

The Argus

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Since 1954

Exemptions, Exile, and the Structural Crisis of South Korea's Elite Athletic System

**Financial Disparity: Privileging
Medal-Contending Sports Over Grassroots Support**

**Dual Career: Bridging the Gap Between
Athletic Training and Academic Survival**

**Systemic Reform: Redefining National Rewards
Beyond Short-Term Achievements**

Toward Sustainable Sport Ecosystems



HANKUK UNIVERSITY OF FOREIGN STUDIES

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Editorial

Asking What Lies Beyond the Outcome

A single result often appears to be a complete fact on its own. Yet behind every outcome, multiple layers of less visible processes and conditions often lie beneath the surface. When we focus solely on the result, we risk missing the context and structure that generated it in the first place.

This October issue examines the processes behind visible outcomes. The success or failure of a specific moment has long served as the clearest metric for deciding an individual's treatment and future path. However, as rewards and attention concentrate on a singular achievement, the learning process behind it – and the time spent preparing for what comes next – often receives far less attention. The longer a result-driven evaluation persists, the more essential it becomes to build systems that support the journey leading to that outcome.

A similar pattern emerges in language. While the brevity and wit of a newly coined expression quickly catch our eye, how widely and how long that expression is actually used is a separate question. What determines an expression's lifespan may have less to do with its form than with how many people come to understand it in the same way. Institutional approaches to safety follow a similar dynamic. The tendency to overhaul laws and policies only after a crisis occurs suggests that preventive processes tend to draw attention only once an outcome has already forced our hand. Building systems that detect warning signs and allow for intervention before a crisis unfolds may deserve more attention going forward than responding after the fact.

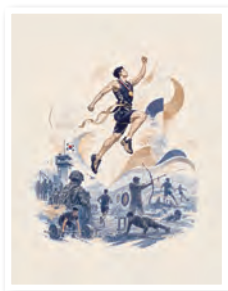
What catches our eye first is almost always the outcome. Yet asking how each outcome came to be is precisely where we begin to understand, and respond to, the same result differently. Perhaps the task before us is not to look away from the outcome, but to keep looking past it. 

By Cho Subin
Editor-in-Chief

조수빈



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>> In 2026, the aftermath of the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games once again brings the controversy surrounding military service exemptions to the forefront of South Korean society. This ruling – and the broader debate on intergenerational equity – highlights how current policies may shape the future of young people. While elite sports have long been utilized as a tool for national prestige, the heavy reliance on short-term medal achievements has raised concerns about structural problems, including inequalities in access to military exemptions, the marginalization of less prominent sports, and limitations on student-athletes' academic and career development. This article examines the structural limits of South Korea's elite athletic system, reviews the historical and administrative policies governing sports rewards and financing, and evaluates whether the fundamental rights and future of young athletes are being adequately protected in South Korean society.

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Beyond the Scoreboard

HUFS to Hold Second QUINQUATRIA of the Year

HUFS will hold its second QUINQUATRIA of the year at the Seoul Campus from Oct. 7 to 8. Previously held once a year in the fall, the festival has been expanded to twice a year for the first time in 2026.

The 60th General Student Council (GSC) “Sunmyeong” pledged to hold QUINQUATRIA in both spring and fall under the slogan “QUINQUATRIA in Spring and Fall.” The GSC proposed the change to provide students with more opportunities to participate in the festival, which had previously combined various programs into a single annual event. The fall QUINQUATRIA will distinguish itself from the spring event by placing greater emphasis on student participation. During the election, Sunmyeong announced plans to focus the spring festival on participatory activities for freshmen and other students, while expanding numbers of student-run booths and pubs for the fall festival.

Following the pledge, the first festival of the year, “2026 QUINQUATRIA: Luminous,” was held from June 1 to 2. The spring festival featured student-run booths and pubs, participatory programs, student performances, and guest artists.

Kim Ha-eun, president of the GSC, said, “Rather than simply holding the festival one more time, the GSC aim to lay the foundation for a fall QUINQUATRIA that can continue to grow by accumulating experiences and records each year.” She highlighted new initiatives for the fall festival, including an official festival website being developed with the student club LIKELION and student-participatory programs. 



▲ HUFSans enjoy QUINQUATRIA, the university festival held at the HUFS Seoul Campus.

By Jang Yeseo

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CKLC Accepts Applications for 2026 Winter semester Regular / Translation & Interpretation Course

The Center for Korean Language and Culture (CKLC) is accepting applications for its 2026 Winter semester Regular / Translation & Interpretation Course. The application deadline is Oct. 16 for applicants from designated countries, countries at high risk for tuberculosis, and countries under intensive management, and Oct. 30 for applicants from non-designated countries. The semester will run from Dec. 1, 2026 to Feb. 12, 2027.

The course is open to foreign nationals and overseas Koreans residing in South Korea who have completed high school or higher education and wish to learn Korean language and South Korean culture. Students are assigned to classes based on their placement test results. The course offers seven levels: Levels 1 and 2 for beginners, Levels 3 and 4 for intermediate learners, and Levels 5, 6, and the Korean Interpreting and Translating Course for advanced learners. Each class consists of 12 to 15 students, with classes held for four hours a day from Monday to Friday.

Students interested in enrolling can apply through the CKLC’s online application system. Ryan Chen, a former exchange student at HUFS, said, “Through the course, I want to learn Korean language systematically, make Korean friends, and experience Korean culture first hand,” expressing his excitement about taking the course. 



▲ Applicants can apply for the course and check the application process on the CKLC website (<https://dep.hufs.ac.kr/sites/hufskorean/index.do>).

By You Chae-hyeon

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HUFS, KHU, UOS Conclude Joint Blood Donation Campaign



©HUFS GSC Sunmyeong

▲ A blood donation bus seeks donors at the Seoul campus of HUFS.

HUFS, Kyung Hee University (KHU), and the University of Seoul (UOS) successfully concluded their joint blood donation campaign, “2026 Blood Donation Festival,” held from Sept. 1 to Sept. 20 across Dongdaemun Ward. Among the three participating universities, UOS recorded the highest participation rate.

Organized collaboratively by the General Student Councils of the three institutions – HUFS’ “Sunmyeong,” KHU’s “MATE,” and UOS’s “Dawn” – the event aimed to tackle chronic blood supply shortages and promote civic solidarity among university communities. Students, faculty, and staff participated by visiting either the Blood Donation Center in Hoegi-dong, Dongdaemun Ward, with their student IDs, or the on-campus mobile blood donation buses. According to the final tally calculated as a percentage of each school’s undergraduate enrollment, UOS recorded the highest participation rate at 2.97 percent, taking first place in the joint campaign, followed by HUFS at 2.02 percent and KHU at 1.10 percent. Incentives such as volunteer service hours, gift vouchers, and social media verification events contributed to the strong turnout throughout the three-week drive.

“I had always been aware of the severe shortages in blood supplies, and participating in this joint campaign gave me a truly rewarding opportunity to contribute directly to the community,” said Yang Dong-jun, a sophomore majoring in Division of Social Science & AI. By turning routine healthcare volunteering into an engaging intercollegiate initiative, the campaign demonstrated the positive civic role that local student bodies can play in addressing pressing public welfare challenges. 🇰🇷

By Lee Joon-woo
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New Words, Changing Korean



▲ King Sejong is reimagined with contemporary slang, connecting the creation of Hangeul with the constantly changing language of the present.

By Jang Yeseo

Staff Reporter of Culture Section

2026 marks the 580th anniversary of the promulgation of Hunminjeongeum, meaning “Proper sounds to instruct the people,” and the 100th anniversary of Gagyanal, the predecessor of Hangeul Day, first celebrated by the Chosun Language Research Society, which established as an organization for the study and development of Korean language, in 1926. While these anniversaries invite people to look back on the history and value of Hangeul, the Korean language, as it is spoken in South Korea (hereafter Korea) today, has never stopped evolving. A sentence from a gaming livestream can be reduced to a few syllables and enter office conversations. News reports can compress age and gender into a short group label, while anxiety over housing prices or the cost of lunch can quickly acquire a new name. To understand what these changes mean, The Argus examines three types of neologisms, namely context-compressing expressions, generation and group labels, and socially reflective neologisms, and considers why they emerge and what may happen to them.



▲ Performers celebrate Hangeul at the Sejong Hangeul Festival, highlighting the continuing cultural significance of the Korean writing system.

Before Reading

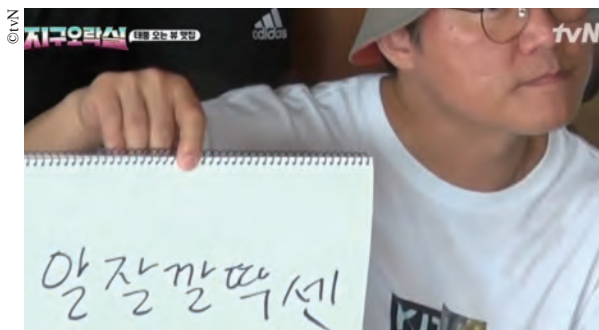
Methods of Shortening Korean Expressions

Abbreviation is common in Korean. Longer words or phrases are shortened while leaving enough clues for speakers to recall the original expression. “Bok-se-pyeon-sal,” for instance, comes from “bokjaphan sesang pyeonhage salja,” meaning “let us live comfortably in this complicated world,” while “Gap-bun-ssa” shortens “gapjagi bunwigi ssahaejinda,” meaning “the mood suddenly turns awkward.” Korean speakers also create words by combining existing elements. “Ma-gi-kkun,” for example, combines “maseukeu,” meaning “mask,” and “sagikkun,” meaning “fraudster.” Similar processes of word formation exist in English: “advertisement” becomes “ad,” “application” becomes “app,” and parts of “breakfast” and “lunch” form “brunch.”



Context-Compressing Neologisms: Putting a Shared Story into a Short Expression

A Long Utterance and Its Story Become One Expression



▲ The abbreviated expression “Al-jal-ddak-kkal-sen” appears on a television program, showing how online slang can move into mainstream media.

The first type shortens an existing utterance or event while calling up the situation and cultural background attached to it. “Al-jal-ddak-kkal-sen” is made from the key syllables of “alaseo jal ttak kkalkkeumhago senseu itge,” meaning “handle it yourself, well, neatly and sensibly.” The expression emerged during a 2018 livestream by Korean game streamer Woowakgood, where it was used in the context of asking viewers to understand what was needed without every detail being explained. It later spread through his fandom and online communities.

The expression does more than shorten a sentence.

Among people who know it, “Al-jal-ddak-kkal-sen” also conveys an expectation that a person should read the situation and act appropriately without detailed instructions. It therefore compresses not only the original phrase but also the communication style of the community in which it circulated.



▲ Smartphone users communicate through digital platforms, where new expressions can spread rapidly among online communities.

“Jung-kkeok-ma” works in a similar way. It shortens “jungyohan geon kkeokiji anneun maeum,” meaning “what matters is an unbreakable spirit.” The phrase originated from media coverage of an interview related to the 2022 League of Legends World Championship and spread through gaming communities. During the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar, it reached audiences far beyond gaming and came to be used to express perseverance in difficult situations. Its shortened form can now evoke the larger notion of endurance attached to the phrase.

The productive use of abbreviation and combination was also visible during the COVID-19 pandemic. In

the study “‘COVID-19’ Neologism Patterns, Social Influence, and Response Measures: Focusing on 2020-2022” (2022), Yeo Kyung-ae, a professor at Mokwon University, analyzed 75 pandemic-related neologisms. Seventy-two were compounds consisting of two or more elements, while 23 to 31 percent, involved abbreviation. “Jip-kok,” which combines “jip,” meaning “house,” with “kok,” describes staying at home, while “Ma-gi-kkun” humorously refers to the difference in a person’s appearance with and without a mask.

However, a shorter expression is not necessarily easier for everyone to understand. According to the Korea Press Foundation’s report *Problems and Measures for Improving the Use of Loanwords and neologisms in the Media* (2020), only 19.6 percent of respondents considered neologisms effective in conveying information. The figure was 31 percent among teenagers but 14.8 percent among people in their 50s. The efficiency of a short expression therefore depends on whether its users share the same meaning and context.

Linguistic Economy Is Not “As Short as Possible,” but “Leaving Enough to Understand”

It is important to understand the linguistic economy behind such expressions. Kim Hae-yeon, a professor in the Department of English Language and Literature at Chung-Ang University, explained in the study “Formation and Linguistic Motivations of Abbreviations in English and Konglish” (2007) that abbreviation involves an economic motivation to reduce linguistic effort while maintaining enough distinctiveness to identify the intended meaning. If an expression is shortened so much that it requires another explanation, the communicative cost outweighs the savings.

Digital platforms reinforce this tendency. Real-time chats, comments and short-form videos encourage quick input and reaction. At the same time, fandoms and gaming communities repeatedly consume the same content, allowing background knowledge to spread rapidly within the group. Abbreviation itself is not new, but digital platforms accelerate both the speed of communication and the sharing of context.

Compression Will Remain, but Only Expressions with a Wider “Shared Range” Will Last

As long as digital communication continues, context-compressing expressions are unlikely to disappear. Yet the production of many new expressions does not mean that each one will survive. Terms that move beyond a particular fandom or platform and remain useful long after their original event has faded are more likely to last.

Yoo Hyun-jung, a professor of the Department of Korean Studies at Hufs pointed to both sides of this process. “Slang shared only among particular users can strengthen a community’s identity and emotional bond, but it also has an exclusive quality because people who do not know the expression become outsiders,” she said. She added that linguistic economy is difficult to regard as an advantage when accurate communication instead requires more time and a longer explanation. Professor Yoo also warned of a widening generational gap: parents may feel excluded when they cannot follow neologisms rapidly created and spread by younger users online, while younger people may feel frustrated by the communication gap. She noted that even teenagers and people in their 20s can fail to understand one another’s expressions, just as those in their 30s and 40s may struggle with language used by people in their 20s. Ultimately, a compressed expression is most likely to remain useful when its meaning can be shared beyond the community that created it. As Professor Yoo emphasized, genuine communication becomes possible when members of a language community share the situation and context and cooperate to convey meaning.



Generation and Group Labels: When a Name Creates an Image

A Name Creates the Image of a Group

The second type gives a group a name based on characteristics such as age, gender, taste or familiarity with trends. “Idaenam,” formed by shortening “men in their 20s,” refers to young men as a social category.

According to the study “An Analysis of Media Frames on the Politicization of ‘Idaenam’ by Conservative and Progressive Political Circles” (2023) by Oh Da-seul, a researcher and Yoo Hong-sik, a professor of Chung-Ang University, the term began appearing in news reports in January 2019 and quickly became a recurring feature in coverage of gender conflict and election strategies.

The term initially appeared to be a simple demographic label, but repeated media use attached political and social meanings to it. In the coverage examined by the researchers, “Idaenam” was often associated with opposition to policies favoring women and with particular right-wing political preferences. As these associations accumulate, differences among individual men in their 20s became less visible behind the image of a supposedly typical “Idaenam.”

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▲ A stereotypical “Young Forty” image combines streetwear, sneakers and accessories associated with attempts to follow younger trends.

sneakers and smartphones, along with attempts to follow younger trends, became associated with the stereotype. Lecturer Cho also points out that political hostility played a strong role in this negative shift.

K-pop produced another group label in the first half of 2026. “Yeong-keu-keu” is formed from the initial

“Young Forty” shows how quickly the evaluation attached to a group name can change. In the study “A Sociolinguistic Study on the Semantic Change of the Neologism ‘Young Forty’” (2025), Cho Won-hyoung, a lecturer at Seoul National University, explains that the expression appeared around 2015 as a positive marketing term for consumers in their 40s who were considered youthful and financially active. By 2025, however, it had become widely used online as a mocking label for people in their 40s. Images of snapbacks, streetwear,



▲ CORTIS presents its “Young Creator Crew” identity, the phrase from which the neologism “Yeong-keu-keu” is derived.

syllables of “Yeong Keurieiteo Keuru,” the Korean-style pronunciation of “Young Creator Crew,” a phrase associated with the group CORTIS. On short-form platforms and social media, it spread into a meme for people seen as young and trend-conscious. Its contrasting form, “Neulk-keu-keu,” combines the idea of being “old” with “Creator Crew.” It can refer to older people, but people in their 20s and 30s also use it to make fun of themselves when they fail to recognize a current trend. In this usage, “old” describes cultural distance rather than biological age. Even so, a term that begins as self-mockery, however, can also move into contexts where it is used to judge or exclude others.

Generational Identity and Self-Categorization Draw the Boundary Between “Us” and “Them”

Why do such labels appear repeatedly? One reason is that generation itself can function as a source of identity. Michael A. Hogg, a professor of Claremont Graduate University and Scott A. Reid, a professor of University of South Carolina Beaufort, explain in their study “Social Identity, Self-Categorization, and the Communication of Group Norms” (2006) that people often understand groups through context-dependent “prototypes,” simplified images of what supposedly distinguishes one group from another. Once a representative image forms, differences within a group may appear to shrink while differences between groups appear to widen.

This can lead to both homogenization and othering. If “Idaenam” is repeatedly connected with the same political and gender attitudes, men in their 20s with very different views may still be perceived as similar. If certain consumption patterns are repeatedly described as typical of “Young Forty,” diverse individuals in their 40s can likewise be reduced to one image. At the same time, someone who understands “Yeong-keu-keu” may place themselves among people who share the latest cultural code and use “Neulk-keu-keu” to distinguish those outside it.

More Important than Semantic Change Is How Quickly a “Label” Becomes Fixed



▲ Stereotypes reduce diverse members of a group to simplified assumptions, illustrating how group labels can obscure individual differences.

The future problem, then, is not simply whether these labels survive but how quickly an evaluation becomes fixed on them. Researcher Oh and Professor Yoo’s study found recurring frames in “Idaenam” coverage, including group-identity stigma, backlash against stigma, conflict and competition, attribution of responsibility and proposed alternatives. The 2022 Korea Press Foundation survey also found that 71.1 percent of respondents viewed the term “Idaenam” negatively, while 88.9 percent agreed that divisions such as “Idaenam” and “Idaenyeo,” referring to women in their 20s, could fuel gender and generational conflict.

Professor Yoo also stressed the risks of such labels. “A group name defines public perception of that group and

can affect the identity of its members and even provoke social conflict,” she said. If an individual’s behavior is interpreted as a problem of the entire group, she added, misunderstanding and prejudice can escalate into confrontation between groups.

The media therefore has a particular responsibility when using these terms. Han Kyoung-soo, a professor in the Department of Computer Engineering at Sungkyul University, found in the study “Analysis of Neologism Usage Characteristics in News Articles Based on Persistence and Bias” (2019) that about 72 percent of articles explained the meaning of a neologism when it first appeared, but the proportion dropped to 41 percent four years later. However, frequent use does not mean universal understanding. When a group label carries evaluative or political implications, explaining its background is as important as defining the word itself.



Socially Reflective Neologisms: Turning Social Change into Lived Experience

Changes Once Seen in Statistics Become the Language of Lived Experience



▲ Korean stock markets rise during the COVID-19 period, when surging asset prices intensified public attention to relative wealth gaps.

The third type names not social change itself but the way people experience it. “Byeo-rak-geo-ji,” literally combining “byeo-rak,” or “thunderbolt,” with “geo-

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ji,” or “poor person,” does not usually mean someone who suddenly lost all their property. The term spread widely in 2020, when housing and stock prices were rising rapidly, and described the feeling of becoming relatively poorer simply because one had not bought into appreciating assets.

©Pinterest



▲ Apartment buildings fill the Seoul skyline as rapidly rising housing prices reshape perceptions of wealth and relative deprivation.

The economic background helps explain why the expression gained traction. According to KB Kookmin Bank’s report *KB Real Estate Market Review No. 2020-9* (2020), the average sale price of an apartment in Seoul reached 1.00312 billion won (US\$ 966,000), up 19.3 percent from a year earlier. It had taken only six months for

the average to rise from more than 900 million won (US\$ 699,000) to more than 1 billion won. “Byeo-rak-geo-ji” captured not the price increase itself but the relative deprivation felt by people who believed they had been left behind.

“Lunchflation,” a blend of “lunch” and “inflation,” similarly turns a macroeconomic trend into an everyday experience. According to Ministry of Data and Statistics, consumer prices rose 5.1 percent in 2022, while dining-out prices rose 7.7 percent, the highest annual increase in 30 years. The year-on-year increase in dining-out prices climbed to 9 percent in September. For office workers confronting higher menu prices every day, inflation became the concrete burden of paying for lunch.

Kim Eun-hee, a professor in the Division of Liberal Arts at the College of SuperStar at Jeonju University, describes neologisms as a barometer of rapidly changing social reality in the study “A Study on the New Chinese and Korean Words Reflecting the Social Image of the New

Normal Era” (2022). Lee Su-jin, a lecturer at the Office of International Affairs at Kyungpook National University similarly analyzed 2,445 new words in the study “A Study on the Sociocultural Characteristics of New Words from 2015 to 2020” (2022), finding that words related to social life, economic life, politics and administration together accounted for more than half of the total. Generational and class conflict, employment, real estate, stocks and cryptocurrency investment were among the recurring concerns reflected in new vocabulary.

■ Newly Salient Experiences Need Names

These terms do not necessarily arise because no previous word exists. “Asset inequality” and “inflation” were already available. What they did not directly capture was the newly prominent focus of experience: the feeling that everyone else had become richer while one stood still, or the repeated frustration of paying more for lunch. Park Na-young of Dong-A University explains in the master’s thesis “A Study on Korean Neologisms: Focusing on Popular Neologisms in Korean Society from 2015 to 2019” (2019) that new words are formed from existing language in response to political, economic, social and cultural change. In this sense, socially reflective neologisms reorganize existing linguistic material to give a sharper name to an experience that has become socially important.

They also carry emotion and evaluation. “Asset inequality” and “Byeo-rak-geo-ji” do not carry the same weight. The latter emphasizes deprivation and frustration, as though a person had become poor overnight through no fault of their own. This emotional force helps scattered individual experiences become recognizable as something shared, but it can also narrow a complex issue to a single perspective.

■ A Word May Be Short-Lived, but the Emotions of an Era Remain on Record

Socially reflective neologisms are therefore closely tied to their historical conditions. A term such as “corona blue,” referring to depression caused by isolation and restrictions during the pandemic, may become less common as the event recedes. Other expressions may

outlast the circumstances that produced them. Their future does not depend on every word entering the dictionary. New terms will continue to appear whenever social change brings a particular experience into sharper focus.

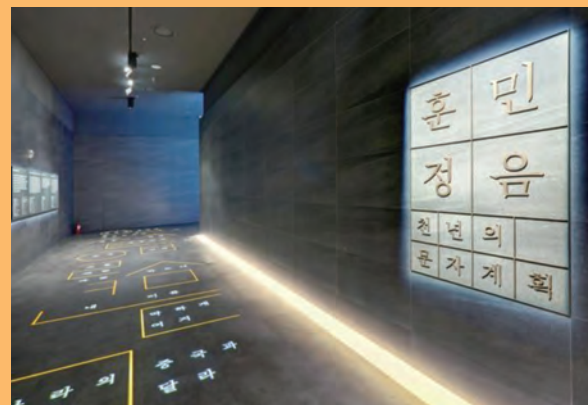


▲ The term “Corona Blue” describes a feeling of depression and emotional fatigue associated with the prolonged COVID-19 pandemic.

Professor Yoo described this archival value directly.

“Neologisms are created with the appearance of new objects, concepts or problems that existing vocabulary cannot accurately explain, and they have important value as linguistic, social and cultural material,” she said. She called them “a realistic indicator that most vividly shows social change and public psychology.” Because they reflect the thoughts, values, desires and deficiencies of people living at a particular time, she explained, neologisms can also be used to examine patterns of word formation and to trace consumer psychology and social trends. Even if a word disappears as a fad rather than becoming standard vocabulary, its value remains because it records the social and cultural context in which it was created and used. Professor Yoo also noted that “when long-used neologisms are considered for standard-language status, factors such as length of use, breadth and publicness of use, and the distinct need for the expression are reviewed.”

Looking at neologisms in the year of the 100th anniversary of Hangeul Day and the 580th anniversary of Hunminjeongeum does not mean labeling every new word as the “destruction of Hangeul.” Nor does it mean accepting every change as linguistic progress. Different neologisms emerge for different reasons and perform different cultural functions. Context-compressing expressions can make communication efficient among people who share the same background, while excluding those who do not. Generation and group labels can help people recognize social categories, but they can also erase differences within a group and entrench stereotypes. Socially reflective words can make an emerging experience visible, but they also carry the emotions and judgments of the period in which they were created. Some expressions will remain, while others will disappear with the trends that produced them. Both, however, reveal what speakers considered important at a particular moment. Rather than trying to stop language from changing, the more practical task is to widen the range of people who can understand it, record the context in which new words emerge and choose expressions appropriate to the audience and situation. This might be the best way to coexist with Korean language that is constantly changing. **A**



▲ An exhibition space presents the principles of Hunminjeongeum and the historical development of Hangeul.

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Where Crowds Gather, How Has Safety Changed?

By You Chae-hyeon

Staff Reporter of Social Section



In October 2026, the atmosphere on festival streets looks very different from four years ago. As South Korea (hereafter Korea) marks the fourth anniversary of the 2022 crowd disaster in Itaewon, Seoul, in which 159 people died, Artificial Intelligence (AI)-powered Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) cameras monitor crowd density in real time, while safety officers and barricades guide pedestrian movement through narrow streets. In 2022, some of these streets had no formal safety measures because there was no official event organizer. Today, they are subject to much closer management. While concerns remain over both the need to prevent another disaster and the possibility of excessive control, few would dispute the importance of crowd safety awareness. But has Korea's safety management system, which has often been revised after major disasters, actually addressed the causes of crowd-related accidents? The Argus examines the major crowd disasters and changes in Korea's safety policies, tracing how the country's understanding of crowd risks has evolved and how such accidents should be prevented today.

©Seoul Metropolitan Government



▲ Seoul implements special safety measures at 14 areas prone to crowding ahead of Halloween.

Before Reading { Crowd Crush }

A crowd crush is a social disaster that occurs when a large number of people become densely concentrated in a limited space, causing injuries, deaths or property damage. As density increases, movement becomes increasingly difficult. At around four people per square meter, walking speed can decline significantly, while at seven or more people per square meter, a crowd may begin to behave like a fluid under external pressure. The Itaewon disaster is a tragic example of these dynamics. On October 29, 2022, large crowds gathered in the narrow streets of Itaewon for Halloween. As movement became restricted and crowd pressure increased, a crush developed in a narrow sloped alley, killing 159 people and injuring more than 190 others. The disaster demonstrated the risks created not only by physical structures but by the movement and density of crowds themselves.

©Kukmin Ilbo



▲ The narrow alley in Itaewon is the site of the 2022 crowd disaster.



Disaster Control Act: Institutionalizing the Management of Human-Caused Disasters

Before the Disaster Control Act was enacted on July 18, 1995, Korea's disaster management system had largely focused on natural disasters such as floods and typhoons. The Disaster Control Act established a national framework for managing disasters caused by human activity. It sought to protect lives and property by establishing disaster management responsibilities for the central and local governments and by strengthening prevention, emergency rescue and recovery systems.

A 1997 amendment further defined human-caused disasters to include fires, collapses, explosions, traffic accidents, chemical and biological accidents, and environmental pollution incidents. This provided a legal basis for managing various accidents, which had previously been governed separately under different laws, and consolidated them for the first time as part of a broader national disaster management system. The shift came amid rapid industrialization and urbanization. Major disasters such as the 1994 Seongsu Grand Bridge collapse and the 1995 Sampoong Department Store collapse exposed the limitations of a fragmented system in which safety regulations and responsibilities were divided among different laws and agencies. The Disaster Control Act therefore marked an important transition: human-caused disasters were formally incorporated into Korea's national disaster management system, alongside natural disasters.

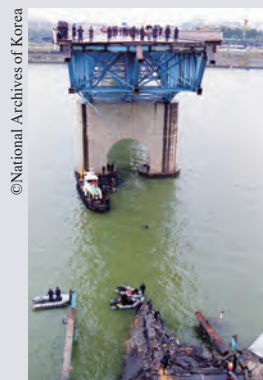
Background From Postwar Reconstruction to Human-Caused Disasters

The enactment of the Disaster Control Act was prompted by the limitations of the existing disaster management system in addressing the increasing number of human-induced disasters that occurred during Korea's rapid industrialization. Prior to the introduction of the Disaster Control Act, Korea's disaster management system had been primarily structured around natural disasters. Following the Korean War, national reconstruction and economic development were prioritized, and disaster management accordingly evolved with a primary focus on responding to damage caused by natural phenomena such as typhoons and floods. With the enactment of the Flood and Storm Damage Countermeasures Act in 1967, the response system of the central and local governments to flood and storm damage began to be legally institutionalized. In 1975, the Framework Act on Civil Defense was enacted, establishing organizational and mobilization mechanisms for disaster response. During the 1960s and 1970s, disaster management primarily consisted of administrative agencies, the police, and fire services responding at disaster sites by managing the damage and providing relief to affected residents. Human-induced disasters such as fires, explosions, and structural collapses arising in the course of industrialization and urbanization, as well as crowd accidents occurring in densely populated settings, had still not yet been established as distinct areas of disaster management.

In particular, as rapid industrialization and urbanization accelerated in the 1990s, the expansion of large-scale buildings and social infrastructure increased the risk of major accidents resulting from human factors, including



▲ The Sampoong Department Store collapses in Seoul in 1995, highlighting the need for stronger safety regulations.



▲ The Seongsu Grand Bridge collapses in Seoul in 1994, exposing weaknesses in safety management.

inadequate design, construction, and maintenance of facilities. Two representative, and deadly, examples were the collapse of Seongsu Grand Bridge in 1994 and the collapse of Sampoong Department Store in 1995. The collapse of Seongsu Grand Bridge was attributed primarily to defective construction and deficiencies in its maintenance and management. Similarly, the collapse of Sampoong Department Store resulted from a combination of factors, including excessive structural modifications, defective construction, and inadequate safety management. These accidents exposed the limitations of the existing disaster management system. At the time, regulations concerning human-induced disasters were dispersed across various individual statutes and administrative regulations, while the safety management of facilities was also conducted separately under sector-specific laws and by the agencies responsible for each area. In 1993, Prime Minister's Directive No. 280, the *Directive on the Prevention and Management of Disasters*, was established, providing a basis for managing various types of accidents that were not subject to the Natural Disaster Countermeasures Act. However, a management system fragmented among administrative directives and individual statutes was insufficient and increasingly untenable to comprehensively coordinate the prevention, response, and recovery of diverse human-induced disasters.

Consequently, significant limitations remained in establishing an integrated national system for managing the entire disaster management process, from prevention and response to recovery, and in consistently coordinating the roles and responsibilities of multiple agencies. In particular, the preventive system for identifying and managing potential risks in facilities in advance was insufficient compared with the emphasis placed on post-disaster response and recovery. This limitation highlighted the need for a transition from a predominantly reactive approach focused on managing disasters after their occurrence toward a comprehensive and integrated disaster management system emphasizing prevention and proactive risk management.



Framework Act on the Management of Disasters and Safety: Toward an Integrated Disaster Management System

The Framework Act on the Management of Disasters and Safety, enacted in 2004, comprehensively expanded Korea's approach from managing individual human-caused disasters to managing the entire disaster cycle of prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.

The law consolidated previously fragmented disaster-related regulations and established clearer roles for the central government, local governments and emergency response agencies. It also established the Central Safety Management Committee under the Prime Minister to coordinate national disaster and safety policies.

However, the system initially focused on coordinating disaster types and institutional responsibilities rather than specifically managing risks created by crowds themselves, a blind spot that would later prove costly. Issues such as crowd density, pedestrian flow and bottlenecks required further policy development.



Background The Daegu Subway Disaster



The February 18, 2003 Daegu subway disaster highlighted the need for a more integrated approach. A fire deliberately started by an arsonist developed into a mass-casualty disaster, exposing weaknesses not only in fire safety but also in evacuation, emergency response, command and inter-agency coordination. The disaster reinforced the need to manage

risks before they materialized and to ensure that multiple agencies could share information and coordinate their responses. This experience contributed to the establishment of the Framework Act on the Management of Disasters and Safety in 2004.



Festival Safety Management and the National Disaster Safety Control Tower

During the 2010s, Korea began strengthening both event-specific safety management and national disaster coordination. In August 2013, Article 66-9 of the Framework Act on the Management of Disasters and Safety introduced safety requirements for certain local festivals. Festivals expected to attract at least 3,000 people at peak times, as well as festivals involving higher-risk environments or materials, were required to establish safety management plans.

These plans covered safety organizations, fire prevention, crowd-related risks, staffing, emergency response and communication among relevant agencies. Local governments were also required to consult with police and fire authorities before events.

In November 2014, the National Emergency Management Agency was reorganized into the Ministry of Public Safety and Security, strengthening the national disaster safety control tower; however, an important gap remained. The system was designed primarily around planned events with identifiable organizers. It was less clear who was responsible when large crowds gathered spontaneously without an official event or organizer.

Background Sangju Civic Stadium, Hwawangsan Mountain and Sewol Ferry

Earlier disasters had already demonstrated the risks of crowd movement. On October 3, 2005, approximately 10,000 people gathered for an MBC concert at Sangju Civic Stadium in the city of Sangju, North Gyeongsang Province. When the crowd rushed through a narrow entrance, 11 people died and more than 70 were injured. The accident highlighted the importance of managing entrances, pedestrian flows and crowd distribution in advance. In February 2009, seven people died and more than 80 were injured during the Hwawangsan Mountain Silver Grass Burning Festival in Changnyeong County, South Gyeongsang Province, after flames spread toward spectators. The disaster demonstrated that event safety required not only fire prevention but also crowd management, evacuation routes and adequate safety personnel. In response, the government introduced a safety manual for local festivals later that year and strengthened



▲ A crowd rushes through an entrance at a concert in the city of Sangju in 2005.



▲ Spectators flee from flames during the Hwawangsan Mountain Silver Grass Burning Festival in 2009.



▲ The Sewol ferry disaster occurs in 2014 exposing weaknesses in Korea's disaster response system.

requirements for safety plans and pre-event inspections.

The 2014 Sewol ferry disaster further exposed weaknesses in Korea's broader disaster response system, particularly in information sharing, command and coordination. Together, these disasters contributed to a gradual shift toward preventive and integrated disaster management.



Amendments to the Framework Act on the Management of Disasters and Safety and the Management of Large Crowds

On December 26, 2023, the Framework Act on the Management of Disasters and Safety was amended to strengthen safety management regulations for local festivals. Under the revised law, when a local festival is expected to attract a large crowd but has no organizer or the organizer is unclear, the head of the relevant local government is required to establish a safety management plan and take necessary measures to ensure public safety. The amendment also established a legal basis for local governments to form and operate regional safety councils involving the police, fire authorities, and other relevant agencies. In addition, when an accident occurs or is likely to occur due to a large gathering of people, authorities may request mobile telecommunications base-station connection data. This provided a legal foundation for using mobile network data to estimate crowd sizes and predict potential risks.

Article 66-12 of the Framework Act on the Management of Disasters and Safety subsequently stipulated that the heads of local governments must conduct inspections of facilities and locations prescribed by presidential decree in order to prevent disasters or accidents caused by large crowds. When a potential safety risk is identified, they may conduct an emergency safety inspection or request that relevant agencies do so. Where the risk is considered serious, authorities may order safety measures and recommend that an event be suspended or that the crowd be dispersed. In 2024, the enactment of the Special Act on the October 29 Itaewon Disaster further expanded the scope of disaster management beyond prevention and response to include fact-finding, protection of victims' rights, and measures to prevent similar incidents from recurring.



Background

The Itaewon Disaster and Unorganized Crowds



Crowd safety management now requires more than simply assessing the scale of an event or the physical risks of a facility. It has become increasingly important to determine how many people are likely to gather at a particular place and time, how densely the crowd is concentrated relative to the capacity of the space, and in which directions people are moving. These considerations were incorporated into the 2023 amendments to the Framework Act on the Management of Disasters and Safety, which require authorities to examine factors including the time and location of large gatherings, the peak number of people present, the capacity of the space, crowd density, and the duration and movement of the crowd.

Following the Itaewon disaster, the Korean National Police Agency developed a manual for managing events expected to attract large numbers of people in an effort to prevent similar incidents. The manual provides guidelines for monitoring crowd size and movement from the pre-event stage and for managing entrances and exits, pedestrian flows, and the deployment of safety personnel. Its significance lies in treating the gathering of a large number of people itself as a subject of safety management, thereby enabling authorities to take preventive measures before a situation develops into an emergency.

However, the existence of such a guideline did not mean that every large-crowd situation automatically fell within the scope of the formal safety management system. Although authorities gradually expanded the scope of application of these guidelines, the institutional framework continued to operate largely around organized events and identifiable event organizers. In particular, it remained unclear who was responsible for safety management and what procedures should be followed in advance when large crowds formed spontaneously without a specific organizer. When an event has a clearly defined schedule and location and an identifiable organizer, authorities can estimate the expected number of attendees, establish a safety management plan, and coordinate the roles of the police, fire authorities, and other relevant agencies in advance. By contrast, situations in which people voluntarily gather through social media and online communities, or in which large crowds naturally form at a particular time and place without being associated with a specific event, are difficult to manage under an event-centered safety management system.

The institutional gap became starkly apparent in the Itaewon disaster on October 29, 2022. During the Halloween period, a massive crowd became concentrated in a narrow alley in Itaewon, Seoul, resulting in the deaths of 159 people. The disaster demonstrated that a large crowd can form and a serious accident can occur even in the absence of a formally organized event or a clearly identified organizer. While the existing safety management system had largely been built around events and their organizers, the Itaewon disaster highlighted the need to broaden the focus of safety management – from specific events to the risks that arise when large numbers of people gather and move through a shared space.



Prospect: From Control to Coexistence

The next stage of crowd safety management should move beyond responding to emergencies toward predicting and reducing risks before accidents occur. AI-powered CCTV and mobile communication data can help authorities monitor crowd size, density and movement in real time. However, technology alone cannot guarantee safety. Ahn Jae-kwang, an assistant professor in the Department of Fire & Emergency Management at Kangwon National University noted “technological development must be accompanied by clear thresholds for warnings, clearly defined responsibility and authority, inter-agency information sharing, and plans for false alarms and system failures.”

Urban design can also play a crucial role. Simply increasing one-way routes or physical barriers may create new bottlenecks elsewhere. Instead, technologies such as smart bollards* and floor-level guidance lighting can encourage people to move safely without relying entirely on physical control.

The 2023 legal reforms strengthened local governments’ authority to monitor crowd situations and intervene when necessary. This represents an important shift from responding after an accident to acting while a risk is developing.

At the same time, greater preventive intervention also raises questions about civil liberties. Real-time crowd monitoring using AI and CCTV may conflict with privacy, freedom of movement, and freedom of assembly and association. Excessive administrative intervention could also affect everyday life, local businesses and festival culture.



▲ Seoul introduces generative AI-powered CCTV monitoring to detect potential safety risks.

*Smart Bollard: A next-generation urban safety facility that combines traditional bollards, which prevent vehicles from entering roads or pedestrian areas, with ICT and IoT technologies.

For this reason, authorities must establish clear risk thresholds and intervention standards and intervene only to the extent necessary.

Most importantly, citizens should not be viewed merely as people to be controlled or protected. They can also be active participants in safety management by identifying risks, reporting dangerous situations and helping others move safely. Professor Ahn noted “unexpected crowds can now form rapidly around popular restaurants, pop-up stores, or locations that suddenly become popular on social media.”

In some cases, local business owners and building managers may notice these changes earlier than government agencies because they can see increases in reservations, inquiries, waiting lines and pedestrian traffic firsthand. Providing citizens with timely information about risks and safe routes can therefore help in preventing dangerous crowd concentrations.



▲ An AI-powered CCTV system monitors crowd density in real time.

As of 2026, Korea’s crowd safety management needs to move toward a system that identifies risks early through AI and data, naturally disperses crowds through urban design, and limits government intervention to what is necessary. Safety should not become a justification for excessive restrictions on civil liberties. At the same time, respect for freedom should not prevent authorities from taking necessary action when clear risks emerge. The challenge is therefore to move beyond changing laws only after disasters occur. Technology, institutions, urban design, and citizen participation must work together to create a proactive crowd safety system – one that identifies and addresses risks before they become disasters. 

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Exemptions, Exile, and the Structural Crisis of South Korea's Elite Athletic System



By Lee Joon-woo
Staff Reporter of Social Section

If a player wins a medal, his method of military service changes; otherwise, he may face a significant gap in his professional athletic career due to military duty. The intense national interest in whether Son Heung-min would participate in the 2018 Jakarta-Palembang Asian Games stemmed from the reality that winning a gold medal would allow him to fulfill his military service through the Arts and Sports Personnel system, a critical factor in his ability to continue competing in European professional football. Although South Korea (hereafter Korea) is a conscription-based state in which male citizens are subject to military service obligations beginning at age 18, the current Arts and Sports Personnel system provides alternative pathways to fulfill this duty for athletes who place in the top three at the Olympics or win gold at the Asian Games. Meanwhile, international competition performance influences not only an individual's method of fulfilling military service but also the criteria by which the state evaluates and supports athletes. Athletes who secure medals may receive military service benefits, pensions, and prize money, while support for performance enhancement is concentrated on sports with high medal potential. Conversely, for sports with weaker international results or less public interest, maintaining a sufficient athlete pool and professional or corporate teams can become challenging, and student-athletes may struggle to balance training and competition with their academic studies and career preparation. On the occasion of the closing of the 2026 Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games in October 2026, The Argus aims to analyze the structural limitations of Korea's elite athletic development system by examining the reward systems centered on international performance, the allocation of sports funding, the conflict between athletics and academics, and post-retirement career paths.



The Equity Issue of the Arts and Sports Personnel System

The Problem: Deepening Inequity in Conscription

Rooted in the Act on the Regulation of Special Cases Concerning Military Service Obligations established in 1973, the Arts and Sports Personnel system directly links international competition performance to the method of fulfilling military duty. Current eligibility is limited to athletes who finish in the top three at the Olympics or win gold at the Asian Games. Selected athletes undergo three weeks of basic military training and serve for 34 months in designated sports-related fields, completing 544 hours of community service using their athletic skills. In a conscription system where active-duty service lasts 18 to 21 months, sports personnel fulfill their military obligations while continuing their athletic careers and earning income. Lee Hye-jung, a researcher at the Korea University Legal Research Institute argued in her study “Measures to Secure Equity of the Special Case of Military Service for Athletes” (2017), that even though sports careers are short, military duty should fundamentally be imposed equally upon all citizens. The current structure generates controversy over equity on two levels. First, there is an equity issue between general men fulfilling military service and sports personnel, as the former experience career interruption and economic opportunity costs. Second, there is an equity issue among athletes themselves. Eligibility depends solely on results at the Olympics or Asian Games, while athletes who consistently perform well in less prominent

sports or World Championships are excluded, intensifying perceptions of inequity in a field where professional careers are relatively short.

The Sports Basic Law, enacted in 2021 and implemented in 2022, guarantees all citizens the right to participate in sports without discrimination and extends sports policy beyond athletic performance to mandate that the state support the post-

retirement career paths of athletes. In light of this policy direction, the Arts and Sports Personnel system warrants reexamination. The current system links an alternative method of fulfilling military service directly to high-level international athletic achievement. However, if the goal of sports policy has expanded beyond performance enhancement to encompass the rights, education, and career paths of athletes, using performance at a designated international competition as the sole criterion for differentiating an individual’s method of fulfilling military duty is no longer sufficient.

The Cause: Cold War Legacies of Medalism



▲ Wrestler Yang Jung-mo waves to a welcoming crowd after winning Korea's first Olympic gold medal at the 1976 Montreal Olympics.

One reason that the equity controversy surrounding the Arts and Sports Personnel system has persisted for half a century lies in the historical policy structure in which Korea's elite sports policy utilized sports as a means of enhancing national prestige rather than focusing primarily on the holistic development of the athlete. Kim Sung-bae, a professor at Kookmin University's College of Law explained in his study, “Issues of Military Service Exemption for Pop Artists and Revision of the Military Service Act” (2022), that the Arts and Sports Personnel system was introduced in 1973 as a means of managing military service resources and addressing national challenges during a period of systemic competition between South and North Korea, when South Korea's international standing was low. The early 1970s was a period when South and North Korea competed fiercely not only in economic and military power but also for legitimacy within the international community. At the time, North Korea sought to demonstrate the superiority of its system, advancing to the quarterfinals of the 1966 FIFA World Cup in England and winning a gold medal in shooting at the 1972 Munich Olympics. Economically, the gap between South and North

©Football Asian



▲ A news report highlights Son Heung-min completing 544 hours of community service as part of his alternative military duty.

Korea was not large until the early 1970s. By 1975, South and North Korea's per capita income was nearly equal (South Korea \$592, North Korea \$597). In this situation, the South Korean government used sports as a means to demonstrate the superiority of its system on the international stage in a relatively short period.

According to a research report by Researcher Cho Hyun-joo at the Korea Institute of Sports Science, *A Plan for Paradigmatic Shift in Elite Sports Policy* (2020), in South Korean society during the Cold War and rapid growth eras, medal rankings at the Olympics and Asian Games were regarded as indicators of national development and systemic superiority both domestically and internationally, beyond simple competition results. This achievement-oriented approach reinforced a system of budget allocation and athlete development centered on cultivating a small elite group of athletes capable of winning medals in a short period. Professor Kim pointed out in his 2022 study that the nationalist reward system of the 1970s, which equated medal wins with national contribution, has persisted through path dependence despite changes in societal values over time. Long-term, qualitative outcomes, such as ensuring basic academic achievement among youth athletes or supporting successful career transitions after retirement, are difficult to measure numerically in a short time, whereas the number of medals provides a readily quantifiable indicator of policy success. Ultimately, this state-centered, achievement-oriented approach, which has prioritized short-term medal performance over support for athletes throughout their careers, may help explain some of the tensions within the current system.

The Solution: Multi-Criteria and Sangmu Expansion

Reforming the Arts and Sports Personnel system requires revising the criteria for fulfilling military service to consider both an athlete's sustained performance and equity, without completely excluding international competition results. The criteria should incorporate various indicators of international competitiveness, such as World Championships, major competitions hosted by international federations, world rankings, and sustained national team activity. In figure skating, for example, the system could evaluate major international competition results over a certain period rather



▲ Wrestlers from the Korea Armed Forces Athletic Corps (Sangmu) are training.

than relying solely on a specific competition. Since the scale and frequency of international competitions differ by sport, sport-specific evaluation criteria are necessary. Additionally, the role of the Korea Armed Forces Athletic Corps (Sangmu) should be expanded. Researcher Kim Mi-sook at the Korea Institute of Sport Science pointed out in “Policy Support Measures to Improve Athletic Performance for the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympics” (2013), that unlike soccer and baseball, some winter sports lack teams within the Athletic Corps, creating disparities in athletes' ability to continue training during military service. Expanding the range of represented sports and allowing flexible enlistment timing would provide an alternative that supports training continuity while preserving the equity of active-duty service. Finally, the 544-hour public service requirement should shift from participation in one-off events to long-term involvement in youth sports programs in remote areas, disability sports programs, and regional sports clubs to strengthen the system's true public-service function.



Imbalances in Sports Funding and the Weakening of Grassroots Support

The Problem: Fragility of Semi-Professional Teams

Disparities in resources between sports with strong international results and less prominent sports directly affect individual athletes' training environments. Foundational sports and team sports require stable career pathways for



▲ The opening ceremony of the 106th National Sports Festival in Busan, featuring participants from numerous semi-professional sports teams across the nation.

athletes to continue competing beyond high school and university. However, athletes in sports without professional leagues or limited private sponsorship must rely on public-sector semi-professional teams operated by local governments and public institutions. While these teams are funded by public institutions to develop elite athletes and promote regional sports, they require significant public funding and are highly vulnerable to changes in local government finances. If a team disbands, athletes lose their affiliation and training arrangements, often facing premature retirement. For example, the city of Suwon restructured its semi-professional team program in 2015 by disbanding teams in wushu, bowling, shooting, and billiards. In “Improving Semi-professional Sport Teams and Policy Suggestions to build Effective Sport Ecosystem” (2013), Professor Kim Ki-han and senior researcher Noh Ye-young of Seoul National University found that semi-professional teams in less prominent sports face severe operational difficulties and budget constraints. Evaluating sports funding based primarily on short-term athletic performance weakens regional foundations when promising athletes leave or teams disband.

As Kim Dae-hee, a professor of the Division of Smart Healthcare at Pukyong National University noted, “The issue is not whether we should or should not value medal achievements. Supporting national team athletes to excel internationally is naturally necessary. However, since an athlete requires years of training and international experience across school and university levels to reach national team caliber, while actual budgets and institutional evaluations

are mostly conducted on a yearly basis, support inevitably concentrates on athletes or sports with immediate medal potential. When a semi-professional team disbands, it goes far beyond a few athletes losing their jobs. For sports without professional leagues, the growth pipeline moves from school athletic teams through universities and corporate teams to the national team. If even a single semi-professional team disappears, the career options shrinking for university graduates directly hinder young athletes from choosing that sport for the long term.”

The Cause: Performance-Driven Budgeting

Sports funding remains concentrated on sports with high medal potential because international competition results and National Sports Festival results are deeply embedded in local sports budget allocation criteria. In the *2019 Local Government Joint Evaluation*, budget allocation criteria included international placement results and National Sports Festival achievement rates. Policymakers are inclined to set investment priorities based on visible indicators like medals because national team performance enhancement projects produce measurable results at regular events. By contrast, long-term outcomes such as increasing youth participation or supporting retired athletes’ transitions into coaching take years to emerge. Furthermore, local governments must justify the annual funding required for semi-professional teams to local councils and residents. Park Choong-hoon, a researcher at the Busan Development Institute noted in *Measures for Restructuring and Improving the Performance of Busan’s Fiscal Programs* (2020) that the rationale for operating semi-professional teams relies heavily on promoting the local government through strong athletic performance. Consequently, funding athletes with strong potential for success in international competitions is easier to justify, pushing essential elements like youth development, equipment replacement, and community sports connections to the bottom of the priority list.

The Solution: Multidimensional Regional Platforms

Sports funding criteria must be broadened to include multidimensional indicators that assess the maintenance of athlete pools and the sustainability of regional sports



▲ Members of a German sports club (Sportverein) gather on a grass pitch, exemplifying the community club model that sustains local athletics and competitive training.

ecosystems. Evaluations should incorporate the number of registered youth athletes, the connection between school athletic programs and regional sports clubs, the employment stability of semi-professional team athletes, and the degree to which public sports facilities are accessible to residents. Club-based systems in other countries provide useful models. In Germany, approximately 86,000 sports clubs operate under the German Olympic Sports Confederation, allowing competitive and recreational sports to share municipal public infrastructure. Japan promotes a “Comprehensive Community Sports Club” model offering multiple sports to participants of all ages while integrating retired elite athletes as instructors. In Korea, public-sector semi-professional teams should be developed into broader “regional sports platforms” where athletes serve as community coaches for young athletes and recreational participants, with operating budgets directly allocated to regional youth sports infrastructure.

As Professor Kim at Pukyong National University emphasized regarding multi-dimensional evaluation, “Medals are important achievements, but support should not be determined by absolute medal counts alone. For instance, out of 100 points, we could allocate about 20 points for athletic performance and development, 20 points for athlete pools and cultivation pathways, 15 points for education and dual careers, 20 points for human rights, safety, and welfare, 15 points for regional public value, and 10 points for organizational and financial soundness.”



The Disconnection Between Student-Athlete Development and Post-Retirement Pathways

The Problem: Compromised Learning and Post-Retirement Precarity

The challenge for student-athletes is not the absence of academic support systems, but rather the lack of a sufficient environment where students balancing athletics and academics can actually sustain their learning. According to the *2026 School Sports Operations Manual* operated by the Ministry of Education and the Korean Educational Development Institute, the e-School system is established to guarantee student-athletes’

right to learn. e-School provides online video lectures tailored to the regular curriculum by grade and subject, along with specialized content such as “Career Exploration” and “Sports Character.” If a student-athlete misses regular classes, taking these lectures is recognized as attendance on their school records. Under the Ministry of Education’s 2026 guidelines, the permitted number of recognized absence days for competitions and training is strictly limited to 20 days for elementary schools, 35 days for middle schools, and 50 days for high schools. Supplementary learning through e-School is mandatory for any missed classes within this limit.

However, the existence of a system to compensate for missed classes is a separate issue from whether students can consistently keep up with regular instruction. “A Study on Stakeholder Perceptions of the e-school Education System for Student Athletes and Strategies for Enhancing Its Effectiveness” (2025) by Researcher Choi Song-a and Professor Kang Hyun-wook of Dankook University includes operational limitations of the e-School system, including one-way content, a lack of real-time feedback, attendance-focused management, and insufficient role division among school



▲ The cover of the “2026 School Sports Operations Manual,” published by the Gyeonggi-do Office of Education to guide academic regulations and student-athlete support programs.

staff. For sports with year-round regional qualifiers, national tournaments, and training camps, school academic calendars and athletic schedules repeatedly clash. While e-School can serve as a tool to make up for missed classes, it cannot completely replace the classroom experience of listening to a teacher's explanations, asking questions, discussing with peers, and completing assignments.

This academic gap directly leads to career problems after an athlete retires. According to a survey of retired athletes in the “2025 Information and Statistics Data” published by the Korean Sport & Olympic Committee, only 38.38 percent of former athletes were employed in sports-related fields in 2024, while the unemployment rate reached 38.19 percent. As analyzed in “Exploring the Perceptions Required for Retired Athletes' Career Transitions into Non-Sports Fields” (2025) by Dr. Youm Hee-ok of the Department of Sports Convergence at Dongguk University and Researcher Kim Ji-hye of Sahmyook University, retired athletes attempting to transition into non-sports sectors face structural barriers right from the resume screening stage due to a lack of basic computer skills, foreign language proficiency, and vocational certifications stemming from their academic deficits during their school years.

Reflecting on these precise barriers to entering non-sports fields, Dr. Youm pointed out, “The greatest fear is the sentiment that ‘I know nothing but sports.’ The fear and vagueness of stepping onto a path never traveled before creates extreme anxiety when making choices about what to do and what they are capable of doing. Many athletes simply reply, ‘I do not even know how to study.’ This vagueness and helplessness act as the primary barrier to entry.” Therefore, if athletes fail to adequately prepare for their academics and careers during their student years, they are forced to start from scratch to prepare for university admissions, certifications, or general employment after their athletic careers end.

The Cause: Structure Collisions and Formalistic Relief

Academic problems among student-athletes persist because athletic training schedules and school education structurally collide, and instructional losses cannot be adequately compensated through the e-School system alone. The Ministry of Education introduced the Minimum Academic Achievement System, which requires student-athletes to meet a specific



▲ Participants gather at an outcome-sharing conference for the student-athlete e-School system, an initiative designed to review the platform's performance and discuss future educational alternatives for athletes.

percentage of their grade's average score. In principle, failing to meet this standard prohibits students from participating in competitions. However, a relief measure allows students to compete if they complete a Basic Academic Guarantee Program – roughly 12 hours of online lectures per subject. This loophole diminished the system into a mere formality required to secure competition eligibility.

Dr. Youm further criticized the structural entrapment, stating, “Before demanding a change in perception from athletes, we must first build environments and education systems that allow those perceptions to shift. We must first examine how athletes have long been placed within structures where preparation is exceedingly difficult. The domestic elite sports system has operated centrally around linear pathways of competitive results, higher school advancement, and professional or corporate team entry from a young age. In this process, academic studies or career exploration were frequently treated as behaviors showing a lack of focus on sports.”

The Solution: Institutionalizing the Dual Career System

To practically guarantee learning rights, a Dual Career system that integrates athletics and academics from the outset must be established. Schools, sports organizations, and coaches should share annual schedules to preemptively reduce academic conflicts. The e-School system must move beyond basic attendance tracking to diagnose individual learning levels, provide teacher feedback, and link outcomes directly to the school curriculum. Professor Jin highlighted the necessity for customized evaluations and independent management

structures targeting student-athletes in “Perceptions and Implementation Challenges of the e-School Program for Student-Athletes” (2025). European nations already treat the Dual Career framework as a distinct policy domain; the EU Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes (2013) emphasize flexible educational pathways connecting university education with athletic careers. Career education must begin during an individual’s active student-athlete years, allowing them to explore aptitudes alongside athletic performance. The approach to managing student-athletes’ careers must extend to accumulating academic and occupational competencies during active careers, enabling them to transition smoothly into non-sports sectors post-retirement. As 2024 data from the Korean Sport & Olympic Committee shows an unemployment rate of 38.19 percent among retired athletes, managing post-retirement career paths as a distinct policy target is imperative.

Urging a life-cycle approach, Dr. Youm emphasized, “The dual career I advocate does not mean cutting down on training. It means ensuring that while doing their utmost in sports,



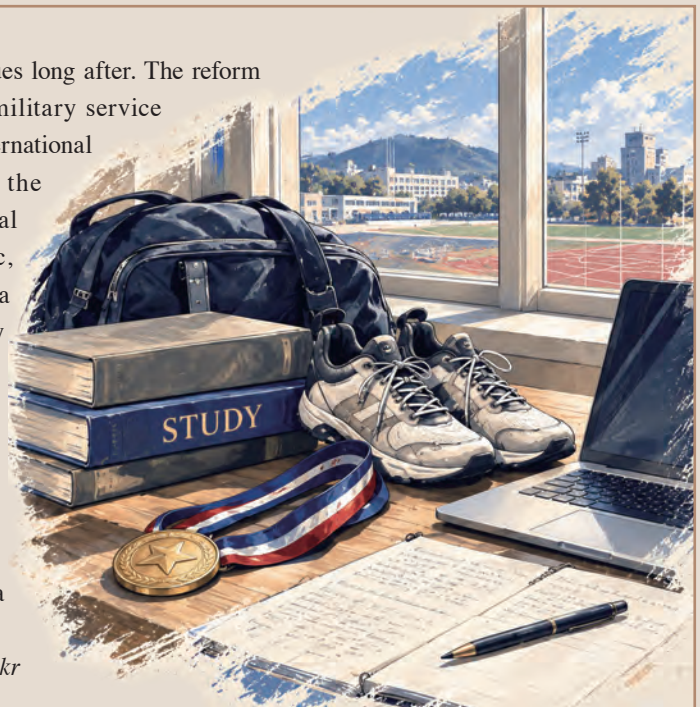
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▲ A student athlete juggles training and coursework on the court, embodying the dual career challenge.

athletes are guaranteed the right to learn, allowing career exploration and vocational experience to span across their entire athletic life. The most urgent task is institutionalizing the dual career not as a one-off program or post-retirement support service, but as a foundational principle of the athlete development system.”

Medals end on the podium, but an athlete’s life continues long after. The reform of Korea’s elite sports system must expand beyond military service exemptions. While rationally adjusting rewards for international accomplishments, sports funding must prioritize the sustainability of athletes, sports disciplines, and local communities, enabling athletes to balance athletic, academic, and career development. Ultimately, a sustainable sports ecosystem is not a system that merely produces more medals, but one equipped with a social safety net where athletes can secure their learning rights and sustain their lives regardless of competitive outcomes. Only when the state looks beyond medal counts to support the personal growth and lifelong well-being of its athletes can sports transcend its role as an instrument for national competitiveness and become a trusted social asset shared by all citizens. 🇰🇷

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Beyond the Scoreboard



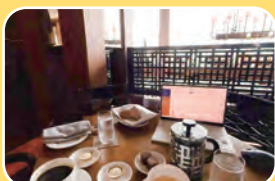
Cho Subin

Sometimes endless studying brought poor grades while high scores came with little effort. More than any result, I clearly remember every moment I spent working hard and searching for answers. It is always great to be recognized by others, but knowing my own effort is what truly counts.



You Chae-hyeon

Whenever I faced a new environment, I felt I had to adapt and succeed from the beginning. Whether I was adjusting to a new major or meeting new people, things often did not go as expected. Sometimes, failing and feeling lost are part of finding my own way and pace. Looking back, those imperfect moments have made me stronger.



Lee Joon-woo

I poured my soul into a marketing project last semester, staying up all night to refine every detail of the strategy. Although my final grade did not fully reflect the endless hours I spent, knowing how hard I tried allows me to value my own growth and gives me the strength to take the next step.



Jang Yeseo

What upset me after the exam was that my effort seemed to be reduced to just a few numbers. But looking back, the experience of working toward one goal has stayed with me. It taught me not to dismiss the entire journey as a failure just because the outcome was different from what I had hoped for.



Park Se-eun

There were times when my hard work did not bring the results I had hoped for. At first, I felt frustrated and wondered if all the effort I had put in had been meaningless. But with time, I realized how much I had grown throughout the process. I learned not to doubt my own worth because of the result, but to keep trying based on what I had learned.



Lee Seeun

When I first started writing articles, I was determined to write great pieces and have one selected as a monthly cover story. Missing that goal for several months brought deep self-doubt, but it also forced me to reflect on my weaknesses and refine my direction.

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