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## The Nature and Conceptualization of Career Transitions in Sports

While an athlete's sports career may seem to develop in a smooth and continuous way from beginning to end, it is in fact characterized by specific phases and transitions. Asked to describe its development, athletes highlight their athletic career, for example, in terms of specific moments or situations which occurred throughout their career (Wylleman & De Knop, 1997a,b). These moments or situations do not only require athletes to cope with specific changes, but are also perceived by the athletes to influence the quality of their participation at their current competitive level. The occurrence of phases and transitions in the athletic career can also be illustrated by chronologically pin-pointing athletes' sport achievements (e.g., a first national championship title) and selections (e.g., selection for the national team). Comparison of such developmental data has revealed many similarities in (elite) athletes' athletic careers (Stambulova, 1998; Wylleman & De Knop, 1998): athletes start out in their sport at the ages of approximately 8 to 12 years-of-age; one or two years later athletes start competing at club level, and go, some three to four years later on to national level; a first selection for a national team occurs somewhere between 17-19 years-of-age, while a first Olympic selection is achieved during their early twenties; and finally, athletes do end their involvement in high-level competitive sport at approximately 30 years-of-age (3). In fact, researchers have been able to identify a sequence of career developmental phases, not only with elite level athletes, but with talented performers in general, namely an initiation, a development, a mastery, and a post-career phase (e.g., Bloom, 1985; Salmela; 1994).

### Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks

A phase which has received most of sports psychologists' interest has been the end or termination of an athlete's career and the beginning of a post-athletic career. In this tradition, early theoretical frameworks were derived from thanatology (i.e., the study of the process of dying and death) (Kubler-Ross, 1969) and (social) gerontology (i.e., the study of the aging process). Several thanatological models were suggested, such as, the "Social Death" model which implies that athletic retirement is comparable to the loss of social functioning, isolation, and ostracism (e.g., Kalish, 1966); the "Social Awareness" perspective which implements the process of growing awareness (i.e., closed and suspected awareness, mutual pretense, and open

awareness) of impending death (Glaser & Strauss, 1965); or the “Stages of Death” which include the phases of denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance of the athletic career termination (Kubler-Ross, 1969).

Models from sociological gerontology include:

1. “Activity Theory” which suggests that the once active role as an athlete should be substituted with new ones after retirement from elite-level sport in order to maintain a homeostatic level of activity throughout the lifespan (Havighurst & Albrecht, 1953).

2. “Subculture Theory” which asserts that the prolonged social interactions among individuals may enable the retiree to be less active and well-adjusted during retirement (Rose, 1962).

3. “Continuity Theory” which emphasizes the importance of a stable pattern of the previously established athlete role behavior with an emphasis on maintaining continuity throughout the retirement process (Atchley, 1989).

4. “Disengagement Theory” which views retirement as a necessary manifestation of the mutual withdrawal of athletes and the sport structure, and the retiring athletes from each other (Cummings & Henry, 1961).

5. “Social Breakdown Theory” which, by incorporating elements from activity, subculture, and continuity theory, proposes that athletes become vulnerable to social judgement upon retirement, particularly unfavorable redefinition, and thus may lead them to withdraw further from their sport and become susceptible to more negative evaluation (Kuypers & Bergston, 1973).

6. “Exchange Theory” which underlines that aging athletes rearrange their activities so that their remaining energy generates maximum return (Homans, 1961).

Although the models of social gerontology and thanatology were instrumental in stimulating research on career termination issues, each of these perspectives possessed limitations (e.g., development from non-sport populations, a limited focus on lifespan development of athletes, the presumption of the career termination process as an inherently negative event) which have rendered these theories and research less adequate for explaining the process of sports career termination.

Transition models, which became popular in the 1980's, characterized, in contrast to the gerontological and thanatological perspectives, athletic retirement as a process rather than as a singular event. Transition frameworks included Sussman's (1972) Analytical Model, and especially the frequently used Model of Human Adaptation to Transition (Schlossberg, 1981). A transition was defined by Schlossberg (1981) as "an event or non-event which results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behaviour and relationships" (p. 5). In this model, three major sets of factors interact during a transition, including (a) the characteristics of the individual experiencing the transition (e.g., psychosocial competence, gender, age, previous experience with a transition of a similar nature), (b) the perception of the particular transition (e.g., role change, affect, occurrence of stress), and (c) the characteristics of the pre- and post-transition environments (e.g., the evaluation of internal support systems, institutional support). A number of researchers have utilized this model in an attempt to understand the career transition process of athletes (e.g., Baillie & Danish, 1992; Parker, 1994; Sinclair & Orlick, 1994; Swain, 1991).

Sinclair and Orlick (1994) proposed a modification of Charner and Schlossberg's (1986) model by reassigning specific characteristics to alternate categories, thus incorporating in a more specific way the various factors related to athlete's retirement and adjustment. A similar model is presented by Greendorfer (1992) emphasizing socialization perspectives. Greendorfer argues that "factors influencing involvement could also be related to those influencing withdrawal" (p. 212). From this regard career termination is also seen as a process showing continuity and transition. A final transition model formulated by Stambulova (1994), sees career transitions as critical life events which have to be coped with and which can best be described on three levels: on a general level typical phases and principles can be distinguished; on a specific level, the differences between sports or cultures come into play; and on an individual level differences in coping with transition exist related to athletes' personality and experiences. The result is either successful adjustment or a crisis calling for professional advice.

All three approaches, that is, the Model of Human Adaptation to Transition (Schlossberg, 1981), Sinclair and Orlick (1994) and Greendorfer's (1992) modification to this

model of adaptation, as well as Stambulova's (1994) emphasize the fact that sports careers correspond to a sequence of transition phases, each of which is a process and not a single event. During this process athletes have to cope with new demands (similar to solving developmental tasks) and have to find a new balance between demands and resources. As the career termination is an inevitable part of the sports career, athletes are in need of coping strategies to effectively make the transition.

Finally, it should be noted that models from other fields of psychology (e.g., occupational psychology) have also been found to be relevant to the study of athletes' commitment to participation in competitive sports. For example, Rusbult's (1980) Investment Model describes an individual's commitment to an activity as a product of satisfaction, alternatives, and investments, and has been shown to be effective in predicting commitment to work settings (Farrel & Rusbult, 1983).

#### Methodological Approaches

Empirical research into career transitions in sport has been very diverse. A review of 21 empirical studies into career retirement among athletes revealed 48% to have used a quantitative methodology, 24% a qualitative methodology, and 28% a combination of both (Wylleman, De Knop, & Sillen, 1998). During the initial phase in the athletic transitional research--more specifically, into the transition out of competitive sport--researchers used a methodology which was exploratory in nature. Open-ended questionnaires or open-ended interview questions were included in order to survey possible causes for career termination (e.g., Lerch, 1984; Mihovilovic, 1968), or, in a later phase, to delineate the factors mediating the quality of the transition out of sport (e.g., Allison & Meyer, 1988; Werthner & Orlick, 1986). These studies were generally retrospective in nature. The need for more qualitative data on career transitions, as expressed by different authors in a symposium on career transitions (cf. Alfermann, 1998), gave an impulse to the use of different qualitative methodologies in athletic career transition research. While different researchers used a (semi-)structured interview protocol to gather qualitative data, a combination of content analysis and structured interview has also been used in career transition research. Grove, Lavalley, Gordon, and Harvey (1998) in their case-study not only conducted an inductive content analysis of direct quotations

in the literature published, but complemented the data with that from a structured interview, with which additional information was provided on issues identified in the content analysis.

As initial research revealed a degree of comparability between transitions occurring in an athletic and a non-athletic career (e.g., use of coping strategies, importance of social support network), researchers turned towards methodologies which were not specifically developed for the athletic (transitional) context, but which could be used to assess the influence of specific factors occurring in the athletic transitional process.

Recently, researchers (e.g., Grove, Lavalley, & Gordon, 1997; Lavalley, Gordon, & Grove, 1996; Lavalley, Grove, & Gordon, 1997) used different instruments in their transitional research. These include the Revised Causal Dimension Scale (CDSII; McAuley, Duncan, & Russell, 1992), employed to assess reasons for athletic career termination; the COPE inventory (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989) assessing the coping strategies utilised during retirement from sport; the Career Beliefs Inventory (CBI; Krumboltz, 1993) describing an individual's current career development and used in athletic transitional research. Other sport-specific instruments have also been used, among others, the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS; Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993), measuring the degree to which an individual defines herself or himself in terms of the athlete role, and the Sport Interpersonal Relationships Questionnaires (SIRQ; Wylleman, Vanden Auweele, De Knop, Sloore, & De Martelaer, 1995) which assesses the quality of athletes' relationships in their psychological network. Only a few instruments have been developed specifically for research into athletic transitions. These include Blann's (1984, cited in Blann & Zaichkowsky, 1989) Professional Athletes Career Transition Inventory (PACTI), and its Australian versions for athletes and coaches, namely, the Australian Athletes Career Transition Inventory (AACTI; Hawkins & Blann, 1993) and the Australian Coaches Career Transition Inventory (ACCTI; Hawkins, Blann, Zaichkowsky, & Kane, 1994), which enable researchers to assess athletes and coaches' career transition needs. Another instrument is the Athlete Retirement Questionnaire (ARQ; Sinclair, 1990) which assesses athletes' use of transition-related coping resources. A recently developed instrument is the British Athletes Lifestyle Assessment Needs in Career and Education (BALANCE) Scale

which has been designed to identify athletes at-risk for transition-related difficulties (Lavallee & Wylleman, 1999).

Finally, in line with the need for a multi-method approach, Wylleman et al. (1998) used an intra-individual or idiographic methodology, in which former Olympic athletes were interviewed with regard to situations, behaviors, and emotions they experienced during their career transition. Each participant was then asked to rate the occurrence of all behaviors, all emotions, as well as each situation to each other. These ratings were then computed using hierarchical class analysis to structure for each participant individually-relevant classes of situations-behaviors, situations-emotions, and emotions-behaviors. These structures, of which the goodness-of-fit is also computed, provides the researcher with a detailed insight into the strength of the inter-relationships between each situation, behavior and emotion relevant to that particular individual with regard to his/her retirement experiences. A compound of situations, behaviors, and emotions across different retired athletes, enables inter-individual comparisons.

What methodology is advocated for future research in research on career transitions in the athletic setting? First, prospective studies are required. Using a longitudinal design measuring possible determinants and consequences of transition periods at several moments in time would allow a process-analysis, that is, enable researchers to find intra- and interindividual differences in transition and their psychological and social determinants over time. Second, an “in vivo” approach should be developed to study the transition at the actual point of transition. Conducted in a longitudinal design, this approach could provide detailed data on the transition process. Third, retrospective studies are still required, especially to collect data from significant others in athletes’ psychological and social support networks (e.g., coach, parents, siblings, peers). This would allow researchers to collect different viewpoints over large sample sizes. Finally, multi-method research is needed in order to gain a better understanding of the retirement process, thus providing an empirical basis for the structure of career transition programs. Qualitative methods should be considered in order to delineate, for example, the sources of stress at retirement as well as the coping strategies used by athletes to manage them.

## Transitions in the Career of Athletes

Athletes' transition out of competitive sports has been at the forefront of sports psychologists' attention during the past decades, and has, consequentially, provided a body of empirical data which is more substantial than for other transitions--a disproportion which is also reflected in this chapter. However, it is important, when examining the transitions which athletes may face, to take into account the nature of a "transition".

A primary characteristic of transitions is their degree of predictability. Transitions which are fairly predictable are generally organizational and/or structural in nature and may be related to changes in athletes' level of athletic achievement or age (e.g., initiation into competitive sport, the transition from high school to college level competitive sports, the transition from junior to senior level). Transitions which have a low degree of predictability, on the other hand, may occur unexpectedly or not even occur at all. These latter transitions are called "nonevents" and refer to those changes expected to take place, but which, due to circumstances, do not occur (Petitpas, Champagne, Chartrand, Danish, & Murphy, 1997).

A secondary characteristic of transitions is their origin: while some transitions may originate intra-individually--and be physical (e.g., growth spurt, injury) or psychological (e.g., drop in achievement motivation) in nature--other changes may occur within the athlete's environment--and be related to the athletic setting (e.g., retirement from competitive sport, conflicting athlete-coach relationship), or to the athlete's psycho-social (e.g., divorce of parents), educational (e.g., adjusting to college or university level), or professional (e.g., promotion to managerial level) life sphere. As it is not possible to describe all transitions with which athletes may be confronted, a selection of highly predictable transitions will be discussed. Initially these are related to the athletic setting, but are then complemented with empirical data on transitions athletes may experience within their psychosocial and educational sphere of life (see also Chapter 4).

### The Transition into Sport Specialization

Young athletes' first steps into the world of organized sport may require them to adapt to the demands of organized sport activity in general, and to the chosen discipline or speciality, to the coach, and to the team members in particular. Research (Stambulova, 1994; Hvatskaya,

1997) revealed that young athletes may, for example, experience a discrepancy between their wish to play rather than train hard during training sessions. Athletes may also experience some setback once they start out in competitions, and find that the results are not always what they themselves expected them to be, or what was in fact expected from them (e.g., by the coach). Of course, the effects of such experiences are generally neutralized by athletes' interest in, and enthusiasm for their sport, as well as by the quality of support provided by parents, coaches, and teammates. The young athletes who are able to cope with these, and other transitional situations will progress, while others may, due to a lack of coping skills or support from significant others, may drop out, in favor of, for example, other forms of leisure activities.

### The Transition to Intensive Training

As athletes strive toward high-level athletic achievements, the need occurs to train more intensively (e.g., increased physical and psychological loads, increased number of (daily) training sessions), as well as to cope with higher competitive levels. This confronts athletes with the necessity to find a balance between participation in training and competitions, and the possibility of becoming injured or ill, to over-train, or even to burn out. Another balance needs to be found between the growing demands of the sports career, and their education, other interests, and their psycho-social development (e.g., peer interactions) (Stambulova, 1994). A supportive psychological network (e.g., coach, family, peers), attention to injury prevention, and a gradual development of the athletic career in within the constraints of their scholastic career, may provide athletes with the possibilities to progress towards high-level competitive sport.

### The Transition to Elite Sports

The transition to the highest level of competitive sport requires athletes to perform consistently to the maximum of their abilities, for as long as possible. Athletes need therefore to focus a period of their life almost solely to an all-out involvement in their preparation for, and participation in high-level training and competitions. This includes, among others, a search for maximum athletic achievements by adopting a professional approach to performing, the need to go abroad to play for a foreign team. A strong and all-out family support, the guidance

provided by the coach(es), as well as by other specialists (e.g., sports physician, sports psychologist, physiotherapist) can facilitate athletes coping with this transition.

### The Transition Out of Elite Sports

As in any major transition, the retirement from elite sports (voluntary or not) requires athletes to cope with adjustments on a social, physical and personal level (e.g. Ogilvie, 1987; Sinclair & Orlick, 1994). Recent reviews of the career transition literature revealed that between 15 percent (Alfermann, in press) to 19 percent (Grove et al., 1998) of athletes require considerable emotional adjustment to retirement from sport. However, an absence of methodological rigour in the sport-related literature denies any conclusive judgement about the prevalence of adjustment difficulties for retiring athletes (Curtis & Ennis, 1988; Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985). While earlier research suggested that leaving sport is an inevitable source of emotional distress (e.g., Haerle, 1975; Hare, 1971; Mihovilovic, 1968; Weinberg & Arond, 1952), more recent studies have shown that only a minority of athletes face serious difficulties after career termination (Coakley, 1983; Gorbett, 1985; Wylleman, 1995). This does, however, not exclude the need for athletes to adjust to their transition out of sport--adjustments related to financial/occupational, emotional, and social aspects (Curtis & Ennis, 1988; McNally, Cavin-Stice, & Knoth, 1992; Svoboda & Vanek, 1982; Werthner & Orlick, 1986). The overall quality of adjustment has been shown to be mediated by the (voluntary and involuntary) causes of retirement, the developmental factors related to the adaptation process, and the coping strategies mediating the response to athletic career termination (Gordon, 1995; Sinclair & Orlick, 1994; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998).

#### A. Causes of athletic retirement.

Consistent with findings outside of sport, it has been shown that no single, but a combination of factors is primarily responsible for ceasing participation in sport (Koukouris, 1991, 1994; Stambulova, 1994; Swain, 1991). The catalyst for career termination has been both involuntary and voluntary in nature with the most common factors, career-ending injuries, chronological age, deselection, and personal choice (Murphy, 1995; Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993; Werthner & Orlick, 1986). Empirical research supports the notion that involuntary retirement, that is an unexpected and sudden career retirement is difficult because athletes are seldom

prepared for such a transition. One important cause of involuntary retirement has been related to the occurrence of career-ending injuries which have been shown to have the potential to be the most distressful reason for retirement from sport (e.g., Heil, 1993; Svoboda & Vanek, 1982; Werthner & Orlick, 1986). The advancement of chronological age has also been found to be an important cause for involuntary retirement (Mihovilovic, 1968; Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993). It refers to the inability to continue competing at a high level arising from changes in psychological motivation, social status, and physical capabilities. Failing to progress to the next highest level of elite competition, and being “deselected”, have also been shown to be significant contributors to involuntary career termination from sport (McInally et al., 1992; Ogilvie & Howe, 1982; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990; Stevenson, 1989). Finally, athletes may also choose freely to disengage from high-level sport. This voluntary choice may be related to (a combination of) personal (e.g., deteriorating financial status), social (e.g., need to re-inforce interpersonal and family relationships), and psychological reasons (e.g., drop in life satisfaction) (Allison & Meyer, 1988; Baillie, 1993; Werthner & Orlick, 1986; Wylleman, De Knop, Menkehorst, Theeboom, & Annerel, 1993). Although research on athletic career termination has suggested that a large proportion of athletes attribute disengagement from sport as being outside of their personal control (Crook & Robertson, 1991; Mihovilovic, 1968; Werthner & Orlick, 1986), there still exists a lack of research on the specific reasons for retirement from sport, as well as the impact voluntary and involuntary reasons have on the overall adjustment process (Crook & Robertson, 1991; Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993).

#### B. Factors mediating adaptation.

The quality of adjustment to retirement from competitive sport is mediated by characteristics specific to the athlete, to his/her environment, as well as to the type of transition. The individual characteristics are related, among others, to athlete's age, and state of health. Developmental factors, psychosocial in nature, which occur during the athlete's career, also play an important role, in particular social identification and athletic identification with sport have been shown to be fundamental to the career transition process (McPherson, 1980; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). A lack of diversity in athletes' social identification - due to, among others, a socialisation process occurring almost exclusively in an athletic

environment (Brewer, 1993), and an inhibited development of life skills\_ (Murphy, 1995)--may not only restrict athletes' ability to assume non-athletic roles after retirement, but require greater adjustment during retirement (e.g., Botterill, 1982; Werthner & Orlick, 1986), or even reinforce their decision to continue their commitment in sport (e.g., Stevenson, 1990).

A strong athletic identity (Brewer et al., 1993) has also been associated with difficulties arising at retirement from the athletic career (Chamalidis, 1995; Gordon, 1995). The degree to which athletes derive their identity through their athletic roles will therefore strongly determine the intensity of the identity crisis they will face at the termination of their careers (Ogilvie & Howe, 1986). The environmental characteristics are related to the social support available to athletes within, as well as outside of the athletic context. Those athletes who neglect other spheres in life (e.g., professional training, fields of interest, developing friendship relationships outside of the athletic setting) may be less likely to explore other career, education, and lifestyle options (Baillie & Danish, 1992; Good, Brewer, Petitpas, Van Raalte, & Mahar, 1993; Werthner & Orlick, 1986) and may thus feel neglected upon retirement from high-level sports. Moreover, identity foreclosure, which is the process by which individuals make commitments to roles without engaging in exploratory behavior (Marcia, 1966), has also shown to possibly hinder the development of coping strategies essential during career transitions (Crook & Robertson, 1991; Gordon, 1995; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). Characteristics of transitions relevant to the quality of transition, include the duration of the transition, the degree to which athletes make a (in)voluntary transition, the role changes involved, and the degree to which they are imposed on athletes are some.

### C. Coping resources.

Whereas many athletes adjust in a successful and satisfying way to retirement from sport, others may face severe difficulties due to a lack of coping skills and/or resources (Murphy, 1995; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). While some researchers have reported that athletes may turn to alcohol as a way of coping with their career termination (Koukouris, 1991; Mihovilovic, 1968), others found that keeping busy, training/exercising, and a new focus after retirement were the most beneficial coping strategies utilised during the first few months of retirement (Baillie, 1992; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Werthner & Orlick, 1986).

Social support--the exchange of resources between individuals intended to enhance the well-being of the recipient (Shumaker & Brownell, 1984)--and the availability of social support networks (e.g., friends, family, teammates) has also been shown to influence athletes' adjustment to athletic retirement (Alfermann, 1995; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990; Reynolds, 1981; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Stambulova, 1994; Swain, 1991; Werthner & Orlick, 1986; Wylleman et al., 1998). In fact, social support has been asserted to be the key to an optimal athletic career transition (Murphy, 1995). Finally, pre-retirement planning has also been shown to play an important role in athletes' effective coping with their career end (Bardaxoglou, 1995; Gorbett, 1985; Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993). But while retirement is an integral part of the athletic career, a resistance on the part of athletes, or of those significant others in their social network (e.g., coach, family, sports federation), to plan for the career end has been reported (Blann & Zaichkowsky, 1989; Good et al., 1993; Haerle, 1975; McNally et al., 1992; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Swain, 1991; Wylleman et al., 1993).

### Other Career Transitions in Sports

#### A. Athletes' Non-Athletic Transitions.

During the past years the need has been underlined to broaden sports psychologists' view on career transitions so to include those non-athletic transitions which may impact, or which themselves be affected by, athletes' athletic careers (e.g., Ewing, 1998; Wylleman et al., 1998). These transitions include, among others, those occurring in athletes' psycho-social development and their scholastic/academic career.

Research into the development of the career of talented individuals revealed a relation between the occurrence of specific phases in the athletic career and the role and influence of the relationships in individuals' psychological network (e.g., parents, coach) (e.g., Bloom, 1985; Régnier, Salmela, & Russell, 1993). These findings confirmed the importance of the quality of relationships in the development of the athletic career, and thus, in the way athletes are able to cope with the transitions in their sports career (Wylleman, De Knop, & Ewing, in press). While the link between career phases and specific relationships is fairly consistent for most talented individuals (Bloom, 1985), some discrepancies are found to occur, for example, for student-athletes who perceive their parents to remain longer of influence, and the onset of

the “separation-individuation” process to occur at a later age, in comparison to other talented athletes (Wylleman et al., 1998).

The relation between an athlete’s psycho-social and athletic development has been approached on different levels. In a first line of research the development and the quality of the interpersonal relationships constituting the athlete’s psycho-social setting were investigated. This revealed, among others, that talented athletes’ level of athletic achievement was linked to the quality of the athlete-father relationship (Wylleman et al., 1995). In a second approach, a more global perspective upon this psycho-social setting was taken by examining the global network in which the athlete is nested, and more particularly the family context.

The developmental model of the athlete family formulated by Hellstedt (1995) is based on the proposition that a family not only undergoes a constantly changing developmental process, but that it should cope successfully with different major transitional tasks in order to proceed developmentally. As an interacting social system it is hypothesized that symptom formation in a member of the family is connected to developmental or structural problems in the family. So, in order for athletes to progress and cope with the different transitions in, for example, their athletic or academic career, they need to be encapsulated in a family which copes successfully with its own developmental changes and transitions. Taking the demands of athletic competition and training into account, Hellstedt (1995) argued that unique circumstances in the athlete family may lead to deviations in its development from the normal life cycle. Both approaches, underline the importance not only of the psychological and social support network in athletes’ coping with the transitions in the athletic career, but also that sports psychologists need to look at the transitions, and their mutual relations, occurring in athletes’ psycho-social and athletic development.

A second type of transition essential to athletes relates to their scholastic and academic development. The increased importance awarded to the optimal development of talented athletes, as well as the concurrent occurrence of transitions in athletes’ educational and athletic setting (Wylleman et al., 1998) has brought the specificity of the situation of student-athletes to the forefront. Student-athletes not need only to cope with the transitions in their athletic career, but also with the basic transitions in their education (e.g., to college or university), as

well as with the transitions inherent to each level of education. These transitions include at secondary level, for example, teacher-pupil relationships, choice of subject of study, academic achievements, intra-class relationships, a possible delayed college decision; at higher education level they relate to adjusting to campus life, selecting a subject of study or a major, making the college team, preparing for a post-university career. These transitions require student-athletes to adjust to, and cope with challenges and changes occurring in the combination of academics and athletics.

Concurrently, student-athletes are confronted with the duality of their situation. Possible conflict between the role of student and athlete may occur, or may be imposed by the athlete's surrounding who feels that the student-athlete should "choose" between one or the other (e.g., coaches may feel that an athlete cannot fully concentrate and be motivated for high-level sport if involved in academic study). Causes for possible conflict between both roles are related to the need for student-athletes to excel in two domains, deemed by society at large as important, during one and the same period of life (Wylleman & De Knop, 1996, 1997). This situation may induce time-management problems, restricted development of relationships, accruing pressure and de-motivation to perform at both scholastic/academic and athletic level. In-house psychological services at school and university-level should not only provide primary prevention to student-athletes, but also support them in developing their career and life skills in order to provide them with the best possible means of coping at academic, athletic, and psycho-social level. While this may include optimizing student-athletes' study, interpersonal communication or goal-setting skills, the support provided by student-athletes' psychological network should alleviate the occurrence of problems related to, for example, their living environment, identity foreclosure, injury and overtraining (e.g., Carr & Bauman, 1996; Finch & Gould, 1996; Greenspan & Andersen, 1995; Petitpas, Brewer, & Van Raalte, 1996; Petitpas et al., 1997).

#### B. Career Transitions for Coaches.

In many ways, career transitions among coaches are similar to that of athletes. Upon career termination from the coaching ranks, individuals are often required to consider several, if not all, of the transitional adjustment issues previously mentioned in this chapter. However,

coaches are a unique population in terms of sports career transitions because many are former (elite) athletes who will have previously experienced a career transition from their participation in sport. For these individuals, the continued involvement in sport as a coach might help ease their transition from sport as an athlete by allowing their sport-related identities and social support systems to remain intact for a period of time (Lavallee et al., 1997). At the same time, these coaches may put themselves at-risk to experience further career transition difficulties when they decide to retire from the coaching profession. Nevertheless, despite this apparent importance to the field of sports psychology, only one empirical investigation has been conducted on this subject. Hawkins, Blann, and colleagues (Hawkins & Blann, 1993; Hawkins et al., 1994; Hoskin & Hawkins, 1992) developed, on the basis of earlier research with the Professional Athletes Career Transition Inventory (e.g., Blann & Zaichkowsky, 1986, 1989), the Australian Coaches Career Transition Inventory (ACCTI; Hoskin & Hawkins, 1992). Using the ACCTI with national and/or international levels in Australia, Hawkins and Blann (1993) suggested that coaches were reluctant to consider careers outside of coaching despite an expression of job insecurity. Moreover, the majority of coaches felt their profession was not greatly valued and that it left them with limited opportunities for career development. While defining more clearly the relevance and utility of coaching as a profession might assist coaches with their career transitions (Gordon, 1995), future research should examine the career transition experiences of coaches. Replicating research on athletes' career transitions may shed more light on how the reasons for career termination, developmental experiences, and coping resources affect the overall career transition adjustment among coaches (cf. Gordon, 1995; Petitpas et al., 1996; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Finally, very few data is available on programs for coaches confronted with career transitions.

## Chapter 3

### Psychological Interventions and Counseling

As the awareness of the importance of career transitions increased over the years, so has the need for career transition counseling or career transition programs (Lavallee et al., 1997; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998). A variety of perspectives has been offered to assist athletes in transition, varying from “one-on-one” counseling (e.g., Bardaxoglou, 1995; Chamalidis, 1995), to individualized career assistance programs for athletes (e.g., Petitpas et al., 1997), group career assistance programs (e.g., Petitpas, Danish, McKelvain, & Murphy, 1992), or life skills programs (e.g., Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1995), and individual, group, and lifeskill programs for coaches. This chapter will initially address some intervention strategies for athletes and coaches confronted with career transitions, followed by an overview of career transition programs aimed at individuals and groups. In conclusion, specific recommendations for implementing a sports career transition program will be formulated.

#### Counseling Interventions

Only a few specific individualized counseling strategies have been proposed in the career transition literature for athletes. In fact, little counseling literature, if any, is available for coaches. While a number of traditional therapeutic approaches has been proposed by theorists (e.g., Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998) as possible intervention strategies to facilitate adjustment among transitional athletes, including stress management (Meichenbaum, 1977), cognitive restructuring (Beck, 1979; Garfield & Bergin, 1979), and emotional expression (Yalom, 1980), the application of these interventions has largely been supported with a broad range of populations outside of sport, failing to examine the utility of these treatment strategies with individual athletes (Wolff & Lester, 1989).

Individual counseling approaches were developed, among others, by Bardaxoglou (1995, 1997) and Chamalidis (1995). Bardaxoglou presented an intervention tool which can be employed when interviewing an athlete or coach in a career transition. The first part concerns (a) the life line drawing, a projective test of athletes’ life perception and (b) the listing of the ten most important events of their life, which refers to their values and beliefs, as well as, to their roles related to each event. In a second part, athletes are asked to anticipate their future

by (a) completing another life line, traced spirally, and symbolizing the experiences as foundations to a new life cycle (oriented in sport or not); and by (b) imagining ten important events in the future. Based on research with former Greek and French top level athletes, Chamalidis (1995) suggested the following counseling settings for athletes in transition: (a) individual sessions allowing the analysis of personal issues and identity conflicts during and/or following career transitions; (b) discussion groups enabling individuals to share problems, as well as, questions; and (c) psychodrama as a means of enacting and elaborating conflictual issues. The counselor should help athletes to develop ways of coping (e.g., switching identification) with the career termination, enabling them (b) to overcome the loss of their sources of satisfaction and identification as sports heroes, and (c) to readjust in other spheres of life.

Individual counseling should also assist athletes with coping with developments in the self-identity, changes in the available emotional and social support, the enhancement of coping skills, and the development of a sense of control (Murphy, 1995). Due to a process of “identity foreclosure” athletes’ identity may become restricted to their role of athlete, while neglecting the exploration of other roles in, for example the social, educational, or professional setting. The counseling process needs to emphasize the qualities which the athlete possesses and which are transferable and put to good use in other settings (e.g., commitment, communication skills). Counseling can be used as a preventive tool, allowing the athlete to integrate the preparation of his/her post-athletic career into the goal setting process during his/her career. On the other hand, because of the potential difficulty of coping with the loss of status, even after switching identifications and adopting new roles (professional, social, familial), further interventions may remain necessary both during and after career termination. These considerations demonstrate the importance of combined psychological assistance and professional training as a means to facilitate the career transition process.

Although little research has been conducted in this area with athletes in transition, several sport psychologists have also recommended athletes to rhetorically work-through any retirement-related difficulties. "Simply having someone to talk to was very important" (Werthner & Orlick, 1986, p. 357), "Talking about problems regarding career termination"

(Wylleman et al., 1993, p. 904), and "Clarifying feelings about sport careers" (Parker, 1994, p. 301) have been seen as ways for many retiring athletes to finalize their account, that is, complete their account-making process, and thus develop a better sense of their career transition experience. Moreover, several notable athletes in transition (e.g., Louganis, 1995; Seles, 1996) have not only engaged in the process of account-making as a pathway for the restoration of their identity (Lavalley, Grove, Gordon, & Ford, 1998), but, by relating their traumatic stories to others, may have also helped others to forge a new identity in their lives (Erikson, 1963; Harvey, 1996).

### Sports Career Assistance Programs

The growth of high-level competitive sports in size and popularity has, to some extent coincided with a growing interest in career assistance, and more particularly, pre-retirement programs for elite athletes. Several career assistance programs have been designed in countries around the world to help resolve the conflict that many athletes face in having to choose between pursuing their sporting and post-athletic career goals. For example, the Olympic Athlete Career Centre (OACC) in Canada was designed in 1985 to help Olympic-calibre athletes in the preparation for retirement (Olympic Athlete Career Centre, 1991). In addition, the Lifeskills for Elite Athletes Program (LEAP; renamed SportsLEAP in 1993) was launched in Australia in 1989, and has since merged with the Athlete Career and Education (ACE) Program to provide a nationally consistent career and education service for Australia's elite athletes (Australian Institute of Sport, 1996). The Olympic Job Opportunities Program (OJOP) has also been initiated in the United States, Australia, and South Africa to assist Olympic athletes who are committed to developing a professional career as well as achieving their sport-related goals (Olympic Job Opportunities Program, 1996). While many of the sports career programs have been initiated in the United States, Canada, and Australia, only a few (generally small scale) initiatives have been developed in European countries. These include, among others, the "Retiring Athlete" program in the Netherlands, the "Goldstart Program - Planning for Success" in the United Kingdom, and the "Study and Talent Education Program" in Belgium. Table 1 provides an overview of different career transition programs developed around the world. These and other programs are also listed in Anderson (1993), Anderson and

Morris (in press), Gordon (1995), Lavalley, Wylleman, and Sinclair (1998), and Lavalley, Sinclair, and Wylleman (1998).

Programs are generally run by the national Olympic Committee, by a national sports governing body or by a (work group of a) specific sport federation (e.g., National Basketball Players Association), by an independent organisation linked to the setting of sport (e.g., Women's Sports Foundation), or by an academic institute (e.g., University of Teesside, United Kingdom; Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium). While most programs address the needs for (amateur) high-level athletes, some have been explicitly developed for professional players, such as, the "Career and Education Program" (National Basketball Players Association, USA), the "Career Transition Program" (CTP; National Football League, USA), the "Continuing Education Program" (CEP; National Football League, USA), and the "Rookie Transition Program" (National Basketball Players Association, USA).

Sports career assistance programs vary also in format and may include not only workshops, but also seminars, educational modules, as well as individual counseling. These formats are directed at presenting information, at educating, at providing guidance, or at skill-learning, generally relevant to topics linked to sports career transitions. Analysis reveals five topics which are, to some degree or another, covered in the major programs, namely:

1. Social aspects: quality of relationships (e.g., family, friends) in the context of sport and of an academic/professional occupation;
2. Aspects relevant to a balanced style of living: self-image, self-esteem, and self-identity, social roles, responsibilities, and priorities, participation in leisure activities;
3. Personal management skills: education, academic skills, skills required by professional occupation, financial planning, skills transferable from the athletic career, coping skills.
4. Vocational and professional occupation: vocational guidance, soliciting (e.g., résumé, interview, curriculum vitae), knowledge of the job market, networking, and career advice;

5. Aspects relevant to career retirement, such as, possible advantages of retirement, perceived and expected problems related to retirement, physical/physiological aspects of retirement and decreased levels of athletic activity.

The objectives of these programs, while being focussed upon assisting (former) athletes competing at elite level, may vary in content and target population, as illustrated by the following examples:

1. The “Career Transition Program” (CTP) assists players to deal with retirement from the National Football League.

2. The “Goldstart Program - Planning for Success” assists Olympic athletes with education, career, and personal concerns arising from competing at elite level.

3. The “Rookie Transition Program” provides new recruits with opportunity to prepare for professional league.

4. The “Study and Talent Education Program” (STEP) provides information and teaches elite level student-athletes skills to optimize the combination of an academic and an athletic career, as well as initiating successfully a post-academic vocational career.

5. The Women’s Sports Foundation Athlete Service promotes the importance of education in the lives of African-American female athletes and to assist them with life as an elite athlete and with their transition from elite competition.

6. The Shadow Program gives national team athletes the opportunity to explore career options by “shadowing” professionals in the area of choice.

7. The Australian National Athlete Career Education (ACE) Program is an example of a broadly developed career assistance program (Anderson & Morris, in press). While its general aim is to assist athletes to balance the demands of athletic career whilst enhancing the opportunities to develop their educational and vocational skills, its content is defined in terms of nine objectives. These include, among others, ensuring individual athlete and direct athlete needs based assessment, and providing personal development training courses, nationally consistent career and education planning, and a transition program. The program also strives toward community recognition, a program development via appropriately trained personnel,

and program integration within ongoing State Institutes and Academies' programs. It is important to note that this program also offers career transition services to coaches.

Not all programs offer assistance in these six areas. The topics of "Aspects relevant to a balanced style of living", "Personal management skills" and "Vocational and professional occupation" are generally attended to in most programs, while "Social aspects" and "Aspects relevant to career retirement" are not always covered in depth. Some programs may also be focussed on pre-retirement interventions, enhancing the athlete's functional adjustment to specific career transitions, while others may be post-retirement intervention programs, centered especially on the theme of providing support to the retiree.

#### Recommendations For Implementing a Sports Career Assistance Program

While some sports career assistance programs are made available in the major sporting nations, other, especially European countries contemplate the development of, or have already taken initiatives to develop such programs. It is therefore important to take into account the practical considerations in providing sports career assistance services.

The first objective consists of defining the general objective of a sports career assistance program. In view of the broad array of aims of existing programs, a general aim could be to assist and guide athletes, via multi-formats (e.g., "one-on-one" or group counseling, written information, skills enhancement programs), to manage and cope with transitions (and their related causes and consequences) in such a way that they are able to achieve optimal well-being, as well as maximize their potential in their different spheres of daily life (e.g., psychosocial, athletic, educational). It should be emphasized that the diversity of the transitional experience (e.g., predictability, origin, setting, effect), as pointed out in the introduction of Chapter 2, should be taken into account. Although the confrontation with transitions may be moderately stressful (Sinclair & Orlick, 1994), a minority of athletes (up to 15%) has been shown to face serious difficulties (e.g., depression, feelings of helplessness) (cf. Wylleman, 1995). Sports career assistance programs should therefore provide athletes with (a) clinical guidance or counseling, but more particularly, educational modules which are preventive in nature (i.e., optimizing athletes' skills and resources to cope with transitions); and (b) skills and coping resources for transitions specific to the athletic career (e.g., retirement

from competitive sports), as well as, for those transitions occurring in athletes' non-athletic spheres of life but which do affect the development of the athletic career (e.g., transitions in the scholastic/academic career).

In this way, a sports career assistance program should not be solely focussed on post-retirement interventions, but in fact focus especially on the pre-retirement phase. As pointed out by Baillie (1993), the emphasis of the sports career assistance program should be on athletes' functional adjustments in the pre-retirement phase, while in the period of post-retirement, the emphasis should be on the provision of support with regard to emotional adjustment.

A second point in the development of a sports career assistance program is related to the organisational context of a sports career assistance program. Petitpas and Champagne (in press) underline the need to consider the idiosyncrasies of the targeted sport or sports group (e.g., type of sport, nature of the competitive events in which the athletes participate), and the structural aspects of the program (e.g., group size, program format and scheduling, required or voluntary participation). The financial aspects of developing and running the program may require the backing of the major sport federations or the national Olympic Committee, in support with private sponsors.

Third, the actual content and management of a sports career assistance program should touch the topics delineated earlier, with particular attention for athletes' social environment. Attention should be paid to the way in which the program is brought to athletes. Program leaders should understand the make-up of the participating group of athletes, anticipate potential problems, manage athletes' emotional reactions, skillfully use the diversity among participants as a facilitatory instrument in group discussions, and so forth.

Finally, sports career assistance programs should provide athletes with the opportunity to keep the momentum of their career development moving via, for example, local support groups (e.g., of local retired athletes), or periodic experience-sharing meetings.

## Chapter 4

### FEPSAC and Sports career Transitions

The European Federation for the Psychology of Sport and Physical Activity (FEPSAC) not only recognized the important role sports psychologists could play in attending to the needs of (former-)athletes, but also stimulated the interaction among sports psychologists, as well as providing its members with publications on this particular topic. FEPSAC translated this importance in a position statement, the aim of which was to convey to its members (albeit in abbreviated form) why it deems important that sports psychologists should focus their attention to the phenomenon of sports career transitions, what its general characteristics are, why athletes may be faced with problems when confronted with transitions, and the way in which sports psychologists may provide assistance to athletes to alleviate the causes and/or effects of these problems (Wylleman & Schilling, 1997; Wylleman & Alfermann, 1997). This paper has been evaluated as an interesting and thorough document which outlines both personal and event transitions which occur in athletes' careers (J. Salmela, personal communication, February 16, 1998). While it underlines the evolutionary process through which the athletic career may evolve, and the problems which may occur, it does draw sports psychologists' attention to the mediating effect played by the athlete's siblings, parents and coaches at various levels. Counseling and career transition programs need therefore to consider the fact that athletes are not solely responsible for coping with these transitions, but that the full constellation of athlete, family and coaches continuously interact across the career and successful transitions require the delicate interplay of all of these actors.

#### FEPSAC Position Statement 3: Sports Career Transitions

“Sports career” (SC) is a term for the multiyear sports activities of the individual aimed at high level sport achievements and self-improvement in sport. The effects of SC can be considered from two viewpoints: a narrow view considers only sport achievements (records, places in competitions, sport titles, etc.), whereas a broader view also considers the athlete's personal development.

The SC can be divided into several stages, with each stage characterized by a set of specific demands, requiring an athlete to adjust. The success of the athlete's transition from

one SC stage to another depends not only on his/her success during one particular stage, but throughout the SC as a whole.

### Sports Career Transitions

Research has shown that several SC transitions can be identified:

1. The beginning of sports specialisation is characterized by adjustments to the demands of the sport, coach, sport group, and new lifestyle. Young athletes must ensure the right choice of sport and show abilities to learn sport techniques. In the transition to intensive training in the chosen kind of sport, athletes should adjust to the new regime of training loads, improve their techniques and tactical skills, and attempt to achieve stable results in competition.

2. Transition to high-achievement sports and adult sports is characterized by the athlete's attempt at finding his/her own individual way in sport, at coping with the pressure of selection for important competitions, at gaining respect within a team, as well as from opponents, officials, and other sports professionals. It is critical for the athlete to change his/her lifestyle at this point in favour of achieving high-level performance.

3. Transition from amateur to professional sport is characterized by the need to adapt to the specialized requirements and pressures of professional sport, to competitions with equally strong opponents, to individualized and independent training regimes.

4. Transition from the culmination to the end of SC is characterized by the necessity to search for additional self-resources in order to maintain high levels of achievement and preparation to leaving sport.

5. Finally, the termination of SC is characterized by leaving sport and by a transition to another career, by the need to adjust to a new status, lifestyle, and social networks.

### Positive and Crisis-Transitions

Positive transitions are achieved if an athlete makes a relatively quick and easy adjustment to the demands of a given SC stage. This is usually the case when the necessary pre-requisites (e.g., theoretical and practical knowledge, skills, attitudes, etc.) have been created during the previous SC-stage. Other factors which can ease the course of transition are, among others, the athlete's giftedness; a high motivation; a positive attitude towards, and active

coping with training, competitions, and SC as a whole; trust in the coach; and a positive psychological climate.

Crisis-transitions occur when the athlete has to make a special effort in order to successfully adapt to the new requirements. Inability to adjust creates symptoms of crisis-transition, such as lowered self-esteem, emotional discomfort (e.g., doubts, anxiety, fear), increased sensitivity to failure, disorientation in decision making, and confusion. Psychological assistance can prevent such negative outcomes, as well as drop out from sport.

### Recommendations

Since SC-transitions are predictable in the course of the SC, in-depth knowledge of the peculiarities of each transition is essential. The following recommendations should be taken into account, not only by sport psychologists, but also by coaches, parents, and those individuals and organisations (e.g. Sport Federations, National Olympic Committees) involved in competitive sport.

#### A. Beginning Stage.

Provide young athletes with information on the specifics of training in a given sport; create a comfortable supportive atmosphere within and around the sport group; use developmentally appropriate methods of training; enhance young athletes' interest for the sport; encourage them regardless of success or failure; reward effort; give social support in competition, especially in cases of failure.

#### B. Transition to intensive training in the chosen kind of sport.

Do not over-emphasize the importance of the training process; move forward gradually and smoothly, in order to prevent injuries and overtraining; teach athletes the basics of psychological preparation to competition; assist them in combining sports, school, and other activities in the best way possible.

#### C. Transition to high-achievement and adult sport.

This transition is the most difficult one for athletes, as it is linked, not only to the sport maturity of an athlete, but also to his/her psychological maturity. The main focus for sport psychologist is co-operation with athletes. Coaches and sport psychologists should advise athletes, as well as providing them with the opportunity for independent decision making. The

psychological assistance during the transition from amateur sports to professional sports is similar in nature to that just described.

D. Transition from the culmination to the end of SC.

Athletes become more reserved and anxious, and may need social support, expert advice, and counseling, including assistance in searching for a new career.

E. Termination of the SC.

Sport psychologists should support athletes to find a new career and to intergrate in as best as possible in their (new) social environments. Support provided by sport organisations is essential.

The particular methods of psychological assistance of athletes in the different SC transitions vary, and may include, among others, psychodiagnostics, psychological prevention, and mental training. However, their effectiveness is dependent on taking into account the specifics of the sport event, the specificity of the SC-stage, athletes' age, gender, individual traits, and psycho-social environment. Sport psychologists should (a) examine closely the way in which athletes experience and cope with these different SC-transitions, and (b) assist in the education of athletes and coaches so to achieve maximum and positive transitions and thus enhance the chance for athletes to have a long, successful, and enjoyable athletic career.

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## Footnotes

(1) The 9th FEPSAC Congress in Brussels (Wylleman, 1995), the 9th ISSP Congress in Netanya (Wylleman & Alfermann, 1997; Wylleman & Schilling, 1997), the 2nd Conference of the European College of Sports Sciences in Copenhagen (Stambulova, 1997), the 24th IAAP Congress in San Francisco (Alfermann, 1998), and the 10th FEPSAC Congress in Prague (Wylleman & Stambulova, 1999).

(2) The terms “athlete”, “coach”, “sport psychologist”, “sport director”, “parent” refer to both females and males, except where specified otherwise.

(3) One should take into account the averaging out of inter-discipline differences (e.g., with regard to gymnastics, swimming).