

A hand holding a small globe with a word cloud centered around it. The largest word is 'transition'. Other prominent words include 'future', 'change', 'life', 'challenge', 'planning', 'evolution', 'motivation', 'new', 'goal', 'achievement', 'positive', 'time', 'job', 'past', 'work', 'movement', 'advance', 'business', 'action', 'ideas', 'opportunity', 'lifestyle', 'concept', 'strategy', 'nature', 'way', 'career', 'begin', 'butterfly', 'retirement', 'old', 'compete', 'progress', 'event', 'bike', 'success', 'road', 'run', 'race', 'equipment', 'insect', 'age', 'outdoor', 'forward', 'bicycling', 'management', 'technology', 'vision', 'retire', 'extreme', 'sign', 'transformation', 'competition', 'hope', 'man', 'improvement', 'innovation', 'recreation', 'exercise', 'belief', 'start', 'hand', 'zone', 'development'.

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Introduction and guidance

Introduction and guidance

This free badged course, *The athlete's journey: transitions through sport*, lasts 24 hours, with eight 'sessions'. You can work through the course at your own pace, so if you have more time one week there is no problem with pushing on to complete a further study session. The eight sessions are linked to ensure a logical flow through the course.

They are:

1. The athlete's journey – what are career transitions in sport?
2. Influencing factors – key themes in the athlete's journey
3. Out of the blocks – preparing athletes for career transitions
4. Keeping going – expected transitions in sport
5. Stopped in your tracks – unexpected transitions in sport
6. Spotlight – parenthood and sport
7. The final athletic chapter – retirement from sport
8. Moving on – life after sport.

This course will develop your confidence and skills for online study, whether this is to explore sport and exercise topics or as part of your preparation for other study.

You'll begin in the first two sessions with a general overview of career transitions in sport, drawing on your own experiences and those from case study examples, before moving on to look in more detail at some of the key transitions athletes will face and the associated challenges.

Case studies and audio-visual examples are used to help explain concepts and you'll get plenty of opportunities to demonstrate your new understanding and practise your study skills.

Part of this practice will be the interactive quizzes, of which Sessions 4 and 8 will provide you with an opportunity to earn a badge to demonstrate your new skills. You can read more on how to study the course and about badges in the next sections.

After completing this course, you should be able to:

- understand what career transitions in sport are
- identify the main challenges associated with career transitions in sport
- recognise how best to prepare athletes for career transitions
- identify the impact of different transitional episodes on athletes.

Moving around the course

In the 'Summary' at the end of each session, you will find a link to the next session. If at any time you want to return to the start of the course, click on 'Full course description'. From here you can navigate to any part of the course.

It's also good practice, if you access a link from within a course page (including links to the quizzes), to open it in a new window or tab. That way you can easily return to where you've come from without having to use the back button on your browser.

The Open University would really appreciate a few minutes of your time to tell us about yourself and your expectations for the course before you begin, in our optional [start-of-course survey](#). Participation will be completely confidential and we will not pass on your details to others.

What is a badged course?

While studying *The athlete's journey: transitions through sport*, you have the option to work towards gaining a digital badge.

Badged courses are a key part of The Open University's mission *to promote the educational well-being of the community*. The courses also provide another way of helping you to progress from informal to formal learning.

Completing a course will require about 24 hours of study time. However, you can study the course at any time and at a pace to suit you.

Badged courses are available on The Open University's [OpenLearn](#) website and do not cost anything to study. They differ from Open University courses because you do not receive support from a tutor, but you do get useful feedback from the interactive quizzes.

What is a badge?

Digital badges are a new way of demonstrating online that you have gained a skill. Colleges and universities are working with employers and other organisations to develop open badges that help learners gain recognition for their skills, and support employers to identify the right candidate for a job.

Badges demonstrate your work and achievement on the course. You can share your achievement with friends, family and employers, and on social media. Badges are a great motivation, helping you to reach the end of the course. Gaining a badge often boosts confidence in the skills and abilities that underpin successful study. So, completing this course could encourage you to think about taking other courses.



How to get a badge

Getting a badge is straightforward! Here's what you have to do:

- read each session of the course
- score 50% or more in the two badge quizzes in Session 4 and Session 8.

For all the quizzes, you can have three attempts at most of the questions (for true or false type questions you usually only get one attempt). If you get the answer right first time you will get more marks than for a correct answer the second or third time. Therefore, please be aware that for the two badge quizzes it is possible to get all the questions right but not score 50% and be eligible for the badge on that attempt. If one of your answers is incorrect you will often receive helpful feedback and suggestions about how to work out the correct answer.

For the badge quizzes, if you're not successful in getting 50% the first time, after 24 hours you can reattempt the whole quiz, and come back as many times as you like.

We hope that as many people as possible will gain an Open University badge – so you should see getting a badge as an opportunity to reflect on what you have learned rather than as a test.

If you need more guidance on getting a badge and what you can do with it, take a look at the [OpenLearn FAQs](#). When you gain your badge you will receive an email to notify you and you will be able to view and manage all your badges in [My OpenLearn](#) within 24 hours of completing the criteria to gain a badge.

Get started with [Session 1](#).

Session 1: The athlete's journey – what are career transitions in sport?

Introduction



Regardless of whether an athlete competes at a recreational or elite level, they will potentially face a wide range of 'transitions' as they progress through their sporting career. A 'transition' represents a period of change for an athlete which results in a new set of demands for them to manage, for example, at entry into sport, on changing competitive level, and at retirement. Transitions can be categorised as those that are planned (normative), such as the move to senior level, to those that are unplanned and sudden (non-normative), for example injury or unanticipated deselection (Stambulova, 2010).

In this first session, you will learn more about the different career transitions that athletes may experience as well as why this is an important area to study for anyone involved in sport.

By the end of this session you should be able to:

- define and identify the range of different career transitions an athlete may experience
- apply the athletic career transition model to individual experiences
- understand the psychological nature of transitions.

Before you start, The Open University would really appreciate a few minutes of your time to tell us about yourself and your expectations of the course. Your input will help to further improve the online learning experience. If you'd like to help, and if you haven't done so already, please fill in this optional [start-of-course survey](#). Participation will be completely confidential and we will not pass on your details to others.

1 What are transitions?

Before you begin to investigate the more in-depth psychological implications related to transitions, let's first look at the range of transitions an athlete may experience during their journey through sport. This first activity introduces you to the course authors, Candice Lingam-Willgoss and Caroline Heaney, as they discuss their own personal experiences of transitions in sport.

Activity 1 Real people and real lives

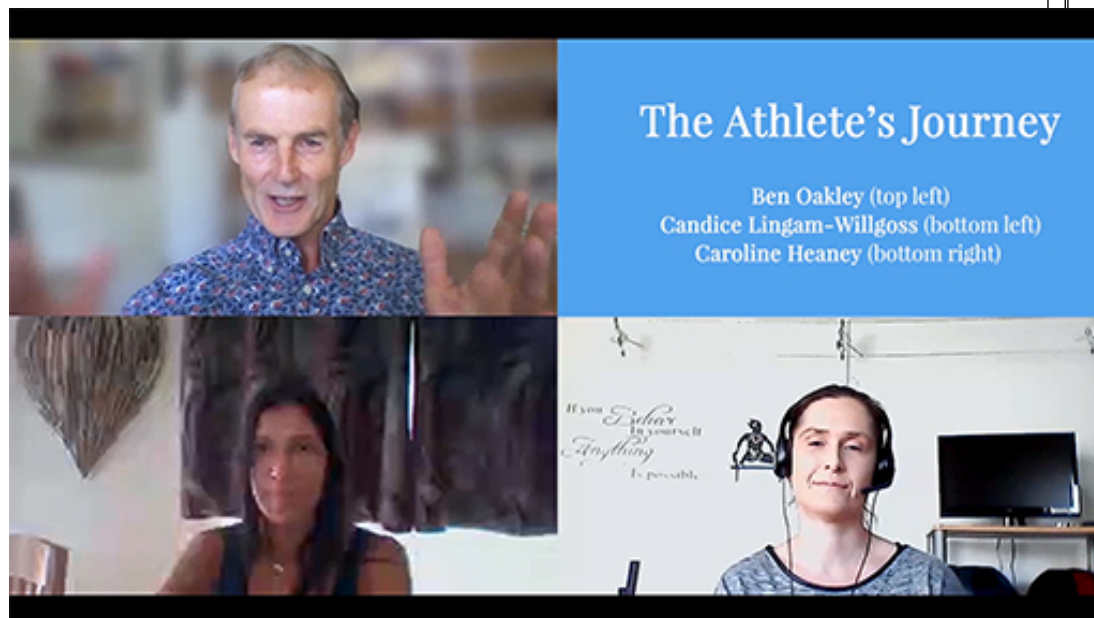
Allow about 30 minutes

Both Candice and Caroline were highly committed to their chosen sports, in fact, one of the reasons they wanted to write this course was due to their own personal experiences of transitions in sport. Watch the video below and make notes on the following points:

- What were the differences and similarities in Candice's and Caroline's pathways into their chosen sports?
- What transitions have they both experienced?
- Note down the psychological impact of the transitions they experienced.
- Why did they retire from sport?

Video content is not available in this format.

Video 1



Discussion

As you listen to Candice and Caroline talk, you will have noticed how both still maintain involvement in sport and still identify closely with being an athlete. Both have

experiences in very different sports and performance settings and retired at different ages.

Unlike many sports that you are introduced to at school, Candice's first experience of her sport was through her family. She experienced a range of different transitions quite early on, from joining a ski team at 12 years old and finding herself in a high-performance setting at a very early age. She also reflects how, in the six years she competed, she had to grow up very quickly and spend a large proportion of her time away from home from a young age. While no one injury caused her to retire, she was skiing in pain a lot of the time and was quite realistic about the opportunity to 'make it' as a skier.

Candice's story is in contrast to the relatively late transition into sport experienced by Caroline who didn't join an athletics club until she was 16, something she reflects may have resulted in her having such a long career. Another difference is how Caroline refers to having a 'phased retirement', first retiring from hurdling and then from 400m/800m flat running. It is very clear she still misses competing on the track.

In the last activity you learned about the different transitions Candice and Caroline have made in their sporting journeys. Other transitions that athletes may experience throughout their sporting life, and which you will explore in the rest of this course, are shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1 What transitions do athletes face?

You will explore both normative and non-normative transitions in more detail in Sessions 4 and 5.

You have now heard about the authors' experiences of transitions in sport. Next, you will reflect on your own transitions or those of someone you coach or are closely associated with.

2 Your experiences of transitions in sport



Most people have their first engagement with sport at school, or at school age, when they are introduced to 'traditional' school sports. For example, in the UK, these may include athletics, netball and football. As such, the entry phase into sport tends to occur in childhood as children 'sample' a range of different sports (Côté, 1999). From this initial entry phase into sport, people go on to have different relationships and experiences associated with sport whether through participation or, in some cases, as a career. What transitions have you experienced so far?

Activity 2 Your journey so far

Allow about 15 minutes

Whether you are still involved in sport or have been in the past, reflect on the experiences you have had and consider the following questions:

- Where was your first experience of your sport?
- What motivated you to continue with it?
- Within these experiences, what would you identify as being transitions?

Discussion

While it's common to have your first experience of sport at primary school there are also instances when you may have been introduced outside of the school environment, like Candice.

Motivations for involvement can vary and are often multi-faceted. For example, you may have noted that you played your sport because your friends did and it was fun. But it could be that you had a parent who played the sport too, or maybe you were inspired by a professional in that sport. Whatever the reason, you will have had different motivations for wanting to be involved.

Depending on what stage you are at in your sporting journey, you will have experienced different transitions. If you are only at the start of your journey, your experiences may be more limited, such as your entry into sport and perhaps moving to playing at a higher level. If, however, you have completed your sporting career, you will probably have lots of transitional experiences and may even have moved into coaching or supporting your child.

Through hearing the stories of the course authors and reflecting on your own experiences, you will be starting to see that the sporting journey is often unique to each individual and characterised by different events.

While it is often easy to identify a transitional period, the challenge can come when trying to make sense of how an athlete experiences it, as often a 'one size fits all' approach is too limiting. Every athlete will have different emotional and psychological reactions to their experiences. Talking to each and every athlete about their experiences is obviously one method of understanding their world, but it is also important to look more broadly at the topic of transitions in sport. One way to do this is to read the work of researchers who have examined the topic in more detail, something you will look at later in this session.

However, before you consider research within this field it is important to take a brief look at the theory that underpins the area. Developing an appreciation of relevant theory is very useful when looking at a new area, and in the case of transitions it can help you understand how and why athletes experience transitions in different ways.

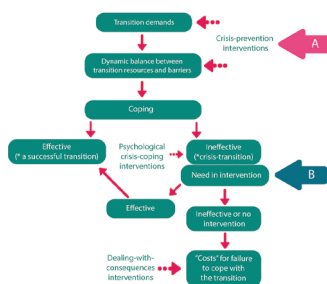
3 The athletic career transition model

At times, theory can seem removed from practice, but theory can allow us to develop a better understanding of a concept and help predict what may happen in different situations.

Within the topic of career transitions, various frameworks have been used to explain the athlete's journey. Perhaps the most useful theory when it comes to exploring transitions is the 'athletic career transition model' (Alfermann and Stambulova, 2007). This model views a career transition as a process that creates a potential conflict between *what the athlete is* and *what the athlete wants to be*, which requires a coping response. This coping response is either effective, leading to a successful transition, or ineffective, leading to a difficult ('crisis') transition. Video 2 shows the different stages of the athletic career transition model and the points at which intervention (which you will learn about in more detail later) can occur to increase the chances of a successful experience.

Video content is not available in this format.

Video 2



This model is helpful as it allows some predictions to be made in terms of how successful a transition will be for an athlete, something you look at in the next activity.

Activity 3 Applying the athletic career transition model

Allow about 20 minutes

Read the case study below and consider how the athletic career transition model could be applied:

- to help describe Jack's experience of his transition so far, and
- to help Jack experience an effective transition.

Jack is a talented young rugby player who has recently secured a contract at a professional rugby club. The club is 70 miles away from Jack's home town and, a few weeks after moving, Jack is feeling very homesick. This is the first time he has lived away from his parents and he is feeling isolated and lonely. He is also finding his new training regime very daunting. He is training more frequently and intensely than he has previously and has doubts about his ability to cope with life at his new club.

Discussion

In applying the athletic career transition model to this case study you may have felt that there is potentially an imbalance between Jack's transition resources and the transition barriers he is facing, resulting in him finding it difficult to cope with the move to a new club (i.e. the barriers outweigh the resources).

Applying the model could help Jack to experience a successful transition. If someone – perhaps a coach – at Jack's new club recognised that he was experiencing a crisis transition they could apply an intervention – for example, speak to a psychologist – to help him develop his coping skills. (Interventions to help athletes cope with career transitions are discussed later in this course). Failure to apply an intervention to help Jack cope with the transition could have several 'costs' for him, such as under-performance, anxiety or, if things were to develop, depression.

You have been introduced to only one model within this section but you should already be able to see how even a relatively simple model can help give you more insight into athletic transitions.

In the final section of Session 1, you will start to look at some of the components raised in the athletic career transition model and how research has sought to develop our understanding of this topic.

4 What does the research say about transitions?

Your exploration of the athletic career transition model has shown you how an athlete's experience of transition can be influenced at several points and that they need to manage different emotional and psychological challenges at various stages.

In recent years, researchers have started to move towards a more holistic approach to understand how athletes experience and cope with transitions. However, it is worth noting that much of the research still focuses on the impact of the final athletic transition, retirement (Ekengren *et al.*, 2018). Table 1 introduces a variety of studies into a range of career transitions which illustrate not only why this is an important area to study but also several of the topics you will look at later in this course.

Table 1 Research into career transitions in sport

Study	Main findings
Samuel and Tenenbaum (2011)	Athletes experience a variety of change events and the way they react can be influenced by factors such as the level of competition and their identity. These would be known as ' individual responses '.
Fairlie <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Maintaining a sport/life balance is important if transitions are to be positive especially retirement.
Park <i>et al.</i> (2013)	Readiness for retirement is a key factor in how well an athlete will cope with the transition, and by selecting the right interventions at the right time experiences will be positive.
Knights <i>et al.</i> (2016)	There are potentially positive outcomes in relation to transitions within and out of sport and the experience is not always negative.
Brown <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Social support remains fundamental to positive transitions but athletes can often find it hard to ask for support.
Giannone <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Higher athletic identity was a potential risk factor for developing certain psychiatric symptoms such as depression and anxiety.
Torregrosa <i>et al.</i> (2015)	A study with elite swimmers found the voluntary nature of retirement and available social support were all precursors of a positive retirement experience. In contrast, involuntary termination, lack of planning, and a one-dimensional identity could result in a more problematic transition.

The findings discussed in Table 1 all link closely to the topics you will cover in the rest of this course.

5 This session's quiz

Now that you've completed Session 1, you can take a short quiz to help you to reflect on what you've learned.

Open the quiz in a new tab or window by holding down Ctrl (or Cmd on a Mac) when you click on the link. Return here when you have finished.

[Session 1 quiz.](#)

6 Summary of Session 1

This session has introduced the concept of career transitions in sport by examining athlete experiences, the athlete career transition model and relevant research within this area.

The key learning points from this first session are:

- Career transitions can be classified as normative (predictable) or non-normative (unpredictable).
- Transitions can cause a range of physical, emotional and psychological reactions.
- The athletic career transition model (Alfermann and Stambulova, 2007) provides a clear framework to help understand how athletes may experience transitions.

Before you start to look at each transition in more detail, you will explore some of the key factors that can influence an athlete's experience of transition.

You should now go to [Session 2](#).

Session 2: Influencing factors – key themes in the athlete's journey

Introduction



While all transitions carry with them unique challenges for the athlete, it is important to understand what factors play a part in influencing these experiences. If you think back to Activity 1 in Session 1, Candice and Caroline both experienced a wide range of transitions but the way they responded and managed them was quite different. In this session, you will examine some of the factors that can influence the way an athlete manages their journey and which can ultimately have a bearing on their overall athletic development. Before you begin, watch the short video below where former England hockey player Alex Danson introduces you to her thoughts on the key themes in her own athlete journey.

Video content is not available in this format.

Video 1



By the end of this session you should be able to:

- understand the main psychological challenges that career transitions present
- recognise the factors that can influence an athlete's adaptation to transition.

1 What factors influence transitions?

While the potential psychological impact of career transitions depends to some extent on the type of transition and on the individual athlete concerned, there are several key factors that reoccur when studying what may influence an athlete's response. You are introduced to these in the next activity.

Activity 1 Transitions and the psychological impact

Allow about 30 minutes

Watch Video 2 below where you will hear five athletes talk about their experiences of having their careers cut short and going into retirement. Note down what you think could have influenced their experiences.

Video content is not available in this format.

Video 2

CAREER TRANSITION & MENTAL HEALTH

Discussion

As you watched the video, you will probably have noted several themes discussed by the athletes. Both Clarke Carlisle (football) and Alex Scott (football) discuss the challenge of no longer being footballers and recognise they suffered a loss of **identity**. This loss of identity links closely to the **level** at which these athletes competed, as they potentially have much more at stake – something Ollie Phillips (rugby) alludes to when discussing the loss of adulation and income.

What nearly all of the athletes recognised was the importance of **preparing** for a life after sport. Alex Scott, Luke Harvey (jockey) and Matt Machan (cricket) all highlighted how a career in sport is relatively short so having a plan for a second career is crucial. Having the right **support** around you to do this is also key.

A final point links to the **different sports** that each athlete was involved in and whether that had an influence on their reactions to retirement.

Activity 1 clearly identifies five factors that can influence an athlete's experience of transition and these are illustrated in Figure 1.

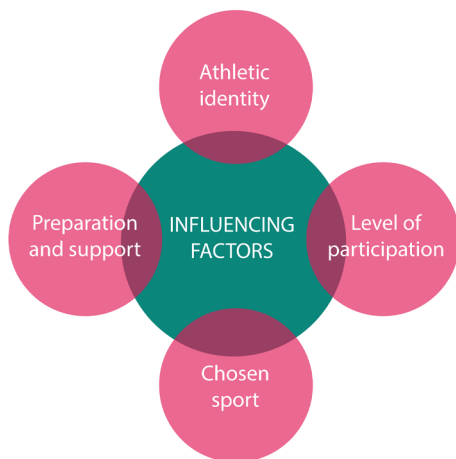


Figure 1 Influencing factors on athlete transitions in sport

These factors will form the focus of the rest of this session.

2 Athletic identity: who am I?

As Alex Scott discussed in Activity 1, she had always been 'Alex Scott, the footballer'. This is known as athletic identity and is 'the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role' (Brewer *et al.*, 1993, p. 237).

Athletic identity can have a significant bearing on how an athlete copes with the transitions they may face in their career and underpins many of the psychological and emotional reactions they might experience. You will hear more about this in the next activity where Dr Josie Perry, a Chartered Sport Psychologist, talks more about why identity and transitions are so inextricably linked.

Activity 2 Athletic identity and transitions

Allow about 35 minutes

Part 1

Watch the following video and as you listen to Josie talk about identity make notes on the following points:

- What are some of the positives Josie notes about having a strong athletic identity?
- What can be the negative implications of a strong athletic identity?
- What did the research Josie discussed note about professional athletes and retirement?
- What are some of the practical implications that Josie talks about when it comes to managing athletic identity?

Video content is not available in this format.

Video 3



Discussion

- Josie mentions how having a strong athletic identity can result in an athlete being highly focused, determined and motivated.
- The negative impact was discussed in relation to injury and how, when an athlete has a strong identity, they can suffer a range of negative emotions if they can no longer fulfil this identity.
- The research conducted by the BBC noted that up to 50% of professional athletes reported symptoms of depression in retirement largely down to not having a passion for something else. This further illustrates the impact a strong athletic identity can have.
- Some of the practical implications that Josie mentioned very much focused on encouraging the athlete to develop a more rounded identity so that if their athletic identity were to be disrupted they had something else to fall back on. This point is not just pertinent for sport psychologists but also for anyone who interacts with performers, for example, coaches, parents and fellow athletes. Encouraging a rounded identity is important and doesn't need to be a distraction from an athlete's sport if managed appropriately.

Part 2

Whether or not you are an athlete, you will still have more than one identity even if some identities feel more prominent than others. Think about the various different spheres of your own life – for example, your professional, family, social, sporting or cultural spheres. Then break down each sphere in order to work out just how many different roles you play.

One way of doing this would be to draw a mind map to describe your identity. Take a look at an example of the different roles Candice thinks she has in Figure 2, and then complete your own mind map to describe your identity.

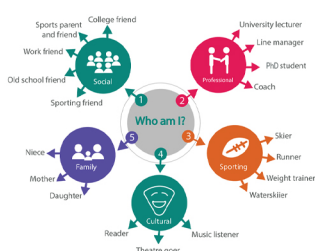


Figure 2 Mind map to represent the different roles that make up Candice's identity

Discussion

By reflecting on the different identities you have, you should have started to see how everyone juggles different roles. You may have noted identities related to your work, being a parent, the sport you play or coach, the other hobbies you partake in or even as a learner on this course. What is important to recognise is that even if you are an athlete with a strong athletic identity you will still have other roles in your life. As Josie explained in Part 1, these different roles can be extremely useful during transitional phases in sport to help athletes 'still feel like themselves'.

Those with a strong athletic identity will define themselves almost exclusively in the athlete role (unidimensional), while someone with a weaker athletic identity might define themselves in a wider range of roles, for example athlete, parent, business person and so on (multidimensional). You will look at how a unidimensional athletic identity can be challenged when facing a transition in more detail next.

2.1 How athletic identity affects responses to transitions

Identity has a significant impact on the way athletes experience transition. As you learned in Activity 2, those with a high level of athletic identity may have more difficulty adjusting to transitions, in particular to unplanned (non-normative) experiences (Cosh *et al.*, 2015). In the next activity you will hear first-hand about the impact an unplanned transition can have on athletic identity.

Activity 3 A changing stage: from football to Dr Who

Allow about 20 minutes

Listen to the short audio excerpt below from the BBC's *Desert Island Discs* in which Matt Smith talks about his experience as a young footballer with the potential to turn professional. As you listen, note down the impact the transitional episode discussed had on both his identity and the identity of those around him.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio 1

Discussion

While Matt has gone on to have a hugely successful career in acting including a stint as Dr Who, he still remembers how tough the period was when he was dropped from Leicester City FC. Matt reflected on how hard he found it to tell people about being let go from his football club as he was always 'Matt the footballer'. He remembers it being a time filled with uncertainty largely due to the fact that being a footballer was his only career plan at the time.

You will probably have also noted that the interviewer raises the impact this had on his father whose identity was as the father of a footballer. Those of you who are parents of athletes may empathise with this.

You will re-visit identity again in some of the later sessions. You will now look at the next of the factors affecting how an athlete responds to transitions – that is, the level at which they compete.

3 Level of participation



As Ollie Phillips (rugby) touched on in Activity 1, athletes who compete at a higher level (e.g. full time Olympic level athletes) arguably have more at stake since sport is their income. They are also likely to have a strong athletic identity. Furthermore, elite athletes tend to have a greater number of transitional events to navigate during their career, for example moving to a higher level, injury, deselection and changes in public perception (Samuel and Tenenbaum, 2011). These events all provide opportunity for disruption in their athletic career and require the ability to adapt and adjust.

However, it could equally be argued that lower level athletes face greater challenges negotiating transitions. One reason for this is because lower level athletes are more likely to have to juggle multiple roles and identities. While in the previous section you saw how this could help when coping with transitions – as less of your identity would be 'lost' or affected – multiple identities can take focus away from what needs attention. Take, for example, Caroline, who you met in Session 1, Video 1. Caroline as a club-level athlete found it difficult to deal with injury on top of her other roles, which she balanced with being an athlete.

Another reason lower level athletes may face more difficulties in transitions is because of a lack of support available to them. Jewett *et al.* (2019) looked at the experiences of university level athletes and reported that when the athlete left university and lost the support and status that came with being recognised as an athlete, they were vulnerable to several mental health challenges. This echoes the stories of the professional athletes that you heard from in Activity 1 and further illustrates how athletes of all levels can experience challenges navigating transitions in sport. You will look at the importance of support in more detail in Section 5.

While level of participation may not be a clear factor when it comes to distinguishing how athletes cope with transitions, there do seem to be some differences when the experiences of athletes from different sports are considered.

4 Is 'type of sport' relevant?



So far you have looked at the impact that identity and level of participation may have on the way an athlete copes with transitions. But, with one sport so different from the next, does the type of sport played have an influence?

Within a team sports setting, Lagimodiere and Strachan (2015) compared the experiences of male hockey and rugby players and concluded that even within similar types of sport the transition experience can be very different especially in relation to social support networks both pre and post retirement. Within an individual sports setting, Clowes *et al.* (2015) looked at the transition experiences of elite female gymnasts. You look at their research in the next activity.

Activity 4 Transitions in gymnastics

Allow about 30 minutes

Read the short summary of the study that Clowes *et al.* (2015) carried out and consider the following questions:

- What were the authors' main findings connected to the experiences of the gymnasts?
- What differences do you think you may see when comparing transitions in gymnastics to other sports and why?

[Research summary](#)

Discussion

The research findings suggest that gymnasts represent a vulnerable group in terms of their susceptibility to negative transitional experiences, notably retirement from sport. The authors conclude that, in part, the organisational structure of high level gymnastics is one which presents a number of unique challenges such as the early age that these athletes reach elite level. This often results in unequal power in the coach-athlete relationship which can culminate in the development of a unidimensional identity. This can be further enforced by the coach trying to reduce any other distractions for their athletes so they have a sole focus on their sport. A subsequent effect of this is that the athlete may only have support from within that sporting set up, meaning that when they leave that environment, they also leave their main or only support network.

One key difference for other sports is that often the elite level isn't reached until much later and the athlete may have had the chance to develop a more rounded support network. Furthermore, the longevity of a career in other sports may reduce the pressure that an athlete feels. You may have also noted that other sports have a

stronger social set up connected to them, for example in a team sport, which may allow reduced feelings of isolation during transition.

The findings of the Clowes *et al.* (2015) study reflect how within a sport with a lower peak age of performance there are potentially different challenges for athletes to negotiate. The study also reflects the importance of social support networks. This is the final influencing factor that you will look at in this session.

5 Preparation and support

Several of the athletes you have met so far, such as Alex Scott in Activity 1, have alluded to preparation and support being closely associated with more positive transitions. As you may remember from the athletic career transition model (Alfermann and Stambulova, 2007) in Session 1, support can be a form of intervention. Put simply, if an athlete is prepared and supported they are likely to cope and experience a much smoother transition. You have already seen that non-normative transitions (e.g. injury) are often more psychologically challenging than normative transitions (e.g. developmental changes in level) as they are not planned for.

Preparation coupled with the right support allows the individual to develop coping strategies to deal with the impending transition (Park *et al.*, 2013). In the next activity you will hear from former England rugby player Duncan Bell who talks about what can happen when you don't prepare or have the right support network in place.

Activity 5 Feeling alone

Allow about 20 minutes

Watch the video below where former England and Bath rugby player Duncan Bell reflects on his retirement. As you watch, consider what other athletes could learn from Duncan's experience.

Video content is not available in this format.

Video 4

DUNCAN BELL: TRANSITION

Discussion

Duncan's story is far from unique with many retired athletes having quite negative experiences. Duncan reflects on how he felt isolated at this point in his life, losing the

support of his wife as he went through a divorce and also reporting that he didn't feel he could reach out for support.

A key point for athletes to learn is that they should ensure they ask for support and forge relationships and networks while they are still playing as this can help the transition process.

In this course, you will see many references to people who may 'support athletes'. This support is not just provided by coaches, but can also come from parents, friends, family members or indeed fellow athletes.

The support mentioned by Duncan in the last activity can be highly tangible such as the recruitment consultant he mentioned or perhaps a sport psychologist or performance lifestyle advisor. The importance of developing a more far reaching support network outside of sport is something supported by Warriner and Lavalley (2008). They concluded that the negative impact of losing relationships that were based in sport can be mediated if social circles are developed outside of sport. In turn this can facilitate a more positive adjustment to life outside sport. Another important point raised in the activity was how often athletes don't feel comfortable asking for support, suggesting there is still a stigma attached to it (Brown *et al.*, 2018). You will look at the importance of preparation more in Session 3.

6 Reflecting on your own experience of transitions

As you reach the end of this session, it is a good point to reflect on what you have learned about transitions so far and how you relate to this.

Activity 6 Your reflections on what influences transitions

Allow about 20 minutes

Reflect on what you have covered in this session by answering the questions below. Only answer the questions that are relevant to your role – whether you are an athlete or someone supporting an athlete.

If you are an athlete ...

1. What factors do you think have influenced your experience of transitions in sport?
2. What impact did these factors have on you and how did you cope?
3. Having studied this session what is the main point you will take away?

If you are someone supporting an athlete (or athletes) ...

1. What factors do you think influence the transitions of those you support the most?
2. What coping strategies do you think the athletes you work with use?
3. Based on what you have learned in this session what is the main point you will take away?

Discussion

Your reflections will be very personal to your own situation and experiences, but below are the brief reflections of former 200m runner Raja in response to these questions.

1. The level I competed at and my identity were definitely big factors for me. I remember turning up at the track at club training and everyone would turn and look as I was the best runner there, the only guy to make the national squad. It was who I was, Raja the sprinter. The newer athletes looked up to me, I loved how that felt. I remember going back a few years ago to help coach a session and no-one knew who I was anymore!
2. I think the biggest impact was when I decided to retire from athletics, but I was already doing a bit of coaching so had a plan in place. I knew that was what I wanted to go into. It allowed me to stay in the sport and my support and social network didn't really change as I was still around the same people. It was what made it all pretty positive for me that I had things in place.
3. I think one of the main things I have learned is that everyone's experience is different, just because my experience was positive it doesn't mean everyone's will be. I was lucky I had systems in place, but I have seen others who didn't. They didn't have a coaching focus and as such when they had an injury or retired, they really didn't know what to do with themselves.

7 This session's quiz

Now that you've completed Session 2, you can take a short quiz to help you to reflect on what you've learned.

Open the quiz in a new tab or window by holding down Ctrl (or Cmd on a Mac) when you click on the link. Return here when you have finished.

[Session 2 quiz.](#)

8 Summary of Session 2

In this session you have started to look at four key factors that can influence the transitions an athlete will experience during their career.

The key learning points from this second session are:

- The quality of the transitions an athlete experiences will be influenced largely by the strength of their athletic identity.
- The level an athlete competes at can influence their psychological reactions to transition.
- Careful planning and preparation as well as the right support network may lead to smoother transitions.
- Experiences may be influenced by the athlete's sport.

In the next session, you will start to explore more about how to prepare athletes for transitions and hear more about the role that performance lifestyle planning plays in elite level sport.

You should now go to [Session 3](#).

Session 3: Out of the blocks – preparing athletes for career transitions

Introduction



In Session 2 you explored the challenges of career transitions in sport and the factors that can influence an athlete's transition experiences. In this session you will examine how best to prepare athletes to cope with these experiences and progress through career transitions as smoothly as possible. In doing this you will investigate the experiences of athletes who have engaged with programmes designed to help them develop these skills and reflect on what strategies are most effective to help athletes. You will also reflect on your own sporting career (or that of an athlete you support) and consider how to plan for any career transitions that might be experienced in the future.

By the end of this session you should be able to:

- recognise the need for athletes to develop the skills to prepare for and cope with career transitions
- understand how best to prepare athletes for a range of different career transitions
- identify the role that performance lifestyle planning can play in supporting the athlete.

1 The need for a life outside sport

As you saw in Session 2, research has shown that having a strong athletic identity can make some career transitions such as retirement or injury more difficult (e.g. Murdock *et al.*, 2016). It was suggested that athletes should develop aspects of their life outside sport to help them cope with future transitions. You will explore this further in the next activity.

Activity 1 Life outside sport

Allow about 25 minutes

Watch the two videos below in which Hannah Cockcroft (athletics) and Nekoda Smythe-Davis (judo) talk about the importance of developing a life outside sport. As you watch, make a note of the areas of their lives they developed beyond competing in their sports and the benefits they felt they gained from doing so. Then think about how this might impact on you or any athletes you support – what might you do differently having watched these videos?

Video content is not available in this format.

Video 1



Video content is not available in this format.

Video 2



Discussion

Hannah felt that it was important to develop her life outside sport and spoke about education, media work and socialising as examples of areas she had developed. She felt that these have helped her grow as a person and allow her to switch off from the pressure of sport. She also felt that this would help her to be better prepared for retirement in the future.

Similar to Hannah, Nekoda spoke about the importance of developing her education and broadening her life experiences. She discussed several benefits of this including preparation for life after sport and skill development. She also noted the importance of being able to switch off from sport and stated that she 'would go stir-crazy' without other things in her life!

As you saw in previous sessions, there is evidence to support the perspective of these athletes. Research such as Brewer and Petitpas (2017) and Torregrosa *et al.* (2015) suggest that athletes who develop a 'multidimensional identity' cope better with transitions and tend to perform better than athletes who have a 'unidimensional identity'. In a multidimensional identity, athletes develop different aspects of their identity – such as athlete *and* student – whereas those with a unidimensional identity concentrate on developing *only* their athletic identity.

If you are an athlete yourself or involved in supporting athletes, it is important to take note of this. For example, if you are a coach you might find it useful to talk to your athletes about developing their identity beyond sport and encourage them to develop other interests.

The videos you have just watched are part of the English Institute of Sport (EIS) [#More2Me campaign](#) launched in 2019 to help athletes develop a better sport–life balance. This campaign is part of their performance lifestyle programme. You will explore performance lifestyle next.

2 Performance lifestyle

In recognition of the challenges that career transitions in sport can bring about, it is now commonplace for elite level athletes to have access to 'athlete lifestyle' or 'performance lifestyle' programmes to help them to prepare for the transitions they will face. The athletes in Activity 1 both referred to the performance lifestyle support they received from the English Institute of Sport (EIS) and cited this as helping them to develop their life outside their sports.

Performance lifestyle can be defined as 'tailored, individualised coaching, mentoring and counselling services that support performance athletes, coaches and key personnel in all aspects of an athlete's life – ensuring they successfully manage the transitions, challenges and choices encountered within the performance environment and in life away from sport' (Sport Scotland, 2018). The video below explores the role of a performance lifestyle advisor.

Video content is not available in this format.

Video 3



In the next activity you will reflect on the benefits of performance lifestyle programmes for athletes.

Activity 2 Preparing for life after sport

Allow about 30 minutes

Watch Video 4 which explores some research undertaken by David Lavalley (2019) on performance lifestyle. As you watch the video make a list of the benefits for athletes engaging in performance lifestyle programmes, and then think about how you could apply principles of these programmes to your own situation (as an athlete, coach or parent).

View at: [youtube:vytlL5pdem5M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ytlL5pdem5M)

Video 4

Discussion

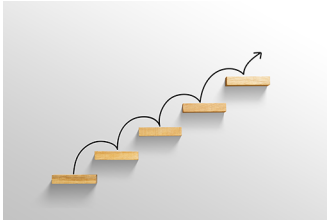
Performance lifestyle programmes are believed to be effective in helping athletes to prepare for career transitions. For example, in his study of rugby league players which is discussed in Video 4, Lavalée found that players who engaged with pre-retirement planning support services were not only better prepared for career transitions, but also derived performance advantages such as being more likely to be selected for teams or having longer careers. It was suggested that performance gains might be due to the players having fewer concerns about the future, resulting in greater levels of satisfaction and enhanced capacity to focus on their sports performance. In the video, Lavalée suggests that this holistic approach to developing athletes – which focuses on athlete welfare and wellbeing – is superior to a ‘win at all costs’ approach as it still leads to winning and successful performance.

It is important to note that while only high level athletes tend to have access to performance lifestyle programmes, that doesn’t mean that lower level athletes should miss out. Transitions are still highly significant for these athletes too and similar support should be offered by significant others around these athletes, such as coaches, parents or teammates.

If you are one of these significant others you can incorporate principles from the programmes in the videos into your own practice by speaking to your athletes about the importance of preparing for transitions in their sporting careers and developing their identity outside sport. You may, for example, encourage an athlete to look at local college or university courses or encourage them to socialise with friends when not training or get a part-time job. Telling athletes that developing their identity outside sport can actually improve their performance – as shown in Lavalée’s (2019) research – could well be a good motivation!

These programmes are all about preparing athletes for transition and developing plans to cope. In the next section you will investigate in more detail what developing a career transition plan might involve.

3 The five-step career planning strategy



In Session 1 you were introduced to the athletic career transition model (Alfermann and Stambulova, 2007). This model suggests that athletes will either experience a successful (positive) transition or a crisis (negative) transition (Stambulova, 2017). In order to help athletes develop the coping skills required to move successfully through career transitions, frameworks such as the five-step career planning strategy (Stambulova, 2010) have been developed.

You will explore this planning strategy using the case study of Larissa, a 23 year old full time swimmer who is working through the five steps with her sport psychologist Ravi. Other athletes may work through these steps on their own or with another person such as a coach, parent or performance lifestyle advisor.

Box 1 The five steps

Step 1: Create a framework

In this first step Larissa is asked to draw a timeline of her life, divided into past, present and future.

Step 2: Structure your past

Larissa then adds and describes the most important events that have happened in her life (sporting and non-sporting) to the 'past' section of her timeline. She identifies various events including key competitions she has won, moving away from home to train with her current coach and leaving school. Ravi asks her questions to help her think about these key events.

Step 3: Structure your present

In this third step Larissa identifies the most important aspects in her life currently. She identifies 'sport, family and friends' and after discussing them with Ravi ranks each of these on three different scales:

- i. the subjective importance of each aspect (e.g. how important does she feel her family are)
- ii. the time spent on each aspect (e.g. how much time does she spend with her family in a typical week), and
- iii. the stress levels associated with each aspect (e.g. how much stress do her family cause her).

The purpose of this step is to help Larissa analyse the balance she has in her life. It makes her realise that almost everything she does in her life currently is focused on swimming.

Step 4: Structure your future

Larissa is now encouraged to think about the future and consider what important events she expects to occur in different aspects of her life over the next 1, 3, 5 and 10 years and her entire life. This encourages her to identify how long she imagines her career will last and what events are most likely to be prioritised following retirement from sport.

Larissa has very clear goals for what she wants to achieve in her sport over the next 1–5 years and doesn't expect to be competing after that. But she hasn't put a huge amount of thought into what she might do after she stops competing, although she thinks she could be a good coach.

Step 5: Bridge your past, present and future

This step is divided into three sub-steps (5a, 5b and 5c) that Larissa works through with Ravi.

- Step 5a directs Larissa from the present to the past and gets her to focus on the successes and difficulties she faced, as well as the skills and lessons gained. This helps Larissa to identify the skills she has developed on her journey so far and reminds her of what she has achieved.
- Step 5b directs Larissa from the present to the future and asks her to develop goals and identify goal achievement strategies and potential barriers. Larissa reflects on what she needs to work on with her coach to achieve her swimming goals and also what she needs to do to become a swimming coach.
- The final step 5c moves from the future to the present and focuses on how Larissa can balance her current and future priorities. This encourages her to plan ahead as well as plan for the present. As a result, she makes a decision to look into part-time and distance learning sports coaching degrees that she could fit around her training.

Activity 3 Evaluating the five-step career plan

Allow about 20 minutes

Having read the five-step career planning strategy in Box 1 reflect on how useful you think it would be to an athlete like Larissa. If you are an athlete yourself or if you support athletes, you may also like to reflect on how useful you think it would be to you. As you do this think about the potential strengths and weaknesses of the strategy.

Discussion

Stambulova (2010) reported that the five-step career planning strategy is perceived as effective by both athletes and practitioners.

You may have reflected that it could be a useful tool to help you or the athletes you support think about and plan for future moves. It appeared to be a useful tool to help Larissa think about her career so far and plan ahead for future transitions and life after sport. It encouraged her to start preparing now for a future career in coaching, something she hadn't thought about until creating and discussing her timeline.

A strength of the strategy is that it can encourage an individual to start thinking about and preparing for future transitions, and this preparation can help an athlete experience a positive rather than crisis transition.

A potential limitation of the strategy is that its success depends on the skill of the person supporting the athlete to ask the right questions to help them delve deeper into their world and consider future transitions. For this reason, professionals such as performance lifestyle advisors and sport psychologists are well placed to support athletes through the five-step strategy. However, as you saw earlier, not all athletes will have access to these professionals and may instead utilise the support of another person.

So far in this session you have explored the importance of preparing for career transitions to ensure they go smoothly. In the next section you'll look at other ways to help career transitions go smoothly.

4 Other strategies: coping with the unexpected



So far in this session you have explored how planning and preparation can be an effective strategy for helping athletes cope with transition. However, as you considered in Session 1, some career transitions can be unexpected and consequently difficult to plan for. So, what other strategies can help facilitate a smooth transition? You will try to answer this in the next activity.

Activity 4 Academy reject

Allow about 30 minutes

Read the article

[Football's biggest issue: the struggle facing boys rejected by academies](#), which outlines some of the difficulties faced by young players dropped by football academies. Now imagine you are supporting Max, an 18 year old footballer who has recently been dropped by the academy team that he played for. Max felt that he had been playing well and so was not expecting this news. He is struggling to accept the decision and come to terms with the transition to a new, possibly lower level, club. What would you recommend to help support Max through this transition?

Discussion

There are a wide range of strategies that you might have identified that could help Max through the transition. Based on what you have covered so far in this course you might have thought about other options available to Max such as playing for a new team, education or work.

Alternatively, you might have thought about psychological strategies. Strategies that have received research support and that could help Max include (Wylleman, Alfermann and Lavallee, 2004):

- counselling
- cognitive restructuring (e.g. replacing negative thoughts with positive ones)
- stress management techniques
- projective techniques (e.g. where an individual projects their thoughts and feelings onto an imaginary person or situation), and
- mentoring.

Max may benefit from working with a mentor who has perhaps been through a similar experience in the past. Hallmann *et al.* (2019) suggest that mentors can support

athletes through career transitions by fulfilling several roles such as providing social support and being a role model.

Wylleman, Alfermann and Lavallee (2004) suggest that over the years the focus of helping athletes to cope with transition has moved away from traditional therapeutic approaches aimed at coping with the negative effects of transition. Instead, the focus has shifted to more holistic programmes, such as performance lifestyle programmes, which are aimed at preparation for transition and skill development. Career transitions are an inevitable part of the athlete's journey through sport and it is important that athletes are prepared for these transitions and develop the skills to cope with them and thrive.

5 This session's quiz

Now that you've completed Session 3, you can take a short quiz to help you to reflect on what you've learned.

Open the quiz in a new tab or window by holding down Ctrl (or Cmd on a Mac) when you click on the link. Return here when you have finished.

[Session 3 quiz.](#)

6 Summary of Session 3

In this session you have explored how to prepare athletes to cope with the career transitions that they will inevitably face.

The key learning points from this third session are:

- There is strong evidence to suggest that preparation eases the psychological stresses associated with career transitions.
- Performance lifestyle programmes and similar services have been developed to support high level athletes. Those not able to access such services can still benefit from some of the ideas and planning strategies that are used.
- The five-step career planning strategy (Stambulova, 2010) is an example of a framework to help athletes prepare for, and cope with, career transitions.

In the next session you will examine some of the expected (or normative) career transitions experienced by athletes.

You should now go to [Session 4](#).

Session 4: Keeping going – expected transitions in sport

Introduction



It is too simplistic to consider that transition into sport (starting sport) and out of sport (retirement) are the most important career transitions an athlete will face. Many transitions that athletes encounter during their career can be highly significant and have far reaching consequences.

You will now move on to explore some of the 'within career' transitions that athletes may face. These can be split into expected (or 'normative') and unexpected (or 'non-normative') transitions as described in Session 1. In Session 4, you will examine expected transitions and in Session 5 you will examine unexpected transitions.

By the end of this session you should be able to:

- identify the different normative transitions an athlete may experience during their career
- recognise the potential impact of normative transitions on the athlete
- appreciate normative transitions through a lifespan perspective.

1 What are normative transitions?



Normative transitions refer to the ‘within career’ changes that an athlete would normally be expected to face during their career. They can therefore be thought of as predictable transitions. In the next activity you will consider the wide range of normative transitions that athletes may face in their time as sports performers and the potential psychological impact of these.

Activity 1 Normative transitions

Allow about 15 minutes

Make a list of some of the normative transitions that an athlete might experience during their sporting career. To help you with this, you may find it useful to think about your own experiences either as an athlete or as someone supporting an athlete.

Once you have compiled your list, select one of the transitions and reflect on the potential psychological challenges that this transition might bring about.

Discussion

The transitions that athletes may experience during their career can be considerable and will vary from athlete to athlete. Below are a few examples of normative transitions that an athlete might experience:

- moving from junior to senior level competition
- moving from part-time to full-time athlete
- moving from amateur to professional
- moving from senior to masters or veteran competition
- moving to a lower level due to age related decline
- change of coach.

This is not an exhaustive list and you may well have thought of many other examples that you or people around you have experienced. Obviously, not all athletes will experience all of the transitions identified in this list – the transitions an athlete will face during their career will depend on their personal circumstances and the level they compete at.

Even though these transitions are expected and can therefore be prepared for, they can still be challenging. For example, an athlete moving from junior to senior level may find the senior training and competition environment very different and difficult to adapt to. This was explored in a research study by Røynesdal *et al.* (2018) which examined the transition from youth to senior teams in professional football. They found that footballers making this transition often find things like managing the social dynamics and the competitiveness in the first team challenging as demonstrated by the quote below from one of the coaches in the study. The study concluded that young

footballers need support to help them successfully navigate the transition from youth to senior level.

It is going out into an unfamiliar environment, dealing with the pressures of playing in men's football where it is competitive, and it is playing for three points. People's livelihoods and careers are on the line, there is a passionate support base and it is a much more challenging environment than youth level football.

(Røynesdal *et al.*, 2018, p. 32–33)

Now you've looked at the normative transitions directly associated with sport, you'll next explore them through a 'lifespan perspective', which takes a more holistic view.

2 Lifespan perspective

From a holistic viewpoint, it is important to note that the transitions an athlete will face are not exclusively sport related and other transitions will occur across an athlete's lifespan. As you will see in Wylleman and Lavalée's (2004) developmental model shown in Figure 1, athletes will typically face normative transitions at an athletic, psychological, psychosocial and academic or vocational level as well. All of these could interact to impact on sports performance.

Briefly study Figure 1, where the orange bars represent the transition boundaries, and then complete the activity that follows where you will explore the elements of this model in more detail.

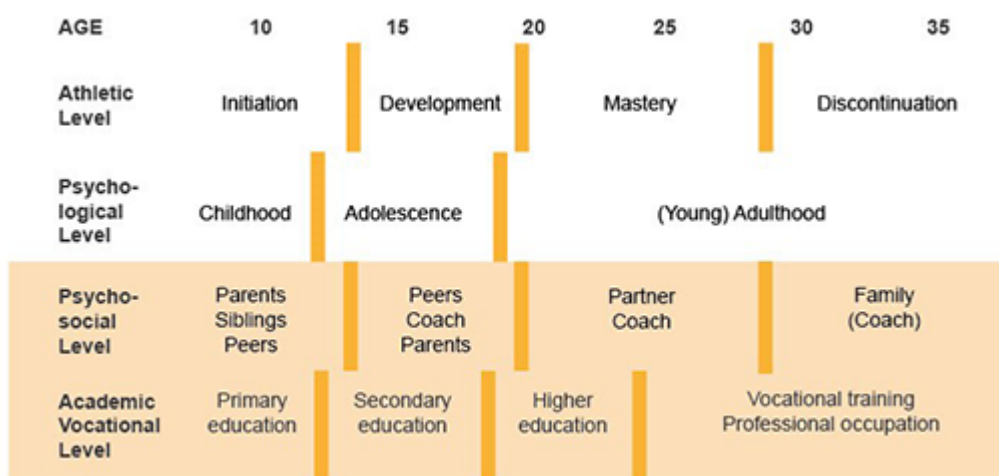


Figure 1 Wylleman and Lavalée's (2004) developmental model

Although the model indicates that discontinuation on the athletic level occurs just before the age of 30 obviously this is different for different athletes, with many athletes retiring at a much later age and some, particularly those from early specialisation sports such as gymnastics, retiring at an earlier age.

Activity 2 Transitions across the lifespan

Allow about 30 minutes

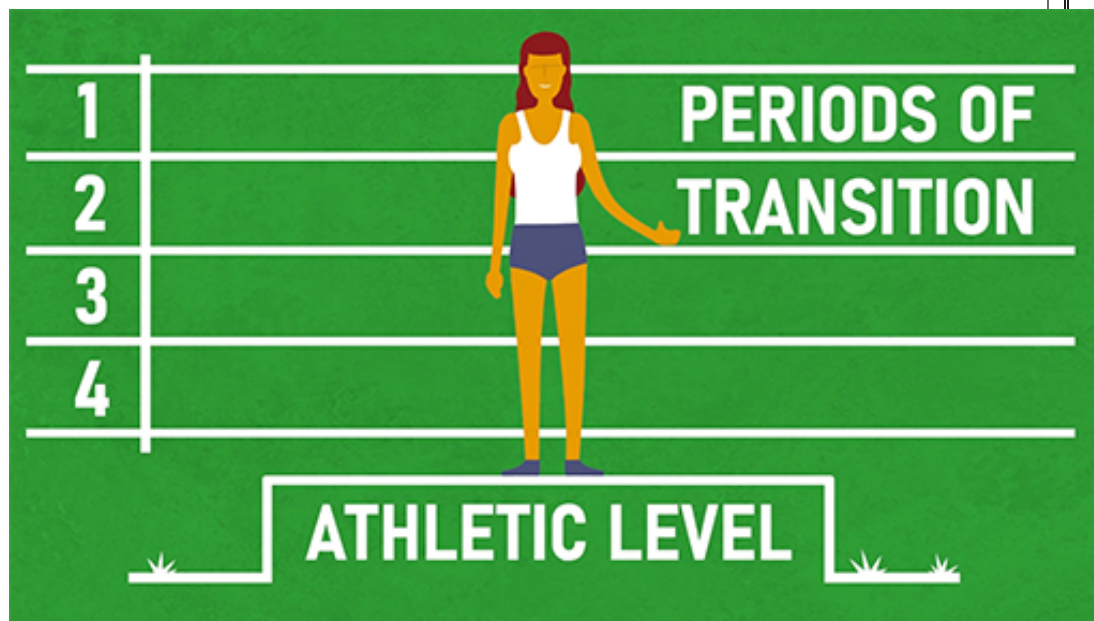
Watch the video below which explores the components of Wylleman and Lavalée's (2004) developmental model. This model allows you to explore the transitions an athlete might experience in different aspects of their lives in order to give you a more rounded or holistic understanding of the individual and their transition experiences. The video talks about the model in relation to a hypothetical case study, Natasha, who is a sprinter.

As you can see the model has 4 'levels' – athletic, psychological, psychosocial and academic/vocational. Within each level there are different normative transitions that an athlete will face that are important to be aware of.

As you watch the video complete the table below by identifying some of the features, potential challenges and impact of the different transitions Natasha experiences.

Video content is not available in this format.

Video 1



Obviously not all athletes will follow this exact path, but it is important to consider the impact these academic and vocational developments can have on the athlete.

Table 1 Applying the model

Transition	Features of the transition and potential challenges	Potential impact on sports performance and participation
Childhood to adolescence	<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Adolescence to adulthood	<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Primary to secondary education	<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Secondary to higher education	<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Higher education to vocational training and a professional occupation	<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>

Discussion

Below are some examples of what you might have put in your table after watching the video.

Table 1 Applying the model (completed)

Transition	Features of the transition and potential challenges	Potential impact on sports performance and participation
Childhood to adolescence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time of great change • Developing more mature relationships with others • Desire for role identification • Becoming more independent from parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a parent is heavily involved in supporting their child's participation this may conflict with the adolescent's need for greater independence • If the athlete develops a strong athletic identity at the expense of other aspects of their identity, it can have a negative impact on the athlete's development and ability to cope with stressors (e.g. career transitions)
Adolescence to adulthood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priorities may change • Young adulthood is characterised by a need to form intimate, loving relationships with other people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An athlete may begin to have more relationship commitments that could compete with the demands of sports participation
Primary to secondary education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change in structure of education (e.g. larger school, broader range of lessons) • An increase in the volume of work • A need to fit into a new social group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An athlete may find it harder to fit in training sessions as they have more homework • They may increasingly be invited to socialise with friends outside school which may compete with the demands of their sport

Secondary to higher education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possibly moving away from home • New social networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moving away will require a change in coach • New social networks may help or hinder sports participation • May open up a new level of competition to athletes, thus providing more opportunities for athletic development
Higher education to vocational training and a professional occupation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Logistical difficulties • Longer working hours • Financial commitments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sports participation may be harder to maintain • Depending on the athlete's level they may have to prioritise work over sport to satisfy financial and career demands

Through a lifespan perspective an athlete will invariably experience both upward and downward transitions in their performance level, both of which can place demands on the athlete. You will examine each of these in the next section.

3 Upward and downward transitions

As an athlete progresses through their career, upward (progressing to a higher performance level) and downward (moving to a lower performance level) normative transitions are a common feature.

Upward transitions: moving to a higher performance level

One of the key developmental transitions faced by athletes as they progress through their career is the move to higher level competition. It is a natural progression, for example, for an athlete to move from junior to senior level or for higher level athletes to progress from amateur to elite level.

As you touched on in Activity 1 an upward career transition, although positive, can be highly demanding both physiologically and psychologically. In fact, dropout from sport can be common in this period and it is recommended that athletes are prepared for this transition (Pummell and Lavalley, 2019). Box 1 shares some athlete reflections on their experiences of upward transitions in sport. As you can see these athletes experienced both positive and negative responses.

Box 1 Reflections on upward transitions

- I went from being the big fish in the little pond to the little fish in the big pond and I found that hard to deal with at first. **(Hans, swimmer)**
- The discipline was the hardest thing for me to handle – in the academy everything was so much more relaxed and less serious. **(Jackie, rugby player)**
- I was ready for the move to senior level – I'd achieved everything I could as a junior and was ready for a new challenge. **(Jackson, sprinter)**

Downward transitions: moving to a lower performance level

Another significant transition is the move downwards in level of competition. This can be caused by a variety of factors such as age related performance decline or deselection. Some of these causes are normative, but some are non-normative. Whatever the cause, it can be a difficult transition for athletes to deal with as they come to terms with the 'comedown' in status, the associated performance decrements and perhaps the reduced training intensity.

Downward career transitions, whether they occur early (e.g. deselection) or late in an athlete's career (e.g. age related decline), bring with them several psychological challenges. Box 2 gives some examples of athletes' reflections on their experiences of

downward transition. These athletes experienced different frustrations at the move. You will also examine another example in the next activity.

Box 2 Reflections on downward transitions

- After moving from a professional football team to a semi-professional team I found it hard to adjust to the 'unprofessional' attitude of the other players. I was used to watching what I eat and staying in the night before a match, but these guys saw nothing wrong with partying the night before a match. **(Zach, footballer)**
- I found that I became almost embarrassed of the times I was running. When I got to the end of the race, I felt like making an announcement to everyone in the race and everyone watching so that they knew how good I used to be! **(Priti, middle distance runner)**
- I found it very frustrating dealing with the lower levels of coaching and officiating and I ended up not having a lot of faith in my coach. **(Sonya, volleyball player)**

Activity 3 Downward transitions

Allow about 30 minutes

Watch the video below which explores the experiences of a group of young football players who have been dropped from their professional clubs. If these players continue to play football, they are likely to play at a lower level. Reflect on some of the responses the boys expressed to being dropped and then some of the challenges you think these players might face during this downward transition.

Video content is not available in this format.

Video 2



Discussion

All the players featured in the clip have experienced a setback that will possibly lead them to playing at a lower level. In response to the initial news of being dropped, all three players expressed a fear of the unknown and concerns about what they were going to do next. One player described being shocked at the decision, indicating that for him this was a non-normative transition. If they move on to playing at a lower level – depending on what they move on to – they may experience several challenges such as coming to terms with not being able to play full time and the financial and emotional implications of this. They may also experience feelings of frustration with the lower level of coaching or with the attitude of other players.

In the video, the young footballers were forced to deal with a downward transition quite early on in their careers. However, the move downwards in competitive level can often be thought of as a developmental process as an individual's career progresses and perhaps the final stages of an athlete's sporting career before retirement. The decision of when to retire can be a difficult one as you will learn in Session 7 of this course.

4 Reflecting on normative transitions

As you reach the end of this session, take a few moments to reflect on what you've learned and how you can apply it to your own situation by completing Activity 4 below.

Activity 4 Your reflections on normative transitions

Allow about 20 minutes

Reflect on what you have covered in this session by answering the questions below. Only answer the questions that are relevant to your role (as an athlete or someone supporting an athlete).

If you are an athlete ...

1. What normative transitions have you experienced in your career so far?
2. What impact did these transitions have on you and how did you cope with them?
3. Is there anything you would do differently to help you cope better with these transitions having now completed this session?
4. What normative transitions do you expect to face in the future?
5. What strategies will you put in place to help you cope with these transitions?

If you are someone supporting an athlete (or athletes) ...

1. What normative transitions have the athlete(s) you support experienced?
2. What impact did these transitions have on the athlete(s) you support and how did you help them to cope with these transitions?
3. Is there anything you would do differently to help support your athlete(s) with these transitions having now completed this session?
4. What normative transitions do you expect your athlete(s) to face in the future?
5. What strategies will you put in place to help them cope with these transitions?

Discussion

Your reflections will be very personal to your own situation and experiences, but below are the brief reflections of an ice hockey coach Lesley in response to these questions.

1. I coach the junior team so I see both ends of the transitions into the junior age group – the younger age group moving up into my squad and the older athletes moving out of my squad to join the senior team.
2. There's no one answer to this question as different athletes respond differently. Generally, the challenge is change – all of them have to cope with things being slightly different when they move up a level. That might be different coaching styles, different teammates or different expectations and some of them find that more difficult than others.
3. Reflecting on what I've learned on this course so far, I probably could have done more to help them get ready for the change ahead and talked it through with them more. Also, Section 2 has helped me to appreciate that they might also have lots of other adjustments going on in different aspects of their life, like education, that might have an impact.

4. I am continuing to coach the junior team, so the most significant change I can have an impact on is their transition from junior to senior level.
5. Having read this session, I am going to talk more to my older players about moving up to the senior team and how they are feeling about it, and also ask them about their life outside ice hockey. I'm also planning to work more with the senior team coach on a transition programme and am thinking of different things we could put in place such as linking the older players in my squad with mentors on the senior team. Hopefully this can help them with the transition.

5 This session's quiz

It's now time to take the Session 4 badge quiz. It's similar to previous quizzes but this time, instead of answering five questions, there will be 15.

Open the quiz in a new tab or window by holding down Ctrl (or Cmd on a Mac) when you click on the link. Return here when you have finished.

[Session 4 compulsory badge quiz.](#)

Remember, this quiz counts towards your badge. If you're not successful the first time, you can attempt the quiz again in 24 hours.

6 Summary of Session 4

In this session you have examined the impact of normative, ‘within career’ transitions. The key learning points from this fourth session are:

- Transitions that occur during an athlete’s sports career are wide ranging and can be normative (expected) or non-normative (unexpected).
- Examples of normative transitions include moving from junior to senior level, moving from amateur to professional, and moving to a lower performance level due to age related decline.
- Wyllemaann and Lavallee’s (2004) developmental model recognises that transitions occur in various aspects of the athlete’s life throughout the lifespan of their sports career.
- Both upward and downward career transitions can place psychological stresses on the athlete.

In the next session, you will examine some of the unexpected (or non-normative) career transitions experienced by athletes.

You are now halfway through the course. The Open University would really appreciate your feedback and suggestions for future improvement in our optional [end-of-course survey](#), which you will also have an opportunity to complete at the end of Session 8. Participation will be completely confidential and we will not pass on your details to others.

You should now go to [Session 5](#).

Session 5: Stopped in your tracks – unexpected transitions in sport

Introduction

Having looked at expected 'within career' transitions in sport in Session 4, you will now move on to look at unexpected (or non-normative) career transitions that can occur within an athlete's career and the impact they can have.

You begin this session by watching the video below in which sport and exercise psychologist Dr Josie Perry discusses why non-normative transitions such as injury are particularly challenging. She explains how these transitions are out of the athlete's control and therefore harder to prepare for. Transitions like this often take athletes out of their comfort zone into periods of change which can make them feel insecure.

Video content is not available in this format.

Video 1



By the end of this session you should be able to:

- identify some of the non-normative transitions an athlete may experience in their career
- understand the psychological and emotional impact of non-normative transitions on the athlete
- consider the psychological impact of sport injury on the athlete.

1 What are non-normative transitions?



Non-normative transitions refer to the unpredictable 'within career' transitions that an athlete might face. Unlike normative transitions, they are not transitions that can typically be predicted and planned for and can therefore be more difficult to manage. In the next activity you will consider the wide range of non-normative transitions that athletes may face in their time as sports performers and the potential psychological impact of these.

Activity 1 Non-normative transitions

Allow about 20 minutes

Make a list of some of the non-normative transitions that an athlete might experience during their sporting career. To help you with this, you may find it useful to think about your own experiences either as an athlete or as someone supporting an athlete

Select one or two of the transitions on your list and reflect on the potential psychological challenges that this transition might bring about.

Discussion

By their very nature, the non-normative transitions that athletes may experience during their career are unpredictable and will vary from athlete to athlete. Below are some examples of non-normative transitions that an athlete might experience, together with some quotes illustrating their psychological impact. (You may have thought of other examples of non-normative transitions.)

Injury

I found it really hard to cope with not being able to compete while I was injured and the loss of form when I returned

(Lena, snow boarder)

Pregnancy

The physiological changes that happened to my body during pregnancy were really difficult to cope with

(Sonal, cyclist)

Parenthood

Being a parent means that I have to plan my training sessions around childcare, and I feel really guilty when I travel away for a competition

(Lance, sprinter)

Relocation

When I moved to a new house, I had to join a new hockey club and it was hard to fit in at first

(Trevor, hockey player)

Deselection

Being dropped from the first team and having to play for the reserves was tough to take

(Kyle, footballer)

A change in weight category

I never expected to have to move from lightweight to light welterweight – everything felt different

(Azir, boxer)

Financial pressures reducing participation

I got a new job with more money which I needed to pay my mortgage, but it meant I couldn't get to as many training sessions as I used to which was really frustrating

(Sarah, rower)

A change of coach

When my coach retired, I moved to another coach and she did everything differently to what I was used to and it took me a while to adjust

(Asha, high jumper)

Illness

At the 2017 World Athletics Championships, around thirty athletes were quarantined due to an outbreak of gastroenteritis. Hurdler Thomas Barr who was forced to miss his semi-final race said that he was 'gutted' as his whole year had been focused on this competition (BBC, 2017).

As you can see from the list above non-normative transitions can include both positive events, such as parenthood, and negative events, such as injury or illness. These

transitions can be challenging for an athlete to deal with – even if they are positive – particularly as the athlete may not have had time to prepare for the transition.

You are now going to look at two examples of the non-normative transitions identified in Activity 1 in more detail. For the remainder of this session you will focus on sport injury, and in Session 6 you will focus on parenthood.

2 Spotlight: sport injury

Unfortunately, sport injury is something that athletes commonly experience during their careers. Depending on its nature and severity a sport injury can lead to several difficult transitions such as temporary withdrawal from sport or in some cases premature retirement from sport. These can have a significant impact on the athlete as you will discover in the rest of this session.

Activity 2 Responses to sport injury

Allow about 25 minutes

Watch the video below in which Olympic medallist (hockey) Helen Richardson-Walsh describes her experience of sport injury. Then reflect on any personal experiences you have had of sport injury (either as an athlete or as someone supporting an athlete) and think about the psychological impact the injury had.

Make a list of some of the common psychological reactions that you think an athlete might have in response to a sport injury.

Video content is not available in this format.

Video 2



Discussion

Everyone's experience of sport injury is different, but common reactions to injury include:

- feelings of isolation
- fear
- anxiety
- hopelessness

- loss of identity
- anger
- depression
- grief
- loneliness
- stress
- anxiety
- low self-esteem.

You may well recognise some of these feelings from your own experiences of sport injury. These feelings are all largely negative emotions, but experiencing sport injury can sometimes lead to some positive consequences. For example, some athletes believe that the experience of injury makes them a better athlete by giving them a new perspective or allowing them to develop new skills while on the sidelines. These gains are often referred to as 'sport injury related growth' (Salim and Wadey, 2018).

Activity 2 demonstrates that adjusting to sport injury can be a difficult transition for people to cope with. Not only is sport injury difficult to deal with when it occurs and during injury rehabilitation, but once the injury has recovered, the return to sport can also represent a difficult period of transition. You will examine this in the next section.

2.1 Return to sport

Following injury an athlete will have a period of transition on their return to sport. On returning to sport, athletes may need to cope with additional challenges such as a loss of form or reduced performance level which they may find difficult to adapt to. For example, when returning to sport following an injury a first team player may initially return to playing for the second or reserve team.

You will explore these challenges more in the next activity.

Activity 3 Returning to sport following injury

Allow about 25 minutes

Watch the video below in which you see athlete Emily Neff talk about returning to sport following a knee injury.

As you watch the video make a note of the concerns Emily mentions about returning to sport and then think more generally about how the issues she raises could impact on an athlete's return to sport.

Finally, imagine you are supporting Emily. What interventions could you use to help her with her transition back into sport?

Video content is not available in this format.

Video 3



Discussion

In the video Emily mentions that she had feelings of nervousness about hurting herself again when she returned to sport. This fear is a common response amongst injured athletes.

Returning to sport is influenced by both physiological and psychological factors. It is recognised that a decision about whether an individual is ready to return to sport should take a 'biopsychosocial' approach – that is, it should consider biological, psychological and social factors (Arden *et al.*, 2016).

An athlete can be physically healed and ready to return to sport but may not be psychologically ready to return. For example, a lack of confidence and fear of re-injury can have a significant impact on how successful an individual's return to sport will be. Research has found that those who are not psychologically ready to return are more likely to be re-injured (McPherson *et al.*, 2019). As such it is important that attention is paid to psychological recovery as well as physical recovery to ensure that transition back into sport is successful.

Psychological interventions such as imagery (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2019) and social support (McVeigh and Pack, 2015) have been suggested to help athletes prepare for the return to sport. If you were supporting Emily, these are interventions you might encourage her to try. For example, you could encourage her to use imagery to visualise her successful return to sport and encourage her to talk to you (social support) about her concerns.

Returning to sport following injury can be challenging, but what if the extent of your injury means you will never return to sport? Next you will look at the impact of career-ending injuries.

2.2 Career-ending injuries

One of the most challenging aspects of sport injury is when an injury is so severe that it leads to the end of an athlete's sporting career. In these circumstances the athlete is often unprepared for this premature retirement. This is why programmes that prepare athletes for career transitions and life after sport, such as those you looked at in Session 3, are so important.

In the next activity you will explore the potential impact of career-ending injuries.

Activity 4 What next? The impact of career-ending injuries

Allow about 40 minutes

Read the BBC article linked below and then watch the video featuring rower Arielle Sanders.

Make a list of some of the feelings that Arielle Sanders and Victoria Vincent experienced in response to their career-ending injuries and the opportunities they took from the experience.

[Victoria Vincent: Ex-GB diver on mental health effects after career-ending eye injury](#)

View at: [youtube:uAEfU6UjkeM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uAEfU6UjkeM)

Video 4

Discussion

Both athletes found their injuries and subsequent retirement difficult and described several negative responses such as depression and feelings of failure, embarrassment and devastation. Arielle found being part of a support group useful to help her communicate her feelings and get through her injury.

After retiring, Victoria channelled her energy into an alternative career and is training to become a doctor. She felt that the injury made her more empathetic and resilient and provided her with the opportunity to study hard for the grades she needed to get into medical school.

Arielle also changed direction and moved into a student-coach role which allowed her to continue to feel part of the team.

Social support provided by groups like the one Arielle spoke about has been shown to help people through sport injury. For example, in their study exploring the impact of career-ending injuries on three rugby union players, Arvinen-Barrow *et al.* (2017) (Box 1) found that social support was an effective strategy to help athletes cope with injury.

Box 1 Helping athletes cope with injury through social support

Research summary (Arvinen-Barrow *et al.*, 2017)

Title

Transitioning out of professional sport: the psychosocial impact of career-ending injuries among elite Irish rugby football union players.

Method

Three rugby union players who had suffered a career-ending injury participated in a one-to-one interview about their injury and subsequent transition into retirement.

Findings

Sport injury and the transition into retirement was a distressing experience for all three players. They experienced feelings that included stress, loss, shock, sadness, and anger. Factors that helped them cope with injury and retirement included social support, pre-retirement planning and working with a sport psychologist (see sample quotes below):

[The coach was] a huge advocate of fellas keeping on studies and doing other things outside of rugby.

I was generally quite positive, I suppose, I attached myself to very positive, influential guys in the squad.

Career-ending injuries are just one cause of retirement. You will explore retirement from sport in more detail in Session 7 of this course.

3 Reflecting on non-normative transitions

As you reach the end of this session take a few moments to reflect on what you've learned and how you can apply it to your own situation by completing Activity 5 below.

Activity 5 Your reflections on non-normative transitions

Allow about 20 minutes

Reflect on what you have covered in this session by answering the questions below in relation to your role as either an athlete or someone supporting an athlete.

1. What non-normative transitions have you or the athlete(s) you support experienced?
2. What impact did these transitions have on you or the athlete(s) you support?
3. Now that you have completed this session, is there anything you would do differently to help you or the athlete(s) you support cope better with these transitions?

Discussion

Your reflections will be specific to your own situation and experiences, but below are the brief reflections of ice hockey coach Lesley who you met in [Activity 4 of Session 4](#).

1. Injury is a pretty common unexpected transition in my sport and probably the non-normative transition I see most.
2. For most of the athletes, being injured was a pretty negative and frustrating experience. I recognised a lot of the emotions described in Activity 2 in my injured athletes, and I also recognised some of the fear of re-injury issues in a couple of players I've worked with over the years.
3. I'm going to look into working with a sport psychologist to learn about psychological techniques like imagery that my injured players could use. Also, I can now see that I could be a really important source of social support for my injured athletes and I'm going to make more of an effort to call and check in with the athletes on the squad who are currently injured and who I haven't seen for a while. I'm going to encourage some of the non-injured players to do the same and check in with their peers, especially those who have been injured in the past and know what it's like.

4 This session's quiz

Now that you've completed Session 5, you can take a short quiz to help you to reflect on what you've learned.

Open the quiz in a new tab or window by holding down Ctrl (or Cmd on a Mac) when you click on the link. Return here when you have finished.

[Session 5 quiz.](#)

5 Summary of Session 5

In this session you have explored some of the non-normative (unexpected) transitions that can be experienced by athletes.

The key learning points from this fifth session are:

- Non-normative transitions are unexpected transitions such as injury, illness, pregnancy and relocation.
- Sport injury can be a particularly challenging non-normative transition resulting in several negative emotions.
- Return to sport following injury can be difficult and it's important to consider both physical and psychological readiness to return.
- Career-ending injuries can be very distressing and cause negative emotional reactions.

In the next session, you will examine the 'within career' transition of parenthood in more detail.

You should now go to [Session 6](#).

Session 6: Spotlight – parenthood and sport

Introduction

[At 35], my perspective on life had started to shift. I had different priorities. ... Once the prospect of becoming a mother started to play on my mind, it grew to dominate my thoughts so much that I knew running would have to take a back seat for a while.

(Pavey, 2016, p. 146)



Figure 1 Jo Pavey – 10,000m athletics World, European and Commonwealth medallist

So far in this course you have looked at several ‘within career’ transitions that most athletes will experience. In this session you will turn the spotlight to a transition that has become more commonplace in elite sport in recent years with more athletes striving to combine an athletic career with a family life. Even away from the sporting domain, parenthood represents one of the most significant transitional periods in a person’s life. However, when placed in the context of sport it can present several unique challenges.

By the end of this session you should be able to:

- understand parenthood as a transition many athletes face
- recognise the potential impact on an athlete of becoming a parent
- identify how athletes successfully balance parenthood and a career in sport.

1 Combining parenthood and elite sport

Research within this field has predominantly focused on the experiences of female athletes as often the implications for them can be more far-reaching than for male athletes. However, it is important to recognise that having children can impact the sporting careers of both mothers and fathers. You will look at this in the first activity.

Activity 1 Parenthood and tennis – the challenge of being an athletic parent

Allow about 40 minutes

Read the blog article ‘

[Parenthood and tennis – the challenge of being an athletic parent](#)’ and answer the questions below:

- What are the main challenges of being an athletic parent?
- Are there different challenges for mothers and fathers?
- What are some of the benefits mentioned connected to having children and maintaining a career in sport?

Discussion

A range of challenges was discussed in the article, from the logistics connected to travel, balancing family life and sport, and the management of multiple identities.

In the case of female athletes, the challenges are connected to the physical implications associated with pregnancy and the time they have to take out of sport. However, male players also have to adapt to a new way of life, balancing family life with elite sport.

There were several benefits noted by the athletes in the article, but the overriding theme was that being a parent could make the athletes ‘better’ by giving them a stronger focus and enhancing their motivation and drive. For example, Djokovic felt becoming a father gave his tennis a deeper, more intrinsic value.

While Activity 1 touched on the challenges both men and women experience during the transition into parenthood, it is clear that the experience can be somewhat more significant for female athletes. You will focus on the athletic mother in more detail next.

2 The athletic mother



While some female athletes decide to wait until retirement to start a family, for others it is not a risk they are prepared to take as optimal fertility often falls at the same time as peak performance (Darroch *et al.*, 2019). As a result, it is becoming more commonplace to hear of female elite athletes deciding to have children during their career rather than waiting until they retire (Cunnam, 2017).

It is, however, important to recognise that there are several physical challenges associated with this decision as it will result in a period of reduced training volume and a loss of fitness. The return to sport has also proved problematic for some athletes. There have been many cases of elite athletes citing increases in injuries such as stress fractures which have been attributed to the limited post-partum advice available to them (Sundgot-Borgen *et al.*, 2019).

In the next activity you will hear from an elite athlete who has successfully navigated her return to sport post-pregnancy.

Activity 2 The athlete mother

Allow about 30 minutes

Watch the video below of Swedish trail running and ski mountaineering athlete Emelie Forsberg. Emelie has won gold at multiple World and European Championships within skyrunning (mountain running), and she gave birth to her first child in March 2019.

As you watch, reflect on the questions below. If you are a parent, you may also want to reflect on your own experiences.

- What are some of the main challenges for an athlete when they decide to return to sport after parenthood?
- What factors contribute to a successful return to sport?
- What can partners of athletes take away from hearing about how Emelie and her partner Kilian manage parenthood?

View at: [youtube:TkjCIV0te4w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TkjCIV0te4w)

Video 1

Discussion

You may already have a good idea of what some of the challenges are when returning to sport after having a family. Emelie discusses how she has taken it very slowly in her return to sport, listening to her body as avoiding injury is paramount. She also comments how there is much uncertainty and many ups and downs connected to a return as you don't know how your body will react. As you learned earlier, the impact of pregnancy on the body can increase the risk of injury and so the slower approach adopted by Emelie is particularly important.

There are several factors that seem to facilitate a positive return to sport but it is clearly a balancing act. Emelie mentions the importance of support during this period as without it a return is almost impossible due to training demands and travel. She also mentions 'preferring to take it slow' and allowing herself time to return to her sport by not rushing the process.

Emelie talks about how it is easier being a parent while an elite athlete compared to if she had a regular job which required her to find time around parenting and work to exercise. She also comments on how having a partner who is also an athlete helps as they can both be flexible. Finally, she recognises the need to be quite relaxed and flexible in approach, something perhaps simpler for an athlete who is more in control of their schedule than for someone with a regular job.

Kilian – Emelie's partner – is also an athlete and understands the demands of her sport and her need to train. As the partner of an athlete, it is clearly important to be as adaptable and flexible as possible in terms of accommodating training needs and balancing that with childcare.

The flexibility Emelie and Kilian have been allowed in their lives as athletes perhaps reflects how in some ways it is easier for an athlete to manage a career and a family than it might be for someone in another career. There are of course challenges and you will look at these in more detail next.

3 The challenges of being a sporting parent

Figure 2 illustrates some of the factors that athletes must consider as they negotiate parenthood and their sporting career. Most of these apply to both mothers and fathers, but as you explored in the previous section, athletic mothers experience additional physical challenges.

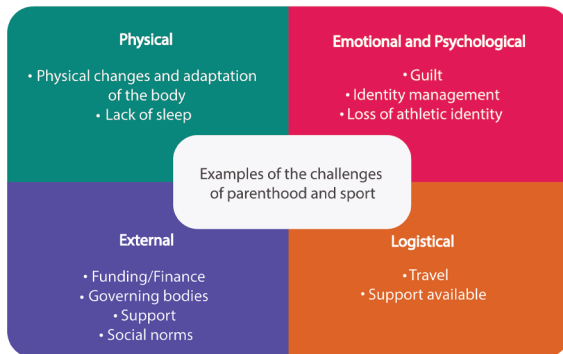


Figure 2 Factors to consider when balancing parenthood and sport

You have looked at some of the physical challenges that can be faced by female athletes due to the physical changes that take place during pregnancy and post-partum and which have practical implications on training and competition. While many women do continue to maintain training, the level at which they are able to train will be at a significantly lower level than pre-pregnancy.

You will look at this and some of these other challenges in the next activity.

Activity 3 Managing a career and parenthood – a case study

Allow about 30 minutes

Read the blog article below which was authored by Candice Lingam-Willgoss (one of the authors of this course) and Jessica Pinchbeck.

In this article, Candice and Jessica share their thoughts on combining a career as an elite netball player with parenthood. As you read the article make notes on the following points:

- What makes it possible to juggle a career in elite sport with parenthood?
- Why do some athletes decide to wait until they retire before starting a family?
- Do you think different sports have different challenges when it comes to combining a career in sport with parenthood?

[Managing a career and motherhood: is it possible in elite netball?](#)

Discussion

The article notes that one of the main factors making it possible to juggle a career in elite sport with parenthood is the importance of support, whether social or financial. This links closely to **external factors** as detailed in Figure 2.

The nature of elite level netball requires athletes to travel extensively in order to play, which often means leaving family at home and possible childcare issues. This can seem like an insurmountable **logistical challenge** to overcome and is often a reason athletes decide to wait until they retire before starting a family. As mentioned in the article, Geva Mentor decided to freeze her eggs so the decision to start a family is not affected by the age she chooses to retire.

Team sports such as netball – where teammates are reliant on you to be there – brings up a new challenge as athletes have to fit in with more structured training times. Those in individual sports, such as a long-distance runner who is able to train alone, may not feel that same sense of responsibility to their peers.

The article in Activity 3 very much focused on the tangible practical challenges that can in many ways be predicted. However, there are other less tangible, unpredictable factors that athletes face in relation to their emotional and psychological reaction. One example is guilt, a concept that is often talked about in connection to parenthood.

This theme is often highlighted in research looking more broadly at the relationship between physical activity and parenthood (McGannon *et al.*, 2012). McGannon and Schinke's (2013) study looked at the relationship recreational athletes had with exercise after they had children. They found that women accept, when they have children, they will feel guilty about anything they do for themselves. Furthermore, in the case of elite athletes, this is also a period that sees identity challenged as athletes seek to fulfil two roles (which could be viewed as incompatible by some) and manage the associated guilt.

4 Positive impacts: is parenthood the key to success?

It's not a secret that I have my sights on 25 (Grand Slams), and actually, I think having a baby might help. When I'm too anxious I lose matches, and I feel like a lot of that anxiety disappeared when Olympia was born.

(Williams, 2018, cited in Haskell, 2018)



Figure 3 Serena Williams and her daughter

While you have heard about the challenges connected with parenthood and sport, there are also several positive implications which you briefly touched on in Activity 1. These positives are alluded to in the above quote from Serena Williams (tennis), as she reflects that having a baby could help her be a more successful tennis player as she is much less anxious. This is something echoed by other athletes, both male and female:

Before I became a mother, I would have been uptight and anxious about reaching my training targets, measuring my progress, worrying a session could have gone better; but [as a mother] I didn't have the time to dwell on it.

(Jo Pavey, athletics – Pavey, 2016)

Kids make it a lot easier than it would be without them... they help you take your mind off it (sport) they have their own needs. We're there to just give them what they want so I've got to put my difficulties aside... If they're happy, I'm happy. I try and make the most of my time with them.

(Taulupe Faletau, rugby union player – Faletau, 2020, cited in Pritchard, 2020)

What can be concluded from this is that deciding to combine a sports career with a family will carry with it several unique challenges but also several benefits.

5 This session's quiz

Now that you've completed Session 6, you can take a short quiz to help you to reflect on what you've learned.

Open the quiz in a new tab or window by holding down Ctrl (or Cmd on a Mac) when you click on the link. Return here when you have finished.

[Session 6 quiz.](#)

6 Summary of Session 6

Within this session you have focused on the transitional period around parenthood and have looked at a number of factors that can influence this transition. You have also looked at how athletes are able to manage this and successfully navigate the two roles to combine family life with elite sport.

The key learning points from this sixth session are:

- Parenthood can place a new set of demands on an athlete which requires a period of adaptation.
- There are several physical challenges for female athletes who decide to have children during their sport career.
- It is possible to manage multiple identities, and the new role as parent can in turn have positive implications for the athlete and their family.

In the next session, you move on to explore what is potentially the most problematic transition and one which is experienced by all athletes, that is retirement from sport.

You should now go to [Session 7](#).

Session 7: The final athletic chapter – retirement from sport

Introduction



Figure 1 Usain Bolt

Retirement from sport is the one inevitable transition that all athletes face, such as Usain Bolt seen above, and is often a daunting experience at the end of their athletic career. Knowing when to retire can be a difficult decision and for some this is a decision over which they have no control. Throughout this session you will hear from several former athletes and start to appreciate why athletes retire and the psychological impact this may have.

By the end of this session you should be able to:

- appreciate why retirement from competitive sport can be difficult
- recognise how retirement can be prompted by reasons such as injury, deselection, age and free choice
- understand why retirement difficulties are more likely to be faced by those who are forced to retire and those with a stronger athletic identity.

1 The reality of retirement

The physical nature of sport means that in contrast to other careers an athlete's retirement tends to occur at a relatively early age. According to Wylleman and Reints (2010), athletes generally retire around the age of 34 (although this can be much younger in some sports such as gymnastics).

To learn more about the reality of retirement, in this first activity you will hear from several retired athletes about their experiences.

Activity 1 How do champions experience retirement?

Allow about 30 minutes

Watch the video below from the start until 05:20. In the video you will hear from several retired elite athletes who discuss their experiences of retirement from sport. As you watch, focus on the stories of two of the athletes Lauren Jackson and Barry Hall and then answer the following questions:

1. What were some of the main emotions and reactions that the athletes experienced when confronted with retirement?
2. What did the athletes attribute these reactions to?
3. Were there different reactions between those who chose to retire and those who were forced to?
4. Ultimately, how did each athlete come to terms with their retirement?

View at: [youtube:tefAF0k4V3s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tefAF0k4V3s)

Video 1

Discussion

1. Both Lauren and Barry described a range of quite negative emotions related to their retirement. Lauren remembered it as a time when she cried a lot and even when recounting certain experiences, it is clear she still finds it hard to talk about. Barry admitted to feeling no motivation and isolated, which led to him drinking heavily. In Barry's case this resulted in him developing feelings associated with depression and several other negative mental health issues.
2. You probably noticed when listening to both stories the feelings of loss both athletes experienced as they didn't have anything else in their lives. This loss is closely linked to athletic identity (as you saw in Session 2) and it is the loss of this athletic self that underpins many of the negative emotions experienced during this transitional period.
3. You may have assumed that those who make a conscious decision to retire and therefore have control over it would experience a more positive retirement from sport. However, as the video highlights, regardless of the control athletes have over their decision, it may not ultimately influence whether retirement is positive or negative.
4. Both athletes found a way out of their negative mental states and several different coping mechanisms were discussed. Lauren is a good example of someone who suddenly had a different focus when she found out she was pregnant. For Barry,

like other athletes, he realised the importance of having structure and he started to set goals in his life as he had previously done in sport.

The stories of Lauren and Barry are not unique but illustrate very clearly why this final transition is often the one to receive most attention. As you move on through the session you will explore some of the points discussed in Activity 1 but also learn more about the impact of retirement. First, however, you will look in more detail at why athletes retire.

2 Why do athletes retire?

This might seem like a relatively obvious question with obvious answers, but before you try and understand the psychological impact of retirement you need to appreciate the different reasons why athletes retire. Research in 2005 by Levy *et al.* concluded that there were four causes of retirement. These are illustrated in Figure 2 below.

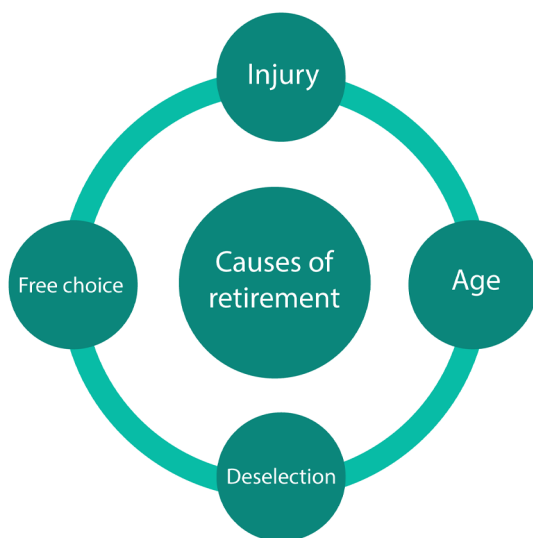


Figure 2 Causes of retirement (adapted from Levy *et al.*, 2005)

You will have noticed from Figure 2 that these categories are quite broad. But are there any other reasons that an athlete might retire? You will look at this in the next activity.

Activity 2 Why do athletes retire?

Allow about 20 minutes

Levy *et al.* (2005) presented four potential causes of retirement but there are actually many more. Make a list of some of the reasons you think might cause an athlete to retire.

Discussion

While Levy *et al.*'s (2005) causes of retirement do present the four key areas, they do not cover all possibilities. For example, where would you place a local league cricketer who retires because he's got three young children and can't afford to spend his whole weekend on the cricket pitch? Likewise, when considering the distinction between chosen or forced retirement, where would you place the athlete who still loves the sport but retires because they are experiencing an age related decline in performance?

There are many reasons why an athlete may choose to retire from sport regardless of the level that they perform at. Below are a few examples, although you may well have come up with others:

- want to retire at the top of their game
- have achieved all their goals
- want to escape the pressure of training and competition

- no longer get a 'buzz' from the sport
- want to focus on other aspects of their life, e.g. family, work, new avenues
- want to start a family
- realise they no longer have the drive and passion they once had
- realise they are unable to achieve their goals.

One or more of these many causes of retirement highlighted in Activity 2 will be experienced in a unique way by every athlete and each carries with them a range of physical, social and psychological challenges. It is the impact of retirement that you will look at in the next section.

3 The impact of retirement – positive or negative?

From a psychological perspective, research tends to suggest that the best time to retire is when you are ready and have chosen to. This choice gives the athlete a sense of control over their career and, combined with a clear retirement plan, can result in a smoother transition into their new life after sport (Park *et al.*, 2012). Indeed, many athletes approach the whole experience in a positive way as illustrated in the example of cyclist Victoria Pendleton.

Box 1 Victoria Pendleton, multiple World and Olympic cycling champion



Figure 3 Victoria Pendleton

Victoria Pendleton made the following comments after her last ever cycling race at the 2012 Olympics in London:

I'm just so glad that it's all done and I can move on.

(Bevan, 2012)

I've had enough of the pressure of trying to maintain the top level in the sport for so many years.

(BBC, 2012)

Victoria retired at the top of her game having achieved all of her goals and viewed her retirement in a positive light, relishing the prospect of new challenges and feeling relief to be away from the intense pressure of cycling.

Victoria's experience is in stark contrast to that of middle-distance runner Kelly Holmes who, like Victoria, also chose to retire from sport. You will hear about Kelly's experience in the next activity.

Activity 3 Feeling lost: the dark side of retirement from sport

Allow about 10 minutes

Listen to the audio clip of Dame Kelly Holmes below. As you listen, note down what she says was one of the hardest things about retirement for her.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio 1

Discussion

Although Kelly retired having had an incredibly successful career, she shares how lost she felt when she retired and how she even had suicidal thoughts. Kelly also alludes to the loss of her athletic identity as she went from being an Olympic athlete to a retired athlete. She notes how this was a hard period of adjustment for her but how it is even harder for athletes who have not had her success but who suddenly find themselves forced to retire.

While both Victoria and Kelly chose to retire from sport, their experiences were very different. Kelly's experience reinforces the point made by Barry in Activity 1 that even when an athlete chooses to retire they can still suffer several negative emotional consequences.

But what is the impact of retirement on someone who feels their career is cut short due, for example, to a loss of form, deselection or injury (such as in the case of youth footballer turned actor Matt Smith who you heard from in Session 2)? Athletes in this position can suddenly find themselves in a situation out of their control and this, as you considered in Sessions 2 and 3, can have a significant impact on the quality of their experience (Kuettel *et al.*, 2018). Forced transitions tend to be more problematic and can be characterised by periods of psychological distress and feelings including grief, sadness and anger (e.g. Demetrio *et al.*, 2020). But how can these feelings be managed?



Discussion

Alex is an example of an athlete who was forced to retire while still potentially at the top of her game, due to a life-changing injury. However, having had significant success she also felt she had achieved a lot in her sport and was able to step away having lived her career with no regrets. What does become clear is the importance of planning and how being mentally prepared for life after sport allowed Alex to successfully navigate her retirement. She talks about having continued to study and gain additional work experience and always being aware that the career of an elite athlete can come to an end suddenly for a variety of reasons.

Although coping strategies and interventions can support an athlete through retirement, as you've seen so far in this session, an athlete's experience of retirement is individual. In the final section of this session you will look at one example of an athlete who came out of retirement as she missed the sport too much.

5 But I can't let go!

Some athletes seek to avoid the psychological stress that can come with retirement by deferring the decision and continuing to masters level. Others who have retired may subsequently revoke their decision if their life after sport fails to deliver the challenges, opportunities or thrills they are looking for.



Figure 4 Kim Clijsters, former tennis world number one, and six times Grand Slam winner

A good example of someone who came back out of retirement is Kim Clijsters, who returned to tennis in 2009 following two years out of the sport. In that same year she went on to win the US Open, a feat she repeated the following year. Kim famously said in 2012 that her second retirement would 'stick' but it seems like she was keen to rise to the challenge yet again, making a return to training in early 2020 with a clear plan to return to competition. Her reasons were quite simple:

For me, I still love to play tennis... I don't feel like I need to prove anything, but I want to challenge myself and I want to be strong again.

(Clijsters, 2019, cited in McElwee, 2019)

What becomes clear is that the decision-making process surrounding retirement or planning a comeback is a complex one. For these athletes, nothing else seems to be able to fill the void left by sport and so continuing their athletic career seems the best option. It can be debated as to whether this is right as retirement (and all its challenges) is the one transition that all athletes will be forced to face at some point.

6 This session's quiz

Now that you've completed Session 7, you can take a short quiz to help you to reflect on what you've learned.

Open the quiz in a new tab or window by holding down Ctrl (or Cmd on a Mac) when you click on the link. Return here when you have finished.

[Session 7 quiz.](#)

7 Summary of Session 7

Through hearing the stories of several elite athletes within this session you have looked at both the reasons that athletes have for retiring as well as the impact this transition can have, whether forced or chosen. You have also briefly considered why some athletes may choose to defer their retirement and others may decide to make a comeback.

The key learning points from this seventh session are:

- Retirement is potentially one of the most challenging transitions an athlete will experience.
- Chosen retirement isn't necessarily less problematic but it has the potential to be more positive for the athlete if the right support is in place.
- Forced retirement can result in an athlete's mental health and wellbeing suffering.
- Some athletes defer retirement by continuing to compete past their peak, while others make a comeback after retirement.

In the final session of this course, you will move on to look at what happens after retirement and life after sport.

You should now go to [Session 8](#).

Session 8: Moving on – life after sport

Introduction



As you saw in Session 7, retirement from sport can be very difficult. But it can also be a positive experience through which athletes can identify new opportunities. In this session you will explore some case studies of athletes who have successfully made the transition into life after sport and the journey they have been on.

Video 1 introduces some of the challenges athletes face as they approach life after sport, which can serve as a reminder of the need for retirement planning as you explored in Sessions 3 and 7.

Video content is not available in this format.

Video 1



By the end of this session you should be able to:

- appreciate life after sport experiences of a range of different athletes
- understand the opportunities available to athletes after they retire from sport
- identify the emotional and psychological impact of life after sport.

1 Making a successful transition

Making a successful transition into life after sport is very important because, as you have seen in Session 7, retirement can have a significant negative psychological impact and has been associated with mental health difficulties (Moesch *et al.*, 2018). These difficulties include depression (Giannone *et al.*, 2017), anxiety (Giannone *et al.*, 2017) and substance abuse (Ponizovski, 2013).

Strategies aimed at preventing such difficulties when retirement inevitably occurs are key to avoiding a 'crisis transition' and ensuring a successful one. Pre-retirement planning and encouraging athletes to think about life after sport long before it is expected to happen is one of the most important strategies.

Programmes and support services such as the performance lifestyle programmes you were introduced to in Session 3 aim to help athletes to do this, and later in this session you will explore some examples of athletes who have benefited from utilising these services.

As you explored in Session 7, retirement can be chosen or forced. It is often those athletes who have suffered a forced retirement (e.g. due to injury) and who have failed to think about life after sport who are perhaps most at risk of experiencing significant difficulties. Successful transition is about transitioning into a new career and identity as you will see in the next activity. This can be facilitated by implementing strategies such as sport psychology support, social support and mentoring (Hallmann *et al.*, 2019).

Activity 1 Moving on: finding a new identity

Allow about 25 minutes

Watch the video below which explores planning for retirement and life after sport, and then answer the following questions. The video is introduced by former professional footballer Robbie Simpson who has set up an online platform to help athletes to plan for the retirement transition.

1. How does athletic identity link to retirement?
2. What are some of the difficulties retired athletes face?
3. Why might athletes be in a strong position to move into a new career?

Video content is not available in this format.

Video 2



Discussion

1. As you've explored previously in this course, athletic identity has an important impact on career transitions. Those with a strong athletic identity, who have not developed other aspects of their life outside sport, are more likely to struggle with life after sport. As you see in the video, a successful transition into life after sport is about developing a new identity.
2. In support of what you looked at in Session 7, it was suggested in the video that retiring athletes can face financial worries, employment issues and mental health issues. In some cases, retirement has been associated with athlete suicide. In the video, Robbie Simpson states that only 30 per cent of professional sports people choose when they want to retire, which suggests that the remaining 70 per cent have a forced retirement. This again highlights the importance of athletes thinking about – and planning for – retirement long before they expect it to happen in case it happens sooner than they expect.
3. In the video you saw several employers and athletes talking about the transferable skills that athletes gain in sport that can be beneficial in other careers. These include goal setting, resilience, work ethic and team working.

Next you will explore a series of four case studies of athletes who have been through the transition to life after sport. In doing this, you will compare and contrast their journeys and reflect on what helped them to have a successful new career.

2 Case study 1: Lizzy Yarnold

In the next activity you will watch a video about Olympic skeleton champion [Lizzy Yarnold's](#) retirement from sport and her transition into life after sport.

Activity 2 Lizzy Yarnold: preparing early reaps positive rewards

Allow about 25 minutes

Watch the video below in which Lizzy Yarnold talks about her journey towards retirement and then answer the following questions.

1. Why did Lizzy feel it was beneficial to be in education alongside training and competing?
2. What did she do during her sabbatical?
3. When did she start thinking about retirement?
4. What advice did she offer to other elite athletes about retirement?

Video content is not available in this format.

Video 3



Discussion

1. Lizzy felt that studying while still competing helped her to switch off from sport and develop a different part of her identity.
2. Lizzy effectively had two periods of her life when she left sport – her sabbatical (break) inbetween her two Olympic titles, and her retirement. During her sabbatical she wanted to do something different and so she registered on an Open University course.

3. In the video she said she started to think about retirement four years before she actually retired, which allowed her to work with her performance lifestyle advisor to plan for life after sport in advance. Lizzy chose to retire but had she been forced to retire early (e.g. due to injury) she would have been prepared.
4. The advice that Lizzy gave other athletes was to talk to other athletes and to a performance lifestyle advisor (or another person who can provide support). These are both strategies that were suggested in Section 1.

Lizzy Yarnold's journey into a life after sport appears to be a very positive one. Next you will look at another athlete who had a positive experience.

3 Case study 2: Kristian Thomas

In the next activity, you will explore the story of another Olympic medallist – former gymnast [Kristian Thomas](#) who retired after the 2016 Rio Olympics.

Activity 3 Kristian Thomas: switching identity

Allow about 25 minutes

Watch the video below in which Kristian Thomas talks about his retirement and life after sport. As you watch the video, reflect on what helped him to have what he described as a positive and smooth transition.

Video content is not available in this format.

Video 4



Discussion

Kristian appeared to be very focused on just gymnastics until two years before he retired, when he began to plan for life after sport. Like Lizzy, Kristian had a chosen retirement and was able to plan when he retired and had the support of a performance lifestyle advisor. He felt that his transition was made easier because he had a new focus (university) immediately after he retired. This was important as he was able to switch his identity from 'athlete' to 'student'. Kristian highlights an important point in the video – that everyone will have a unique experience of retirement. Some athletes will have a positive retirement and some athletes will have a negative retirement.

Both Lizzy Yarnold and Kristian Thomas appeared to have positive experiences of retirement and life after sport, but is that the case for all athletes? In the next case study, you will explore a young footballer's story.

4 Case study 3: Josh Lukwata

Professional football has a different structure to that of Olympic sports like gymnastics and skeleton and so career transition experiences are likely to be different. In this section you look at the case study of Josh Lukwata, a former footballer who played for the Fulham FC Academy.

Activity 4 Josh Lukwata: using football to make music

Allow about 25 minutes

Watch the video below in which former goalkeeper Josh Lukwata discusses his experience of life after football and then answer the following questions.

1. How did Josh's experience of retirement differ from Lizzy and Kristian's?
2. How have Josh's experiences in football helped him in his new career?

Video content is not available in this format.

Video 5



Discussion

1. There are several differences between Josh's experience of retirement and those of Lizzy and Kristian. Firstly, Josh's experience was generally more negative. He described being released as causing his 'world to fall apart' and described how his self-worth was negatively affected. The big difference is that Josh retired from sport at a much younger age and without achieving the success he desired in his sport, in contrast to Lizzy and Kristian. His retirement was a forced retirement rather than a planned retirement. Additionally, unlike Lizzy and Kristian, Josh had not prepared for life after sport. All these factors combined to make his experience more likely to lead to a crisis transition. Fortunately, Josh was able to adjust to life after sport and has now transitioned into a successful music career.
2. Josh feels that he has been able to transfer the skills he learned in football (such as discipline, hunger and sacrifice) to both his new career in the music industry and life in general. This matches with what the employers in Activity 1 said about the benefits of employing former athletes.

All the athletes you have explored in this session so far are relatively newly retired. In the next section you will examine the life after sport experiences of a group of former elite athletes who have been retired for a much longer period of time.

5 Case study 4: Olympic athlete panel

In Activity 4 Josh discussed the transferable skills he learned in sport that benefited his new career. This is something that you will explore further in the next activity which features five Olympians who have transitioned out of sport into successful new careers.

Activity 5 Olympic athlete panel: why are former athletes attractive to employers?

Allow about 35 minutes

Watch the video below from 24.58 to 31.17, which contains extracts from a panel of five former Olympic athletes talking about life after sport.

The five athletes featured in the video are (from left to right):

- Ashton Eaton (athletics – decathlon) who had been retired for two years when the video was made (2019) and was running his own company and working in an operations role
- Erin Cafaro MacKenzie (rowing) who had been retired for seven years and at the time of the video had just completed a research project. Erin was planning to start a company to support athlete and veteran career transitions
- Brianne Theisen-Eaton (athletics – heptathlon) who had been retired for two years and was working for an executive health and wellness company
- Emily Hughes (figure skating) who had been retired for nine years and was working for Johnson & Johnson in an operations role for the health technology team
- Margie Pedder (swimming) who had been retired for fifteen years and was working in Visa's global sponsorship management group.

As you watch the video, answer the questions below.

1. What did Brianne say helped her with the transition into life after sport?
2. Why might former athletes be attractive to employers?

View at: [youtube:LuUY4Sf1Z6c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LuUY4Sf1Z6c)

Video 6

Discussion

1. In the video you can see that the athletes, despite finding transition difficult, have successfully moved into careers outside competitive sport. Brianne discussed how working with a sport psychologist helped her to prepare for the transition and reflect on her identity and what she would say if after retirement someone on an aeroplane asked her what she did. She also spoke about the importance of work–life balance in her new career and consciously making time for family and friends.
2. The panel discussed how retired athletes bring with them a wealth of transferable skills that are highly attractive to employers. These skills include communication, performing in front of an audience, team working, leadership, strong work ethic and goal setting. Margie stated that because of this she has hired a large number

of former athletes. Emily highlighted that it can be difficult for athletes to recognise that they have these transferable skills, and that is where support services such as performance lifestyle programmes can help athletes to develop awareness of their skills and attributes.

6 Bringing it all together

As you near the end of this course, this section provides an opportunity to reflect on what you have learned about career transitions in sport, and what you can do to support athletes (or yourself) prepare for and successfully navigate the transitions they will face.

Activity 6 Reflecting on career transitions in sport

Allow about 15 minutes

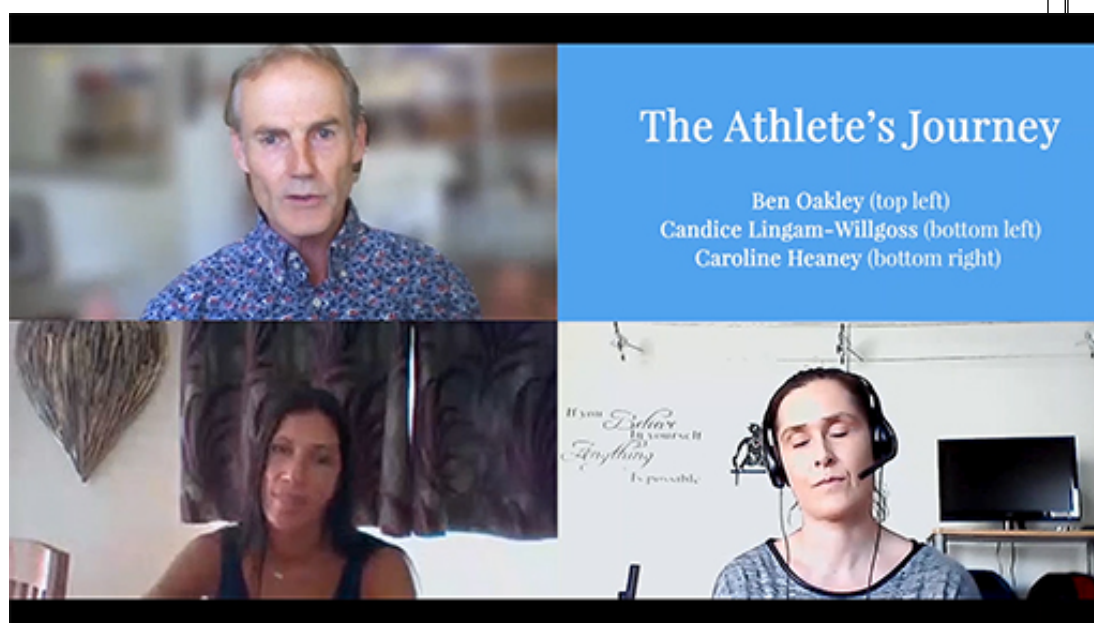
Watch the video below in which Candice Lingam-Willgoss and Caroline Heaney, the authors of this course who you first met in Session 1 Activity 1, reflect on how the content of the course has impacted on them in various different roles, for example as an athlete, a coach or as a parent.

Then, using the following questions as prompts, reflect on what you have learned in this course and how it will affect your future practice in your role as an athlete or someone supporting an athlete.

1. Will your interactions with others – for example, fellow athletes, athletes you coach, your children – change as a result of studying this course? If so, in what way?
2. What actions might you now take to help prevent crisis transitions either in your own career or that of the athletes you support?
3. What actions might you take to help prepare yourself or the athletes you support for both normative and non-normative transitions?
4. What are the key lessons you have learned about career transitions in sport?

Video content is not available in this format.

Video 7



Discussion

Candice and Caroline reflected on how the content of the course had influenced the way they interact with their own children and other athletes as they progress through various transitions both 'within career' and 'post career' (retirement and life after sport). For example, Candice reflected that writing the course has encouraged her to think more about supporting her daughter through career transitions in sport as she gets older. In her role as a sport psychologist, Caroline reflected on her work with injured athletes and the importance of having an awareness of the psychological impact of this difficult unexpected transition.

Reflecting like this is a useful way to consider how what you have learned in this course can be applied to your everyday life. Hopefully, the course has led you to consider the psychological challenges and opportunities of career transitions and the importance of preparation.

You may have reflected on how you can integrate more sport psychology into own your role in career transitions (e.g. coach, instructor, athlete, parent). You may also have reflected on how you can encourage athletes to think about the future and develop their identity outside sport.

7 This session's quiz

Now that you've come to the end of the course, it's time to take the Session 8 badge quiz. It's similar to previous quizzes but this time, instead of answering five questions, there will be 15.

Open the quiz in a new tab or window by holding down Ctrl (or Cmd on a Mac) when you click on the link. Return here when you have finished.

[Session 8 compulsory badge quiz.](#)

Remember, this quiz counts towards your badge. If you're not successful the first time, you can attempt the quiz again in 24 hours.

8 Summary of Session 8

In this session you have explored life after sport, drawing on a range of case studies. These case studies have shown that, while retirement from sport can be difficult, it can provide athletes with new opportunities and experiences.

The key learning points from this final session are:

- Pre-retirement planning can help prevent a crisis transition.
- Other strategies such as sport psychology support, social support and mentoring can help with the transition into life after sport.
- Athletes have a range of transferable skills that can be attractive to employers.

Where next?

If you've enjoyed this course you can find more free resources and courses on [OpenLearn](#). If you have not already done so, you might be especially interested in looking at our other badged courses on sport:

- [Exploring the psychological aspects of sport injury](#)
- [Learning from sport burnout and overtraining](#)
- [Exploring sport coaching and psychology](#)
- [Coaching others to coach](#)
- [Communication and working relationships in sport and fitness](#)

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Making the decision to study can be a big step and The Open University has over 50 years of experience supporting its students through their chosen learning paths. You can find out more about studying with us by [visiting our online prospectus](#).

Tell us what you think

Now you've come to the end of the course, we would appreciate a few minutes of your time to complete this short [end-of-course survey](#) (you may have already completed this survey at the end of Session 4). We'd like to find out a bit about your experience of studying the course and what you plan to do next. We will use this information to provide better online experiences for all our learners and to share our findings with others. Participation will be completely confidential and we will not pass on your details to others.

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David Conn, *The Guardian*, 6 October 2017

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