting tactical communication with foreign coaches, writing training logs in English), on and off the field (simulating post-game mixed-zone interviews with athletes answering reporters' questions, learning how to congratulate or console opponents in English, reading English technical statistics reports of matches), sports medicine and rehabilitation (learning English terms for body parts and common sports injuries, understanding English rehabilitation instructions, simulating the description of an injury to a team doctor), anti-doping and rules (reading and discussing WADA rules in English, simulating the completion of doping control forms, understanding international sports arbitration cases), and international sports business and socializing (learning to write English cover letters for applying to overseas coaching positions or universities, simulating contract negotiations for sports agents, mastering polite expressions for international sports social occasions). Each module contains authentic language input, task-driven output activities, and a reflective section comparing Chinese and Western sports culture. Students can flexibly choose the order of learning and the depth of each module based on their own sport, English proficiency, and career plans, thereby achieving

truly personalized learning.

4.2 Implement the 'Learning-Training-Competition Integration' Teaching Method and Embed it into Daily Training

To resolve the time conflict between academic study and training, English learning must be embedded into—rather than added to—the training and competition process. the "learning-training-competition integration" teaching method can be implemented as follows. Five minutes before training: activation. The coach or English assistant plays a short English video related to the day's training theme (e. g., an English explanation of a specific technical movement) and asks students to repeat key words or answer a simple question. During training: embedded application. The coach consciously uses previously learned core English terms when explaining tactics or correcting movements (e. g., "Tuck your chin, " "Cover the passing lane!") to achieve immersive language input. Ten minutes after training: production. Students are required to post a brief training summary in English on a WeChat group or learning app (e. g., "Today we practiced zone defense. I need to improve my reaction time"). A weekly award is given for the best English training log. Monthly project-based presentation: once a month. An English sports-themed activity is held, such as an English sports commentary contest, a simulated international anti-doping hearing, or an English presentation on one's own sport. This is not only a language showcase but also an interdisciplinary integrated report on training outcomes. This teaching method liberates language learning from the fixed time and space of the classroom, utilizes the fragmented time before, during, and after training, and makes English an organic part of training culture. Students are constantly doing sports-related tasks in English, which greatly enhances the sense of meaning and efficiency of their learning.

4.3 Construct a 'Process+Performance' Diversified Evaluation System That Highlights Cultural Literacy

The summative evaluation model of 'one exam determines the outcome' must be reformed, and a diversified evaluation system centered on process evaluation and performance evaluation, with an emphasis on cultural literacy, should be established. It is suggested that the overall

assessment structure be adjusted as follows: process evaluation (40%)+performance evaluation (40%)+summative evaluation (20%). Process evaluation covers the completion rate of online micro-course learning, the quality of training log check-ins, class participation, and learning portfolios. This part of the evaluation involves the joint participation of teachers, coaches, and peers, emphasizing effort and progress. Performance evaluation is the core innovation of this model. Students are required to complete complex language tasks in real or simulated real-world contexts to demonstrate their comprehensive cultural literacy. Tasks include, but are not limited to, English presentations of sports events, cross-cultural sports case analyses, simulated sports business negotiations, and English sports news reporting. These tasks assess what students can do, rather than what they know.

4.4 Form a Collaborative Teaching Team of 'English Teachers+Coaches+Foreign Teachers' to Enhance Relevance

Teachers with a single disciplinary background cannot adequately undertake the task of cultivating compound talents. It is necessary to form a cross-disciplinary collaborative teaching team consisting of English teachers, professional coaches, sports science researchers, and foreign coaches, and to establish a regular mechanism for collaborative teaching research. First, roles and division of labor: English teachers are responsible for the accuracy and systematic nature of language forms and for pedagogical design. Coaches provide authentic sports contexts, specialized terminology, and real-world cases, and consciously reinforce the language learned in class during training. Foreign teachers serve as language models and cultural guides, offering authentic language input and cross-cultural perspectives. Second, collaboration mechanism: Establish a bi-weekly teaching research meeting system, where coaches explain the upcoming week's training plan to English teachers and provide sports materials; English teachers give coaches feedback on students' language difficulties, and together they design points for integrating learning and training. For example, if the training for the next week focuses on the 'defensive counter-attack' tactic, the English class will preview relevant vocabulary and sentence patterns in advance. In addition,

implement a job-shadowing system: English teachers observe or accompany the team during training or competitions at least four times per semester, experiencing firsthand the athletes' training rhythm and language needs. Coaches also need to attend basic English teaching methodology workshops to learn how to naturally integrate language points into training. This collaborative model not only enhances the relevance of instruction but also implicitly conveys a strong signal to students: both coaches and teachers value English together, and English is truly a part of a sports career.

4.5 Establishing a Flexible Learning Support System to Solve the Problem of Time Fragmentation.

"Establishing a flexible learning support system to solve the problem of time fragmentation. " We must respect the time patterns of sports-talented students, abandon the rigid and uniform traditional classroom model, and establish a flexible learning support system that combines online and offline approaches with autonomy and flexibility. First, build a micro-learning resource repository: relying on the school's learning platform or a mobile app, decompose the course content into a large number of micro-learning units—5-minute videos explaining grammar points, 10-minute audio clips for listening practice, a graphic and text post explaining a sports term, or an interactive online word-game. Students can complete their learning via mobile phones during any fragmented time, and the system automatically records their learning progress and scores. Second, adopt a credit bank and alternative certification: break the rigid rule that attending class equals earning credits, and establish a credit bank. Students can earn corresponding credits by completing micro-learning tasks, participating in English sports-themed activities, or completing performance-based assessment tasks. More importantly, establish an alternative credit certification system. When students participate in international competitions, completing competition diaries or volunteer service reports in English can be certified as credits equivalent to class hours. If a student independently completes a literature review of an English sports article, they may apply for exemption from some course modules. This system of "learning through competition and assessment

through application" truly realizes the idea that training is learning and competition is assessment. Third, improve personalized learning advising: assign a learning advisor to each student, who regularly analyzes the student's online learning data, provides personalized learning suggestions and resource recommendations, and offers emotional support to prevent students from falling behind in autonomous learning.

5. Conclusion

The integration of sports and education is not only a policy requirement but also a call of the times. Steering sports-talented students from a singular focus on "building muscles" onto a comprehensive development path that values both "building minds" and "building muscles" is an inevitable choice for cultivating a new generation capable of shouldering the mission of national rejuvenation. English cultural literacy serves as a key link connecting sports practice with the global stage, and current training with future careers. The innovation of its cultivation model is undoubtedly an important breakthrough for deepening the reform of the integration of sports and education. This study has systematically elaborated the contemporary value of this innovation, directly confronted the practical dilemmas at the levels of curriculum, teaching methods, evaluation, teaching staff, and institutional arrangements, and proposed five mutually supportive and actionable governance pathways: developing modular English courses in sports contexts to shift learning content from "general" to "specialized"; implementing the "learning-training-competition integrated" teaching method to shift the learning process from "classroom extension" to "training embedding"; constructing a "process+performance" diversified evaluation system to shift the evaluation orientation from "score-based" to "competence-based"; forming a collaborative teaching team of "English teachers+coaches+foreign teachers" to shift the teaching from "individual effort" to "cross-disciplinary integration"; and establishing a flexible learning support system to shift the learning time and space from "uniform and rigid" to "flexible and autonomous". This model strives to build an educational ecology that "nurtures people through sports and shapes souls through culture," making English learning a genuine internal driver of growth and a core

support for career development for sports-talented students. Admittedly, this study is primarily a theoretical model construction and has certain limitations. For example, significant differences exist in the demand intensity and cultivation methods for English cultural literacy across different sports (individual vs. team events), different educational stages (secondary school vs. university), and different institutional systems (sports schools, regular middle schools, sports universities). The adaptability of this model to specific contexts needs further testing. Moreover, how to quantitatively assess students' "cross-cultural communication competence" and "sports English pragmatic competence," and to develop measurement tools with good reliability and validity, remain challenges for future research. Future research needs to move further towards empirical investigation, testing the applicability and effectiveness of this model across different sports, educational stages, and regional schools through specific action research or experimental studies, and developing supporting teacher training programs, curriculum resource packages, and evaluation tools. At the same time, longitudinal studies are recommended to examine the long-term development performance of sports-talented students trained under this model after they enter international sports organizations, pursue overseas study, or undergo career transitions. We look forward to, through continuous theoretical exploration and practical innovation, truly forging a path of integrating sports and education with Chinese characteristics, so that our sports-talented students can not only win glory for the country but also engage in dialogue with the world, becoming internationally oriented sports talents with both a strong physique and a rich soul.

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