

Legal Protection of the Rights of Regional Athletes During the Post-Career Period: A Socio-Legal Study in East Kalimantan Province

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Abstract

Problems in this research: Despite being normatively guaranteed by Law Number 11 of 2022 concerning Sports, the implementation of legal protection for athletes' rights during the post-career period at the regional level still faces significant challenges. This study examines the gap between the legal framework and empirical reality in East Kalimantan Province, focusing on the effectiveness of social security and welfare for retired athletes. This study aims to analyze the implementation of legal protection for post-career athletes in East Kalimantan, identify inhibiting factors, and formulate contextual policy recommendations to strengthen the athlete social protection system. The research method uses a socio-legal approach with a qualitative case study design. Data were collected through analysis of legal documents (Law No. 11/2022, Law No. 24/2011, East Kalimantan Regional Regulation No. 5/2016), in-depth interviews with five retired athletes and eight institutional informants (Dispora, KONI, legal practitioners), and field observations. Data were analyzed thematically to integrate normative and empirical findings. The findings reveal systemic failures in implementation. The ambitious legal framework is not accompanied by operational mechanisms at the regional level. Institutional fragmentation between the Youth and Sports Agency (Dispora), the Indonesian National Sports Committee (KONI), and the Social Security Agency (BPJS) has created a vacuum of responsibility, shifting the legal rights paradigm to incidental charitable assistance. Low legal literacy among athletes and the absence of a unified database further exacerbate this situation. This study concludes that legal protection for post-career athletes in East Kalimantan remains theoretical and ineffective. Comprehensive reforms are needed, including revisions to regional regulations, the establishment of strong institutional coordination mechanisms, and legal empowerment programs for athletes to transform normative rights into accessible realities.

Keywords: Legal protection; post-career athlete rights; social security; implementation of socio-legal approach policies; sports law; institutional governance.

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Introduction

Law, as a key pillar of social order, serves not only as an instrument for regulating behavior but also as a guarantor of justice, security, and welfare for all levels of society (Arisman et al., 2024). In the dynamics of modern society, the role of law is increasingly expanding, touching various sectors of life, including the world of sports, which has transformed from mere physical activity into a complex global industry. Within this sports ecosystem, athletes are central actors who sacrifice their youth, health, and energy to achieve peak performance, not only for themselves but also to bring honor to their region and nation (Yaroshenko et al., 2024).

As their physical prime ends and their professional careers enter the post-career phase, many of these athletes find themselves plunged into uncertainty. They often face the harsh realities of economic vulnerability, difficulty finding decent employment, and limited access to a comprehensive social security system. This phenomenon indicates a paradox on the one hand, the state and society view athletes as symbols of pride and prestige; on the other, their survival and well-being after retirement are often neglected. Therefore, legal protection for athletes' rights in the post-career period is not merely a technical legal issue, but has become a fundamental issue concerning human dignity, social justice, and the fulfillment of human rights as citizens (Carmona, 2017).

The context of this issue is becoming increasingly relevant and urgent to examine in Indonesia. As a country with a large population and a vibrant sporting spirit, Indonesia has positioned sports as a strategic sector in national development. Sport is believed to contribute not only to public health but also to play a role in building national character, fostering nationalism, and enhancing Indonesia's image on the international stage (Kurniawan et al., 2025). The passion and euphoria of sport are evident in every multi-sport event such as the SEA Games, Asian Games, or the Olympics, where athletes' achievements are greeted with great fanfare.

Behind the cheers and glittering medals, a bleak narrative lurks about the future of these sporting heroes. Various reports and studies show that many national athletes, even those who have won international medals, live in dire economic circumstances after retirement (Rustandi et al., 2021). They struggle to adapt to life outside of sport due to a lack of preparation, limited education, and the absence of a structured support system. The focus on short-term achievement often neglects the sustainability of athletes after their competitive careers end.

As a result, the transition from active athlete to civilian is abrupt and traumatic, leaving deep psychological and social scars (Golyk, 2025). In response to this concerning situation, the Indonesian government has undertaken several legislative initiatives. The enactment of Law Number 11 of 2022 concerning Sports (the Sports Law) can be seen as significant progress. This law explicitly recognizes and regulates athletes' rights (Hambali 2025). Articles 99 and 100 of the 2022 Sports Law affirm that athletes, coaches, sports personnel, and referees/judges have the right to protection, including social and health protection.

Furthermore, this law requires the central and regional governments to facilitate the fulfillment of these rights. This normative recognition represents a significant step in shifting the paradigm from viewing athletes merely as "objects of development" to "legal subjects"

with rights that must be protected (Chandra & Djulaeka, 2024). At the national social security system level, a legal framework has been established through Law Number 24 of 2011 concerning the Social Security Administering Body (BPJS). This law requires every worker, including athletes with employment status, to participate in the employment and health social security programs.

In theory, this legal instrument should serve as a safety net for athletes, including in the face of retirement risks (Meilarovasari et al., 2025). However, as is often the case with many policies in Indonesia, there is a wide gap between the law on the books and the law in action. The 2022 Sports Law, while progressive, remains general in nature and does not yet detail the mechanisms, procedures, or amount of post-career benefits for athletes. The provisions on "social protection" in the law have not been translated into operational implementing regulations, particularly those governing pension schemes, retirement benefits, retraining programs (re-skilling), or career transition assistance.

Meanwhile, the universal BPJS system also faces challenges when applied to athletes. The unique characteristics of athletes' work, with relatively short careers, unstable incomes, high risk of injury, and often lack of formal employment status, make it difficult to integrate them into conventional social security schemes (Shoham et al., 2000). As a result, many athletes, especially those with non-elite status or those in less popular sports, are marginalized from existing protection systems. This disparity between norms and practices becomes even more apparent when viewed from a regional perspective.

Indonesia, with its regional autonomy system, grants substantial authority to local governments to regulate government affairs, including sports. Therefore, the effectiveness of protecting athletes' rights after their careers depends heavily on the commitment and capacity of local governments to interpret and implement the national legal framework. East Kalimantan Province, as one of the regions with a relatively developed sports dynamic, has Regional Regulation No. 5 of 2016 concerning Sports Administration. This regulation serves as the legal basis for sports management at the provincial level.

Unfortunately, upon closer examination, Regional Regulation No. 5/2016 primarily addresses organizational, institutional, and performance development aspects, but provides very little, if any, coverage for social protection and post-career welfare for athletes. Not a single article explicitly addresses athlete pensions, old-age benefits, or transitional assistance programs. This lack of specific regulations at the regional level creates a legal vacuum that renders athletes' normative rights under national law unenforceable at the local level.

The impact of this regulatory vacuum and weak implementation can be observed empirically. Preliminary data from the East Kalimantan Provincial Youth and Sports Agency (Dispora) and the regional Indonesian National Sports Committee (KONI) shows that many former athletes who once brought honor to their region at the national and regional levels still live in limited economic conditions. They face difficulties in accessing formal employment due to a lack of skills outside of sports, limited networks, and sometimes due to the stigma that former athletes rely solely on physical abilities. Furthermore, legal awareness among athletes regarding their rights remains low.

Many athletes are unaware of their right to social security or how to access it. Institutionally, coordination between the Youth and Sports Agency (Dispora), the Indonesian

National Sports Committee (KONI), and the local BPJS Kesehatan (Social Security Agency) is also suboptimal. There is no integrated mechanism for data collection, registration, and support for both active and retired athletes in social security programs. This situation is exacerbated by limited regional budgets, which often prioritize physical infrastructure development and short-term performance development, neglecting long-term athlete welfare programs (Christiani, 2016).

Based on the above description, it is clear that the issue of protecting athletes' rights after their careers in East Kalimantan, and perhaps in many other regions in Indonesia, is complex and multidimensional. This issue concerns not only the lack of specific legal norms but also institutional aspects, budgeting, coordination, socialization, and even legal culture among stakeholders. To fully understand this complexity, a research approach is needed that views the law not only as a static set of articles but as a living social institution that interacts with the surrounding reality.

A socio-legal approach is deemed appropriate to address this need. This approach combines normative legal analysis (of the Sports Law, the BPJS Law, and regional regulations) with empirical investigations to examine how these laws operate, are interpreted, and are applied in everyday practice, as well as the social, economic, and political constraints that influence them (Banakar & Travers, 2021:29). This study aims to (1) analyze and critique the national and regional legal frameworks related to post-career athlete protection; (2) describe and analyze the implementation of these legal frameworks in East Kalimantan Province based on empirical data from stakeholders; (3) identify inhibiting factors that cause gaps between law and practice; and (4) formulate concrete and contextual policy recommendations for local governments and relevant stakeholders to improve the welfare of post-career athletes.

In terms of originality, this research contributes on two levels. Substantively, this study is a pioneering study that specifically and in-depth examines post-career issues for athletes using a socio-legal approach at the provincial level, particularly in East Kalimantan, a region that has not been widely explored by similar studies. Most sports law studies in Indonesia still focus on aspects of contracts, dispute resolution, or anti-doping, leaving post-career welfare issues relatively neglected. Methodologically, this study seeks to bridge the disciplines of law and sociology by integrating rigorous legal document analysis with direct voices from actors in the field (athletes, officials, administrators).

Thus, the resulting findings and recommendations are expected to be not only academic in value but also highly relevant and have practical impact on policy improvements and the quality of life of former athletes, who have contributed to the reputation of their region and nation through sports. Ultimately, protecting athletes after retirement is the highest form of recognition for their dedication and a reflection of a state based on the rule of law and social justice.

Method

This research uses a socio-legal research approach rooted in the interpretive-constructive paradigm. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to not only

analyze legal texts normatively but also understand how the law is understood, interpreted, applied, and experienced by various actors in specific social contexts (Banakar & Travers, 2021:46). Within a socio-legal framework, law is viewed not as a static and autonomous entity, but as a dynamic social practice that both shapes and shapes social reality (Soekanto, 1986:39).

This approach is highly relevant for exploring the gap between normative ideals in legislation (law on the books) and the empirical reality of its implementation (law in action) in the context of post-career athlete protection (Christiani, 2016). Therefore, this study seeks to produce a holistic and contextual analysis of the complexity of legal implementation at the regional level. This research is qualitative with an instrumental case study design. Qualitative research was chosen because it can explore the meanings, experiences, and in-depth perceptions of the actors involved (Creswell & Poth, 2018:83).

Meanwhile, the instrumental case study design allows researchers to understand a specific phenomenon (legal protection of post-career athletes) through an in-depth study of a specific case (East Kalimantan Province), where the case serves as an instrument to understand broader issues. East Kalimantan Province was chosen as the research locus because it is an autonomous region with an existing regional legal framework (Regional Regulation No. 5/2016), but at the same time represents common challenges in the implementation of sports policies at the regional level, so that the findings can provide valuable insights for similar contexts in other regions.

The target population of this research is multi-sectoral, encompassing all entities that have roles, interests, or experiences related to the athlete's career cycle, particularly in the post-career transition phase. This population includes groups of former athletes (retired athletes) who have retired for at least 3 years from official competition, and active athletes entering the final phase of their careers (veteran athletes). Formal institutional actors include officials and technical staff at the East Kalimantan Provincial Youth and Sports Agency (Dispora), as well as administrators and administrators at the East Kalimantan Provincial Indonesian National Sports Committee (KONI). Policy supporting actors include legal practitioners (advocates/lawyers) who handle employment or sports cases, academics from the fields of law, sports science, or public policy, and representatives from the local BPJS (Employment Social Security Agency) (if possible).

Given the heterogeneous nature of the population and the exploratory-in-depth research objectives, the sampling technique used was purposive sampling combined with snowball sampling (Patton, 2015:107). The inclusion criteria for the retired athlete sample were (a) having held the status of a regional/national training center athlete or at least a national champion; (b) having completed their competitive career at least 3 years prior to the research; (c) being willing to share personal experiences openly. The selection process resulted in a final sample of 5 (five) retired athletes from various sports and achievement backgrounds.

This number is considered sufficient to achieve informational saturation in qualitative research, where the addition of new data no longer provides new substantive insights (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). In addition, 8 (eight) key informants from institutional circles were also selected, consisting of 3 Dispora officials (Head of Division, Section Head, and Staff), 2 KONI administrators (Secretary and Treasurer), 2 legal practitioners, and 1 academic. The

use of snowball sampling helped researchers reach former athletes who may not be recorded in official administrative data through recommendations from fellow athletes or sports administrators.

The data collection techniques and instruments used in this study relied on methodological triangulation to obtain comprehensive data and validate findings (Denzin, 2012). The three main techniques used were documentary analysis of legal and policy documents, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and participant and non-participant observation. The collected data were analyzed interactively and iteratively using the thematic analysis model (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis process was carried out in six stages, which were not always linear.

1. Familiarization with the data involves repeatedly reading interview transcripts, field notes, and legal documents until the researcher is completely familiar with the data.
2. Generating initial codes marks interesting or relevant pieces of data (words, phrases, paragraphs) with descriptive labels or codes.
3. Searching for themes groups conceptually similar codes to form broader, more meaningful themes. For example, the codes "don't know how to claim BPJS," "never received any information," and "complicated forms" can be grouped under the theme "low legal literacy and administrative access."
4. Reviewing themes re-examines the themes for their relevance to the code collection and the overall data set. Weaker themes are combined, separated, or discarded.
5. Defining and naming themes formulates the essence of each theme, defines what it means, and gives it a clear and attractive name.
6. Producing the report presents an analytical narrative that integrates findings from various data sources. Verbatim quotes from informants are used as empirical evidence to support interpretations, which are then critically linked to the findings of the legal document analysis.

Analysis of normative data (legal documents) and empirical data (interviews & observations) is carried out in an integrated and dialectical manner throughout the process to produce an in-depth synthesis of legal implementation.

Results

This research used a socio-legal approach to analyze the implementation of post-career athlete rights protection in East Kalimantan Province. The results presented are an integration of thematic analysis of three main data sources (1) legal document analysis, (2) in-depth interviews with 5 retired athletes and 8 institutional informants, and (3) field observations within the East Kalimantan Youth and Sports Agency (Dispora) and KONI (Indonesian National Sports Committee). The research findings reveal five main themes that illustrate the dynamics and complexity of legal implementation in this context.

A. Theme 1 Regulatory Disorientation Between Normative Ambiguity and Operational Emptiness

Analysis of legal documents shows a pattern layered normative ambiguity extends from the national to the regional levels. Law No. 11/2022 on Sports, while progressive in

its recognition of normative rights (Articles 99-100), does not provide an operational definition of "social security for athletes," the scope of benefits, funding mechanisms, or responsible institutions. These articles are more declarative (aspirational) than imperative (mandatory). A sports law expert (INF-03) analyzed, "Article 100 of Law No. 11/2022 is like a blank check. It says 'entitled to social security,' but there is no clause specifying who should fill out the check, how much, or how to cash it. This creates a very loose and easily overlooked area of interpretation."

This ambiguity continues at the regional implementation level. East Kalimantan Regional Regulation No. 5/2016 concerning Sports Administration fails to translate the social security mandate of the parent law. Analysis of the regulation's text shows that of the 17 chapters and 56 articles, not a single one specifically addresses athletes' rights post-career, retirement, or job transition. The regulation's focus is strictly administrative and event-driven. INF-01 (a Dispora official) acknowledged, "Our regulation is a 2016 product, enacted long before Law 11/2022. So, it's not synchronized. To accommodate post-career issues, a revision is needed, or at least a Governor's Regulation as implementing guidelines, which currently does not exist."

The impact of this ambiguity and regulatory vacuum is manifested in legal uncertainty for athletes. AP-02 (a former karate athlete from the National Training Center) shared his paradoxical experience: "I know athletes from other countries. They have a kind of 'former athlete association' that fights for pension rights based on clear regulations. Here, the regulations exist at the national level (law), but at our level (regional), they act as if the regulations never existed. We live in a legal vacuum." Observations of official communications (correspondence) between the Youth and Sports Agency (Dispora) and sports clubs also confirmed that there is no single document instructing or educating athletes about the procedures for registering with BPJS after their contracts expire.

B. Theme 2 Institutional Fragmentation and the Culture of 'Throwing off the Hook'

These findings reveal a fragmented governance structure, where three key institutions the Youth and Sports Agency (Dispora), the Indonesian National Sports Committee (KONI), and the Social Security Agency (BPJS Kesehatan) operate in silos with overlapping but uncoordinated mandates. Dispora, as a regional agency, views its role as a facilitator and regulator of macro-policy. They allocate funds for coaching and events, but not for individual, long-term pension programs. INF-01 explained, "Our regional budget (APBD) is allocated per activity. There are allocations for national training, for student athlete development, and for events. There is no budget item called 'athlete pension allowance' or 'reintegration program.' Creating a new item requires a strong legal framework, which we don't yet have."

KONI, on the other hand, acts as a government partner and technical coordinator for sports. Their primary mandate is to prepare athletes for multi-event competitions (PON, Peparnas). INF-02 (KONI Management) stated, "We are an organization that promotes high-performance sports. Our focus is on how athletes win. Post-achievement welfare matters are actually the government's domain through universal social security. However, we are often used as the 'spearhead' to resolve athletes' social issues, which should not be within the technical realm of sports." Observations at PON committee meetings show how

discussions regarding the athletes' future after PON are consistently postponed with the excuse that "further coordination with the Youth and Sports Agency (Dispora) and the local government is needed."

BPJS Employment faces structural obstacles in covering athletes. The BPJS system is designed for formal employment relationships with wage-earning participants. Most athletes, especially early in their careers, are informally funded by their parents, scholarships, or incidental sponsorships. INF-05 (an interviewed BPJS employee) confirmed, "To register, you need employer data (club name, NPP) and proof of contribution payments. Many athletes' 'clubs' are not legally registered, or their contracts are intermittent. This complicates ongoing membership administration, which is a requirement for receiving pension benefits."

This fragmentation gave birth to culture "passing the buck." A retired athlete (AP-03) described his frustrating journey: "I once tried to take care of BPJS. The Youth and Sports Office told me to go to KONI. KONI said it was a club matter. The club chairman said there were no funds and told me to ask the Youth and Sports Office. Finally, after going round in circles, I gave up." This phenomenon was observed by researchers when a former athlete visited the Youth and Sports Office and was transferred to different sections without any clarity.

C. Theme 3 Low Legal Literacy and Alienation of Legal Subjects (Athletes)

A consistent finding from all interviews with athletes was that there is a vast gap in knowledge between normative rights and awareness of those rights. None of the five retired athletes interviewed had ever read or received any information about Law No. 11/2022. AP-01 stated, "Sports law? For us, the law was the coach's orders and the training schedule. Money and security were handled by the administrators; we were never consulted." This lack of knowledge leads to vulnerability and dependency. Athletes are accustomed to a patron-client relationship with coaches or administrators, where welfare is seen as a gift (grace) rather than a right. AP-05 explained, "If we're close to a caring administrator, we usually get help. But if we're not close, don't expect it. Asking for rights is considered impolite." This culture was observed in interactions between officials and athletes at a casual event, where the promised assistance took the form of "personal assistance" rather than "fulfillment of institutional obligations."

In addition, athletes also face complex procedural barriers. They don't understand how to access dispute resolution mechanisms (mediation, arbitration), which are actually regulated in Law No. 11/2022, Article 102. INF-03 (Legal Practitioner) stated, "In the cases I've handled, athletes don't even know they can take their benefits issues to a sports arbitration institution. They think their only options are to remain silent or protest on social media, which is often counterproductive." This low literacy is exacerbated by the lack of legal assistance or sports-specific legal aid clinics at the provincial level.

D. Theme 4 Ad-hoc, Charitable, and Personal Capacity-Reliant Protection Practices

In the absence of a formal system, research has found that the "protection" athletes receive is very sporadic and uneven. The forms that emerge tend to be ad-hoc responses to specific cases that receive attention or driven by the individual initiatives of concerned officials.

Some patterns identified:

1. The general social assistance pattern for retired athletes in dire economic circumstances is sometimes "registered" by Dispora officials who know them into local government social assistance programs for the general poor, such as the Family Hope Program (PKH) or Non-Cash Food Assistance (BPNT). INF-01 stated, "This is a shortcut we take out of conscience. But it's a misguided solution because it equates former athletes with the general poor. This actually demeans their dignity."
2. The connections and recommendations of highly accomplished athletes or those with strong networks (AP-02) often lead to recommendations for jobs as part-time coaches at schools, instructors at fitness centers, or even honorary positions in government agencies. However, this largely depends on personal connections. AP-02 admitted, "I got my current position because the head of the provincial government used to be my coach. He recommended me. My classmates who didn't have such connections had a different fate."
3. Incidental assistance is based on events. Sometimes, during events like National Sports Day or major holiday celebrations, local governments provide one-off "compensation" to former senior athletes. Observations at one such event indicate that the assistance is symbolic and limited, more for media image purposes than for building a sustainable system.

AA public policy academic (INF-04) provided a critical assessment, saying, "What happened in East Kalimantan is a classic example of policy by anecdote. The government's response came when an athlete's case went viral due to his poverty, not because there was a proactive system in place to reach everyone. This kind of charitable model will never solve the root problem; instead, it creates new inequalities among retired athletes."

E. Theme 5 Data Gaps and the Absence of an Evidence Base for Policy

Key findings from the document analysis and interviews with institutions are there is no integrated and disaggregated database on athletes, both active and retired. The Youth and Sports Agency (Dispora) maintains data on athletes under its care, focusing on current performance and achievements. The Indonesian National Sports Committee (KONI) maintains data on athletes qualified for specific events. However, no single institution systematically tracks athletes' BPJS membership status, contract or employment history, non-sports skills, career transition plans or needs, and post-retirement socio-economic conditions.

INF-02 (KONI) admitted, "Our data consists of names, branches, and recent results. Once an athlete is no longer on the team, the data can become stagnant. We don't have a mechanism to update whether they have found work or not." INF-01 (Dispora) added, "Creating a comprehensive database requires resources and regulations that require every club/sports organization to report. As long as it's not mandatory, and as long as budgets are limited, the data will remain partial." This lack of data has serious implications for policies being made in the dark. Regional governments struggle to formulate targeted programs because they don't know the population, profile, and real needs of retired athletes. A planner at Bappeda (INF-06) who was interviewed informally stated, "In the preparation

of the RPJMD, the issue of post-career athletes is difficult to accommodate because there is no strong evidence of the extent of this problem and how many are affected. There are only individual stories that are difficult to use as a basis for budget allocation." The five themes above do not stand alone, but rather form a cycle of mutually reinforcing failures in legal implementation.

1. Regulatory ambiguity (Theme 1) results in the absence of a clear mandate for institutions.
2. This triggers fragmentation and shifting of responsibility (Theme 2) among existing institutions.
3. Fragmentation and lack of socialization results in low legal literacy of athletes (Theme 3).
4. In this systemic vacuum, there appears ad-hoc charitable practices (Theme 4) that are unfair and unsustainable.
5. This whole process is unmonitored and unmeasurable because the absence of adequate data (Theme 5), so that system failures cannot be properly diagnosed and repaired, then returning to the starting point: unclear regulations in their implementation.

This finding firmly proves the research thesis that there is a very deep gap between the legal ideals in law No. 11/2022 and the reality on the ground. Legal protection for post-career athletes in East Kalimantan is currently more of a legal myth than a legal reality accessible and enjoyed by its legal subjects, namely retired athletes themselves.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal the complexity of the implementation of legal protection for post-career athletes in East Kalimantan, which can be analyzed through three main dimensions (1) Critical analysis of the existing legal framework, (2) Deformation of implementation in the local context, and (3) The novelty and contribution of this study to the discourse of Indonesian sports law. The national legal framework, especially Law Number 11 of 2022 concerning Sports, has normatively experienced significant progress by recognizing athletes' rights to social security. However, the findings of this study are consistent with the initial criticism raised by (Chandra & Djulaeka (2024) that this law still leaves a severe operational deficit.

Article 100 of Law 11/2022, which states "the right to social security," fails to concretely define what social security means in the context of athletes' uniquely short, injury-prone, and often informal careers. This ambiguity creates what Christiani (2016) calls a "grey zone of implementation," between ideal norms and the lack of implementation guidelines. Furthermore, this study found that Law Number 24 of 2011 concerning the Social Security Agency (BPJS), which should be an operational instrument for social security, is incompatible with the work reality of most athletes.

As identified by (Meilarovasari et al., 2025), the BPJS system is designed for stable and sustainable employment. Meanwhile, athletes' career patterns are characterized by income instability and fragmented employment relationships (Golyk, 2025). Consequently, while legally open, athletes are administratively trapped, unable to meet standard participation

requirements. This demonstrates the failure of national regulations to provide tailored schemes for workers with non-standard work models, including athletes. At the regional level, Regional Regulation No. 5 of 2016 actually widens the implementation gap.

This regional regulation fails to serve as a bridge translating national mandates into local policies, but rather ignores them. This finding confirms the analysis (Rustandi et al., 2021) of the tendency of regional sports policies in Indonesia to focus more on infrastructure development and quick wins than on building long-term support systems for their human resources, namely athletes. The research findings on institutional fragmentation and a culture of passing the buck between the Youth and Sports Agency (Dispora), KONI (Indonesian National Sports Committee), and BPJS Kesehatan (Social Security Agency) are clear manifestations of collaborative governance failure.

Each institution operates within its own silos with separate logic and accountabilities. The Sports and Youth Agency (Dispora) operates under the logic of bureaucracy and regional budgets, the Indonesian National Sports Committee (KONI) operates under the logic of achievements and sports organizations, while the Social Security Agency (BPJS) operates under the logic of membership and standard administration. The inability to align these three logics creates a vacuum of responsibility, where athletes' rights become a "loose ball" with no clear owner. This situation aligns with the theoretical framework (Banakar & Travers, 2021), which states that the effectiveness of law depends heavily on the institutional capacity and willingness to implement it.

The most worrying consequence of this governance failure is the transformation of legal rights into charitable assistance.

The finding that athletes who receive aid usually do so because of connections, personal concerns from officials, or media attention indicates a paradigm shift from a rights-based approach to a charity-based approach. This shift is highly dangerous because, as criticized by Carmona (2017), the charitable approach perpetuates dependency, inequality, and fails to foster state accountability. Former athletes are no longer rights-holders who can sue the state, but rather beneficiaries who must be grateful for incidental gifts.

The low level of legal literacy among athletes, as found in this study, is a catalytic factor in this process of deformation. Their ignorance of Law 11/2022 and dispute resolution mechanisms (mediation/arbitration) leaves them legally powerless. This creates an environment where rights violations can occur without resistance. A study by Yaroshenko et al. (2024) on international athletes demonstrates the importance of early legal education and advocacy for athletes. The absence of a systematic legal literacy program in East Kalimantan, as observed in this study, reflects a neglect of the legal empowerment of athletes as legal subjects.

This research contributes several novelties and different contributions when compared with previous relevant research.

Table 1. Novelty and different contributions when compared with previous relevant research

Aspect	Previous Relevant Research	This Research (Rohadi, Rahmat, Temmassonge)
Substantive Focus	Tends to focus on sports law in general,	Specifically examines the post-career issues of

	athlete contracts, anti-doping, or dispute resolution at the national/elite level (Yaroshenko et al., 2024; Chandra & Djulaeka, 2024).	athletes, the most neglected phase, with a focus on regional/provincial implementation levels.
Geographical Locus	Many studies focus on the national level or cases in Java (Arisman et al., 2024; Kurniawan et al., 2025).	Using East Kalimantan as a case study, it provides a problem map from the perspective of regions outside Java with their unique regional autonomy dynamics.
Methodological Approach	Dominant use of pure normative approach or literature study (Meilarovasari et al., 2025; Golyk, 2025).	Using an integrated socio-legal approach, combining analysis of legal documents with primary empirical data (interviews, observations) from various direct stakeholders.
Depth of Analysis	Often stops at identifying regulatory deficiencies.	Going deeper by analyzing the process of implementation deformation, uncovering the mechanisms of passing the buck, the transformation of rights into charities, and the cycle of governance failure at the local level.
Voice Subject	Data sources are often only from secondary documents and literature.	Including the direct voices of retired athletes as the main subjects who have been most impacted but rarely heard in policy analysis.

This research's theoretical contribution is to demonstrate the relevance and power of a socio-legal approach to examining sports law issues in Indonesia. This research demonstrates that understanding sports law is not simply a matter of reading the law's text, but requires delving into how that text, or its absence, interacts with institutional structures, bureaucratic culture, power relations, and the capacity of legal subjects at the local level. The primary practical/policy contribution is to provide a comprehensive diagnosis of the root causes of the problem.

The recommendations emerging from this study are not simply calls for "law revision," but emphasize the need for multi-level interventions: (a) Improving more operational national regulations, (b) Strengthening institutional capacity and coordination at the regional level, (c) Developing an integrated database system, and (d) Developing legal literacy and advocacy programs for athletes. These recommendations are contextual and grounded in field evidence, and are therefore expected to be more implementable. Overall, this study not only confirms the existence of a gap between law and practice, but also successfully maps the anatomy and mechanisms of this gap in the specific context of East Kalimantan.

Thus, this study serves as an important empirical benchmark to encourage improvements in post-career athlete protection policies that are fairer, more inclusive, and sustainable, not only in East Kalimantan but also in other provinces in Indonesia that face similar challenges in implementing sports autonomy.

Sconclusion

Based on a socio-legal analysis integrating normative studies of the legal framework with empirical field investigations, this study concludes that the implementation of legal protection for post-career athlete rights in East Kalimantan Province is experiencing systemic failure. The normative rights guaranteed by Law Number 11 of 2022 concerning Sports have not undergone a substantive transformation into enforceable rights for retired athletes in the region. This failure is manifested through several key findings: regulatory disorientation

characterized by ambiguous norms at the national level and operational vacuums at the regional level, leading to legal uncertainty.

Acute institutional fragmentation between the Youth and Sports Agency (Dispora), the Indonesian National Sports Committee (KONI), and the Social Security Administration (BPJS) has given rise to a culture of passing the buck, creating a vacuum of responsibility. As a direct result, a paradigm shift has occurred, with social security, as a legal right, being relegated to incidental, charitable social assistance, heavily reliant on personal networks, thus neglecting the principles of justice and certainty. These dynamics are exacerbated by low legal literacy among athletes and the absence of a unified database, which hinders evidence-based policy formulation.

The implications of this situation are serious. The state, in this case the local government, has de facto reneged on its constitutional and statutory obligations to fulfill the right to social security for its citizens who have rendered service. The absence of a sustainable protection system not only threatens the economic and social future of retired athletes but also has the potential to weaken the motivation and competitiveness of younger athletes, ultimately undermining the ideals of sustainable and equitable national sports development. Therefore, improvements can no longer be patchwork or partial.

Comprehensive reforms are needed that simultaneously address the root of the problem at three levels: regulation, institutions, and empowerment. Urgent strategic steps include (1) Revision of Regional Regulation No. 5/2016 or the issuance of a Governor's Regulation that explicitly regulates the post-career security scheme, funding mechanisms, and institutional responsibilities; (2) Establishment of a task force or special unit that coordinates Dispora, KONI, and BPJS in building an integrated athlete database and organizing registration, mentoring, and career transition programs; and (3) Launching a massive legal literacy and advocacy program for athletes, so that they can position themselves as legal subjects who are aware of their rights and able to advocate for themselves.

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