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## Introduction

Career transitions as an area of research was generally overlooked by sport scientists until recently and also by sport administrators, coaches, athletes, and those closely associated with athletes (e. g., family) who are nevertheless keenly aware of the complex personal adjustments and socio-psychological phenomena involved. This chapter provides an overview of the theoretical approaches and frameworks that help explain the phenomenon, a review of the existing literature, and a summary of future research directions. Specifically, in the first section, theoretical perspectives that have been applied more or less appropriately to sport are summarized. The second section reviews the extant research, followed by recommendations for future investigations. The chapter concludes with a summary and set of ‘what have you learned’ questions.

The major terms used in this chapter, borrowed from Coakley (1983), include *competitive sport*, which refers to "any organized sport activity in which training and participation are time-consuming and in which the level of performance meets relatively high standards of expectation" (p. 1); and *retirement*, which is the "the process of transition from participation in competitive sport to another activity or set of activities" (p.10). Consequently, the population we are referring to includes all female and male athletes who participate in professional sport of all types, through to highly competitive amateur sports that often demand similar amounts of invested time commitment and sacrifices. In other words, the attention is on all individuals who allow their desire for competence in sport to dominate all other forms of human expression and especially those who allow sport to become the total focus of their lives.

## Theoretical Models

The following section summarizes several theoretical approaches that have been used or referred to in the study of career transitions and retirement in sport. Initially, most theorists

applied models from outside of sport to explain the career transition process. More recently, however, sport-specific models of career transition have been proposed.

### **Social Gerontology Theories**

McPherson (1980), in his discussion of occupational and psychological adjustment problems in athletic retirement, suggested that certain theories associated with social gerontology (the study of aging) might have applicable orientations. Rosenberg (1981) discussed the merits and shortcomings of six such approaches, namely activity, disengagement, subculture, continuity, social breakdown, and exchange theories.

*Activity or Substitution Theory* (Burgees, 1960) maintains that lost roles are to be substituted for, so that total activity continues, and the basic proposition is that high activity and maintenance of roles are positively related to self-concept and life satisfaction. *Disengagement Theory* (Cumming, Dean, Newell, & McCaffrey, 1960) is a structural - functional theory, which suggests that society and the aging individual withdraw from one another to the mutual benefit and satisfaction of both. After retirement, society gets younger workers into the workforce and the elderly can enjoy their remaining years in leisure. Although Disengagement Theory was developed to refute Activity Theory, neither provide mechanisms to predict whether activity or disengagement will result, therefore, both are limited in their applied utility in sport.

Leveraging off Activity Theory, *Subculture Theory* (Rose, 1965) added the possibility of sub-cultural norms where some elderly people may enjoy less activity, but be well adjusted. Rosenberg (1981) saw some merit in this approach to sport retirement because competitive athletes have fairly obvious and distinguishable sub-cultural characteristics. Unlike Activity Theory, *Continuity or Consolidation Theory* (Atchley, 1981) suggests that substitution is not necessary for lost roles. Time and energy can be redirected or redistributed among roles remaining or towards new roles. However, if the lost role was important, consolidation or other

activities may not provide the same basis for a meaningful existence, and therefore may not provide a satisfactory solution.

*Social Breakdown Theory* (Kuypers & Bengston, 1973) proposes that with any role loss (e. g., retirement or widowhood) individuals become susceptible to external labelling (e.g., hero to zero, Orlick, 2008) and, if the social evaluation of status is unfavourable, tendencies to withdraw or to reduce certain activities develop. To combat this negative downward spiralling cycle out of activity, a "social reconstruction" cycle is proposed, which restores and maintains positive self-image through counseling and engagement in alternative activities that enhance self-reliance. Finally, *Exchange Theory* (Dowd, 1975) can be adapted to illustrate how successful aging can be achieved, through rearrangement of social networks/activities to maximize return.

While all of the above theories have relevance for sport retirement, and warrant closer scrutiny than offered here, Rosenberg (1981) suggested that the latter two - *Social Breakdown* and *Exchange Theories* - are most salient. Anecdotal evidence alone suggests that voluntary disengagement from sport is unlikely (cf. Frith, 1990, 2001; Howe, Howe, & Wilkins, 1989) and that, contrary to Disengagement Theory, athletes typically try to "hang on" to sport sometimes long after their skills have begun to deteriorate. In addition, the main messages of Activity, Subculture, and Continuity Theories are, arguably, largely incorporated into Social Breakdown Theory. For example, Activity Theory proposes concepts like role replacement and activity level maintenance, Subculture Theory acknowledges and identifies norms that are dysfunctional to retirement planning, and Continuity Theory posits that commitment, sacrifice, and self-concept from the competitive athlete role can be reallocated to remaining or new roles. Through understanding and counseling on these and other issues athletes can learn to minimize

the potential for social breakdowns and take steps, through social reconstruction, to smooth out the transition period.

Exchange Theory can help explain how athletes gradually come to understand their relationship with sport over time, and provides a perspective on what will happen to that relationship over time. For example, athletes' primary resource - physical talent - is exchanged for meaningful rewards from the sport system, but that resource is finite and the inevitable deterioration in skill will affect the degree of control over the athlete/sport relationship. Rosenberg (1981) proposed that an Exchange Theory perspective "would, in pre-retirement counseling, make a fitting prelude to a discussion of social breakdown" (p. 123).

### **Social Death: Thanatology**

Both Rosenberg (1982) and Lerch (1982) have employed the concept of social death as a model for explaining the social and psychological changes involved in retirement from sport. Social death refers to the condition of being treated as if one were dead, although still physiologically and intellectually alive. It derives from the science of thanatology (study of death and dying) and although the concept of death is only an analogy, and there is a considerable difference between actual death and retirement from sport, the concept of social death is perceived as quite useful, particularly for designing career assistance/counseling programs. Lerch discussed two thanatological models that reveal interesting parallels between the socially-dying retiring athlete and the physically-dying hospital patient - the "awareness context" notion of Glaser and Strauss (1965) and the "stages of dying" of Kubler-Ross (1969).

Glaser and Strauss (1965) suggested four different types of awareness context: closed, suspicion, mutual pretence, and open. Applied to sport, the *closed awareness* category is when athletes are unaware of plans to cut, release, or trade them from teams. Teammates may have seen "the axe" approaching, but, because failures or deteriorations in form are rarely discussed

in competitive sport, the athlete concerned is often surprised and shocked when it happens. *Suspicion awareness* is more complicated in that athletes may suspect a demotion is forthcoming by subtle changes in personal interactions with coaches and administrators. For example, less verbal and non-verbal (body language) communication is perceived by the athlete when in the presence of coaches and administrators. The next context, *mutual pretence*, is analogous to make-believe, where all concerned with certain athletes - managers, coaches, trainers - know that no matter how well the athlete performs, their careers are nearing their final conclusion. If this is not sustained, mutual pretence can only change to the final context, *open awareness*, where both retiring athletes and others know that career end is inevitable and openly acknowledge the fact.

Interview data collected by Kubler-Ross (1969) identified certain reactions or coping mechanisms terminal patients use to deal with impending death that Lerch (1982) suggested draw interesting parallels with athletes coping with social death. The first stage is denial, e. g., "no it's not true", followed by anger, e. g., "why me? why now?", and bargaining, e. g., "I'll do anything to stay in the game", and depression, e. g., "this loss is unbearably sad", and finally acceptance or resignation, e. g., "its happened, my competitive sport career is over, now what?" At the final stage, social death obviously differs from real death in that the athlete continues to live. Recovery from social death is, therefore, possible although athletes themselves will likely mourn the loss of their careers either publicly or privately in a cyclical fashion drifting in and out of different stages of reaction. Regarded in this light, Rosenberg (1982) and Lerch maintained that the concept of social death, as an analogy, can be useful particularly to involuntary, rather than voluntary, retirement. The consequences of voluntary retirement are less severe because athletes retain control of their fate.

While models from social gerontology and thanatology dominated the early literature, several researchers (e. g., Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985) have questioned the ability of those models to comprehensively capture the process of leaving sport. Crook and Robertson (1991) also criticized social gerontological models and specifically the analogy between athletic (functional) retirement and old age (chronological) retirement, and the inability of gerontological models to explain variations in athlete responses to retirement. The thanatological model is also criticized for stereotyping athlete reactions, and for portraying retirement in an overly negative light. Both models, seem to assume that all retirement experiences require serious adjustment when, in reality, this may not always be the case.

### **Transition Models**

Whereas social gerontological and thanatological models view retirement as a singular event, transition models characterise retirement as a process. A transition has been 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 the model of human adaptation to transition, Schlossberg (Schlossberg, 1981, 2004) identifies three major sets of factors that interact during a transition, namely the characteristics of the individual experiencing the transition, the perception of the particular transition, and the characteristics of the pre-transition and post-transition environments. The variables that characterise the individual include attributes, such as psychosocial competence, sex, age, state of health, race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, value orientation, and previous experience with a transition of a similar nature. These variables may show considerable differences across the population of athletes facing retirement from sport, and Coakley (1983) asserted that a diversity of factors influencing the

athlete in transition must be acknowledged in order to understand the overall adjustment process.

Regarding the perception of a particular transition, Schlossberg (1981) suggested that role change, affect, source, onset, duration, and degree of stress are all important factors to consider. This aspect of Schlossberg's model emphasizes the phenomenological nature of transitions, in that it is not just the transition itself that is of primary importance, but also the individual variables that have different salience depending on the transition. For retiring athletes, Sinclair and Orlick (1993) have acknowledged this position by suggesting that every career transition has the potential to be a crisis, relief, or combination of both, depending on the athlete's perception of the situation.

When considering characteristics of pre- and post-transition environments, Schlossberg (1981) acknowledged internal support systems, institutional support, and physical settings. Although several researchers have examined social support networks among involuntarily-retired injured athletes, such as retired injured athletes (e.g., Ford & Gordon, 1993; Udry, 1997), little research has been conducted in this area with voluntarily retired athletes. A number of theorists have outlined the obligations of coaches and sport associations in preparing athletes for retirement from high level competition (e.g., Thomas & Ermler, 1988) and research by Fortunato (1996; Fortunato & Marchant, 1999) found that those athletes who had terminated their career on a voluntary basis and/or remained actively involved in their sport (e.g., as a coach) experienced more positive transitions than did those who ended their careers due to injury or deselection. However, few other empirical investigations have been made in the area of athletic career termination.

In an attempt to understand the career transition process of athletes, a number of researchers have utilized transition models. Swain (1991), for example, employed a multiple

case design with recently retired athletes and found support for Schlossberg's (1981, 2004) model in terms of the characteristics of retiring athletes, the perception of the career transition, and the characteristics of the environments. Further evidence in support of this theoretical perspective has been documented in Parker's (1994) study with retired collegiate football players, Baillie's (1993) study of former elite-amateur and professional athletes, Sinclair and Orlick's (1993) study of Olympic-level athletes, and Pummell, Harwood, and Lavallee's (2008) study of transitions experienced during the career of adolescent event riders. An investigation by Lavallee (2005) has also employed Schlossberg's model in an evaluation of the effectiveness of a life development intervention on career transition adjustment in retired professional athletes.

Sport psychologists have started to consider the concurrent and interactive nature of transitions throughout athletes' careers at athletic, psychological, psychosocial, and academic/vocational levels. Wylleman and Lavallee (2004), for example, have proposed a developmental model that outlined a series of predictable or 'normative' transitions throughout the athletes' careers. These normative transitions are part of a definite sequence of age-related biological, social, and emotional events or changes and can be said to be generally related to the socialization process, as well as the organizational nature of the setting in which individuals are involved (e.g., school, family). During this type of transition, athletes exit one stage and enter another stage that makes these transitions generally predictable and anticipated. Non-normative transitions, on the other hand, do not occur in a set plan or schedule and are the result of important events that take place in individual's lives and to which they respond. As a result, these transitions are generally unpredicted, unanticipated and involuntary. Examples of non-normative transitions include the loss of a personal coach or an unanticipated de-selection from a team. Non-normative transitions also include those that

were expected or hoped for, but which did not happen – labeled non-events (Schlossberg, 2004) – such as not making the World Cup or Olympic Games.

Overall, the models of social gerontology, thanatology, and transition, which have been applied to sports career transitions, have been instrumental in stimulating research in the area. All of these perspectives, however, possess limitations that indicate the need for further conceptual development in the area. For example, social gerontological and thanatological models do not indicate what factors influence the quality of adaptation to retirement from sport, and transition models that have been applied to sport lack operational detail of the specific components related to the career transition and termination adjustment process (Taylor, Ogilvie, & Lavallee, 2005). As a result, recent attempts have been made to build-upon the existing knowledge and develop comprehensive models of sport career transitions. Figure 1, developed by Gordon (1995), illustrates causal factors that initiate career transition, interacting, and developmental factors that relate to retirement adaptation, tertiary factors that mediate adaptation, and potential sites for interventions or treatment modalities for career transition and career assistance. In the following section, the empirical research conducted in each of these areas is reviewed, with a focus on how the overall quality of adjustment to athletic retirement is influenced by causal factors, developmental experiences, and coping resources. Career transition interventions are then addressed.

### **Career Transition Research**

#### ***Conceptual Model: Causal Factors***

Retirement from sport is likely to be a function of a variety of involuntary and voluntary reasons, but, although actual causes are influenced by the structure of sport, studies have now demonstrated that the most common reasons are career-ending injuries, chronological age, deselection, and personal choice.

An unexpected and sudden retirement from sport can result from serious sport injury and adjustment difficulties can be expected because it is something for which individuals are seldom prepared (Werthner & Orlick, 1986). Kleiber and Brock's (1992) study of competitive athletes who suffered career-ending injuries indicated that an injury may not even need to be severe to force athletes out of continued participation in competitive sport. As Ogilvie and Taylor (1993) have suggested, because elite athletes perform at such a high level, even small reductions in their physical capabilities may be sufficient to make them no longer competitive at the highest level.

In early research, Mihovilovic (1968) reported that retirement from sport can also be a function of chronological age. In his study of former professional soccer players, decline in performance accompanying the aging process was identified as one of the major causes for retirement. Taylor et al. (2005) suggested that age is one of the most significant reasons for retirement because psychological motivation, social status, and physical capabilities can all complicate individuals' ability to continue competing at an elite level.

Associated with the physiological processes of aging is the structural factor of an athlete failing to progress to the next highest level of elite competition, namely deselection. Lavallee, Grove, and Gordon's (1997) study showed that this involuntary reason is an important contributor to sport career termination.

The final notable reason for retirement from sport is that of voluntary choice. Research by Wylleman, de Knop, Menkehorst, Theeboom, and Annerel (1993) demonstrated that many individuals freely elect to terminate their sporting career for a combination of personal and psychological reasons. Some athletes may decide to end their careers because of financial complications, ethnic or gender-related issues, or an overall lack of life satisfaction, whereas others may want to spend more time with their families and friends (Baillie, 1993).

Although a voluntary decision to retire from sport is perhaps the most attractive reason, it is important to recognize that ending a career voluntarily also eases the career transition process (Taylor et al., 2005).

### **Developmental Factors: Athletic Identity**

With regard to developmental factors associated with the transition process, researchers have shown that athletic identity, that is, the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993), can have a significant effect on the quality of adjustment. Brewer and his colleagues (Brewer et al., 1993; Good, Brewer, Petitpas, Van Raalte, & Mahar, 1993) have discussed athletic identity within the framework of a multidimensional construct, and described a person with strong athletic identity as "more likely to interpret a given event (e.g., an injury) in terms of its implications for that individual's athletic functioning than a person only weakly identified to the athlete role" (Brewer et al., 1993, p. 238). Brewer et al. also described athletic identity as a social role, one that is heavily socialized by the influences of family, friends, coaches, teachers, and the media.

Whereas the benefits of strong athletic identity include adherence to and involvement in sport and exercise, development of athletic skills, sense of self, and confidence, the potential risks of strong athletic identity relate to difficulties athletes may experience during career transitions and specifically problems associated with deselection, injury, and athletic career termination (Murphy, Petitpas, & Brewer, 1996; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). A strong and exclusive athletic identity is thought to be a risk factor for emotional problems following career end because "individuals who strongly commit themselves to the athlete role may be less likely to explore other career, education, and lifestyle options due to their intensive involvement in sport" (Brewer et al., 1993, p. 241).

Research has provided support for the hypothesis that strong exclusive athletic identity

creates potential for emotional difficulties upon career end. For example, in their study with female gymnasts, Lavalley and Robinson (2007) found those who adopted an identity based solely on their role as a gymnast knew little about who they were and what they wanted to do with their lives upon retirement, and were consequently forced to distance themselves from their past in order to establish a new identity apart from gymnastics. Webb, Nasco, Riley, and Headrick (1998) demonstrated that athletes who ascribe great importance to their involvement in sport are more at-risk of experiencing retirement-related difficulties than those who place less value on the athletic component of their self-identity. In this study among 91 high school, college, and professional athletes, athletic identity was related to retirement difficulties but not overall life satisfaction. Injury-related retired athletes also were found to have the most difficult adjustment to career termination. Finally, Lally (2007) reported that athletes who proactively diminish their athletic identity prior to retirement are more likely to experience a healthier career transition. Athletes in this qualitative study had anticipated disrupted identities post-retirement, and as such, protected their identity during the career transition process.

### *Coping Resources*

Sport psychologists have examined ways in which coping resources influence the overall quality of adjustment to retirement from sport (e.g., Crook & Robertson, 1991). A number of the earliest studies reported that many high-performance athletes turn to alcohol as a way of coping with their career transition (e.g., Hallden, 1965; Mihovilovic, 1968), while others found that having a new focus after retirement predicts better adjustment (Baillie, 1993; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Werthner & Orlick, 1986). In individuals' attempts to manage the career transition process, those high in coping resources tend to experience less stress than athletes possessing few coping skills (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990).

An early study by Reynolds (1981) with former professional football players in the United States was perhaps the first to outline the general importance of social support as a significant coping resource among retired sport performers. In recent years, other career transition researchers have also documented the importance of social support from friends, family, teammates, and coaches (e.g., Alfermann & Gross, 1997) and Kane's (1991) study of retired professional athletes demonstrated how spouses also experienced difficulties associated with career transitions. Lally and Kerr (2008) recently examined the effects of athletic retirement on parents of athletes and found that career termination can have a significant impact on the parents' personal and social relationships both in and outside of sport.

### *Interventions*

To date, there has been little empirical research examining career transition interventions. Lavalley's (2005) study evaluated the effectiveness of a life development intervention on career transition adjustment among retired male professional soccer players. Data were collected on measures of career termination adjustment and coping with transitions, and the intervention group also participated in a life development intervention package. Results revealed significant post-intervention treatment group differences on career transition adjustment in favor of the life development intervention, while significant within-group differences on career transition adjustment over time were also achieved for the intervention group.

In recent years, numerous career intervention programs for athletes have been developed in countries around the world, based on the belief that intervention at the organizational level can be a useful means for facilitating the career transition process (Thomas & Ermler, 1988). Examples of these programs are provided in Highlight Box 1.

These programs can often vary in their focus from educating younger athletes during their early careers on dealing with various forms of sport transitions including retirement, to helping older or recently retired athletes cope with either voluntary or involuntary and sudden career end. Variety in program content and delivery is also evident, however, learning experiences often include workshops, seminars, educational modules, and individual counselling. As described in greater detail in Anderson and Morris (2000) and Gordon, Lavalley, and Grove (2006), the majority of programs focus on lifestyle management and the development of transferable skills that can assist individuals in making the transition from life in sport into a post-sport career. As such, these programs provide athletes with an introduction to career planning and development by focusing on values and interest exploration, career awareness and decision-making, CV/resume preparation, interview techniques, and job search strategies.

### **Future Directions**

The following section outlines where career transition research is going or perhaps should go in the future. Directions and recommendations are listed under three research themes: career transitions, retirement, and career assistance programs.

#### *Career Transitions*

In a literature search, Lavalley, Wylleman, and Sinclair (2000) identified 270 references related to sports career transition, compared with 20 references reported by McPherson (1980) two decades earlier. Research in the area has continued to expand, which has led to new avenues of investigation.

1. Stage-in-a-life-cycle has not been formally incorporated into transition models when applied to sport. For example, is an athletes' decision to carry on in a particular sport influenced by school age and parental pressure to focus on educational or other occupational achievements?

Do family commitments truncate sporting careers of both males and females? Future research should examine the influence of stage-in-a-life-cycle on sport career transitions, particularly among adolescent aged athletes, and whether or not existing transition models accommodate both female and male experiences. The developmental model proposed by Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) could be employed to guide such research.

2. The focus of this chapter is on athletes in transition, but research has recently started to investigate the career patterns of others involved in sport. This follows the recommendations of Hawkins and Blann (1993) and Gordon (1995) who called for an “occupational analysis” of sport, and particularly the status of coaches and officials in order to identify several critical incidents and triggers in the career pathways of both female and male participants. Lavallee’s (2006) study of the career transition experience of coaches showed how many experiences were similar.

3. Professional sport team cultures now resemble the workplace comprised of players contracted by management to fulfill performance demands (outcomes). Players can subsequently be traded or moved among teams in a cartel when contracts expire. Investigation of transitions created by inter-club trades is required, and could include comparisons between involuntary and voluntary trades and the adaptation processes to new club cultures and support systems.

### *Retirement*

Conceptual models such as Figure 1 and that proposed by Taylor et al. (2005), illustrate many relevant concerns that can influence both the course of athletic retirement and quality of subsequent adjustment.

4. Of the causal factors of career termination – age, injury, deselection, free choice – deselection remains the least examined. Surveys of how different sport associations deselect players and where these players go (e. g., first job post-playing career, second job) would be useful.

Differences and similarities across different sports would be interesting also between female, male, and amalgamated organizations, semi/full-time professional sports, and elite amateur sports (including Olympic sports) organized through Institutes of Sport and major clubs?

5. There have been advances in recent years in the measurement of career transitions in sport, including the development of the *Athletes' Retirement Decision Inventory* (Fernandez, Stephen, & Fouquereau, 2006), *Retirement Sports Survey* (Alfermann, Stambulova, & Zemaityte, 2004), *British Athletes Lifestyle Assessment Needs in Career and Education* (BALANCE; Lavalley & Wylleman, 1999) Scale, *Australian Athletes Career Transition Inventory* (Hawkins & Blann, 1993), and *Athlete Retirement Questionnaire* (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993). These scales require further psychometric development if they are to be used by practicing sport psychologists.

6. Studies of developmental factors should focus on the relationship between adjustment to retirement and athletic identity. Further empirical studies are also required on the relationships identified by Good et al. (1993) and Murphy et al. (1996) between athletic identity, identity foreclosure, and social support.

7. There is a need to assess ways of coping and coping skills that are most beneficial during the course of transitions. Future research should take into account both long- and short-term effects of retirement-related coping processes. In Grove, Lavalley, and Gordon's (1997) cross-sectional study some athletes may have reported generalized estimates of coping strategies used over a long period of continual adjustment. Others, on the other hand, may have reported how they coped during a briefer and more specific period. Longitudinal studies, therefore, are needed to determine if various coping strategies are employed at different points in time during the transition process. A recent example is a one-year longitudinal study by Stephan, Bilard, Ninot, and Delignières (2003) who found that perceived physical condition, physical self-

worth, and global self-esteem decreased during the first six months of transition out of elite sport followed by a period of increase in these dimensions, as well as in perceived sports competence and physical strength.

8. A thorough analysis of the retirement process also requires prospective data. Pre- and post-event data would help determine if retrospective accounts of thoughts and behaviors might have been influenced by social desirability and/or selective memory.

#### *Career Assistance Programs*

Career assistance programs for athletes have been developed around the world in recent years (see Anderson & Morris, 2001; Gordon, Lavalley, & Grove, 2006). These programs are primarily managed by national sport governing bodies, national Olympic Committees, specific sport federations, universities, and independent organizations linked to sport settings.

9. Although some attention has been devoted to career assistance programs in sport it must be acknowledged that the extant research is not only scant, but also highly descriptive in nature.

Analyses have consisted mainly of profiling the extent to which athletes have used (or not used) the services and the program components they found to be most (or least) helpful (e.g., Gorely, Bruce, & Teale, 1998; North & Lavalley, 2004). Descriptive studies therefore need to be complemented with information about the impact of program participation on outcomes, such as retirement planning, career adjustment, and life satisfaction. Only Morris and Anderson (1994) have examined the impact of a year-long athlete career and education program on both athletic performance, with results revealing stability in perceived performance, and positive impact on personal factors such as mood, well-being, and self-concept.

10. The contribution of specific program components in producing favorable outcomes should also be examined. For example, programs that provide opportunities for mentoring (e.g., Perna, Zaichkowsky, & Bocknek, 1996) could be compared to those that do not provide such

opportunities. These components have the potential to assist program participants in making successful transitions, but no empirical evaluations of their impact have been undertaken.

11. Stage considerations also need to be incorporated into future research on the impact of career assistance programs. In addition to stage-in-life-cycle an adequate treatment of these issues will require analyses of both stage-of-career factors and stage-of-readiness-to-change factors. With respect to stage-of-career factors each career stage (early, middle, late) is likely to involve unique transition experiences, and the relevance and/or impact of various program components may, therefore, be stage-dependent. Regarding stage-of-readiness-to-change factors the transtheoretical model of behavior change (Prochaska & Diclemente, 1986) would suggest that athletes and coaches are more or less “ready” for career assistance programming and information. For maximum effectiveness, program structure as well as evaluation protocols need to be sensitive to these differences in “readiness” to change.

12. Finally, there is a need for prospective research employing longitudinal designs and a multi-method approach blending quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Data collected before, during, and after exposure to career assistance programs will not only enhance our understanding of the career transition process for athletes, coaches, and administrators, but will also improve our ability to detect meaningful changes that result from this exposure.

### **Summary**

This chapter has been about the process of desocialization from competitive sport and career retirement and has addressed the relevant research that has aimed to understand, explain, and predict both negative and positive consequences. Evidently, the answer to whether career transitions are stressful is likely to be "most likely yes, but sometimes no" so more research is recommended, both quantitative and qualitative, to explicate culturally-determined causal factors of transitions and how these affect responses to and, in turn, the consequences of

transitions at all levels of competitive sport. Commercial and rationalization forces both in elite amateur and professional sport can be accommodated if prevention-oriented programs are implemented by trained career assistance program coordinators. Establishing best-fit programs for athletes (coaches and administrators) will continue to challenge both researchers and sport organizations. However, the burgeoning literature reviewed in this chapter reflects recognition of the significance and importance of the role of such assistance in contemporary sport.

### **Review Questions**

1. Debate the “retirement or rebirth?” argument discussed by Coakley (1983) in relation to career transitions in sport, and the relevance today of either opinion in sport.
2. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of three theoretical perspectives that have been used or referred to in the study of career transitions and retirement in sport.
3. Describe the causes of career termination and how each can affect the nature and quality of adjustment to career transitions and career termination.
4. Discuss the concept of athletic identity and how it relates to athlete adaptation to career transition.
5. Factors that mediate the adaptation and quality of adjustment to career termination, such as social support and coping skills, were identified. Discuss the implications from the research on these factors for career assistance programs.
6. What are the main challenges in the future for researchers and career assistance program managers in amateur, as well as professional, sport?

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## Highlight Box 1

### Examples of Career Transition Programs

Program	Institution	Country
Athlete Career and Education Program (ACE)	Australian Institute of Sport	Australia
Performance Lifestyle	UK Sport	United Kingdom
Career Assistance Program for Athletes	U.S. Olympic Committee	USA
Olympic Athlete Career Program – National Sports Centre	Olympic Athlete Career Centre	Canada
Study and Talent Education Program	Vrije Universiteit, Brussels	Belgium
Second Career Program	Japanese Olympic Committee	Japan

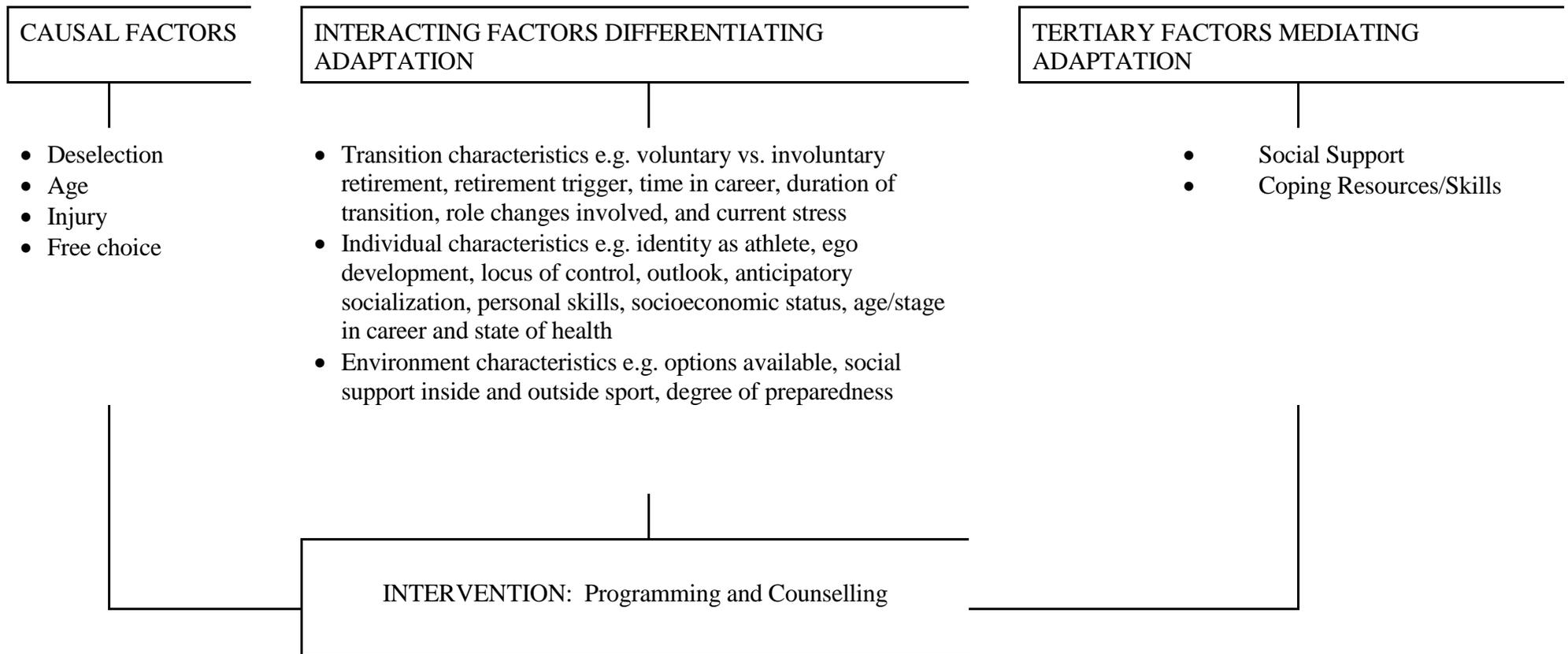


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of the Career Transition Process in Competitive Sport