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## Career transitions in sport

In 2000, an extensive literature search on the topic of career transitions in sport generated over 220 references – a number which was ten times higher than the references available in 1980 (Lavalley, Wylleman, & Sinclair, 2000). The interest in this area has been reflected in the international scholarly co-operation promoted by the Special Interest Group on Career Transitions (SIG-CT) initiated in 1993 (Wylleman, Lavalley, & Alfermann, 1999) and which brought the theme of career transitions to the forefront at many international congresses (Alfermann, 1998, 2000; Alfermann & Stambulova, 2001; Stambulova, 1997; Wylleman, 1995; Wylleman & Alfermann, 1997; Wylleman, Lavalley & Alfermann, 2001; Wylleman & Schilling, 1997; Wylleman & Stambulova, 1999). For example, no less than 22 papers related to the topic of career transitions were presented during the past 10<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Sport Psychology congress! This co-operation has also been supported by the Managing Council of the European Federation of Sport Psychology (FEPSAC) and has resulted not only in a FEPSAC Position Statement on Career Transitions (FEPSAC, 1999) but also in a volume of the FEPSAC Monograph Series (Wylleman et al., 1999).

This special issue is reflective of this growing and sustained interest among sport psychologists across Europe. It presents the work of not only well-established experts in the field of career transitions, but also, and more importantly, of young researchers whose doctoral research focused on this particular topic.

In their introductory article, Wylleman, Alfermann and Lavalley provide readers with an overview of the major conceptual developments in the field of career transitions, as well as of the pallet of interventions used with athletes in transition. In conclusion, the authors propose avenues for further research and future developments in working with athletes.

Some of the issues identified in the introductory article are elaborated throughout the other contributions in this issue. First, Alfermann, Lee and Wuerth provide us with a more in-

depth view into the important role played by parents as significant others as perceived by not only the athletes themselves but also by the parents. Alfermann and colleagues confirm and support with empirical data the parental involvement across the career phases and transitions of young athletes' sports career.

Second, two young doctoral researchers and their colleagues contribute and broaden the extant knowledge on the career termination process. Both studies are also reflective of the diversification of the methodologies used career transition research. On the one hand, Torregrosa, Boixados, Valiente and Cruz add valuable information to the existent knowledge on the career ending process by studying Spanish athletes' prospective view on their retirement. This study provides significant data which will assist providers of career transitions programs in ensuring a high degree of effectiveness of the services they provide to elite athletes in preparing the end of the athletic career. On the other hand, Cecić Erpic, Wylleman and Zupancić take a retrospective view with Slovene athletes to study their perceptions of the quality of their sports career termination process. While this is in line with earlier research, Cecić Erpic and colleagues extend our knowledge base by explicitly investigating the role athletic as well as non-athletic transitions play in the quality of the athletic retirement.

Third, Alfermann, Stambulova, and Zemaityte provide us with an in-depth view upon the cultural diversity which exists in the way former elite athletes look back at their athletic retirement. By comparing data from German, Russian, and Lithuanian retired elite athletes, Alfermann and colleagues are able to reveal the main effects of athletes' national identity on the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural consequences of this career transition. This study clearly illustrates the need to look in more detail into the diversity of the quality of the career transition process which exist in view of, among others, athletes' cultural-specific characteristics.

Finally, North and Lavalley acknowledge the need to visit the aims and quality of career transition programs currently provided to athletes by examining not only the pre-retirement career planning among a large sample of elite athletes in the United Kingdom, but also, and more importantly, their relationship with the program as provided in the United Kingdom. Results show clearly that programs, how well established they may already be, must remain attentive to the effectiveness of the services provided to (especially young) athletes who are not yet contemplating their post-retirement careers.

Not only the quality and the diversity of the studies, but especially the contributions of the young professionals from different European countries – Wuerth, Torregrosa, and Cecic-Erpic – confirm the thriving interest among the sport psychology community for the topic of career transitions.

As editors we would like to thank not only our colleagues for contributing, but also the Editorial Board of Psychology of Sport and Exercise for allowing us to present you this special issue on career transitions in sport. We hope that this thematic issue will not only strengthen the current interest for and research in this area in Europe, but that it may also provide a greater understanding of, and awareness for the transition experience and career development of athletes throughout, as well as, after their active participation in the athletic arena.

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