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Career Transitions in Sport: A Biographical Study

By

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ABSTRACT

This research focuses on the career transition experiences of eight elite athletes in the United Kingdom. In doing so, it seeks to better understand what is happening in the transition process and why some athletes experience difficulties with career transitions be these sport-related or non-sport transitions. Research on career transitions in sport has tended to focus on the transition of retirement which accounts for a number of transitions such as de-selection, injury and burnout. However, such research is narrow in its focus and does not provide a full account of these transitions within the context of the athlete's life. Further, research has tended to focus on transitions as one-off events with little regard for pre- and post-transition experiences. Accordingly this work seeks to move beyond these limited frameworks and to offer new ways of understanding what is meant by career transitions in sport which may be of value to coaches and athlete development programme so that transitions experiences become moments of learning and development in the athlete's career. A biographical methodology was utilised as an approach particularly well suited to gaining a closely textured account of the athletes' transition experiences and for interpreting data generated by the life story interviews.

The findings of the research reveal five major factors affecting career transitions in sport: 1) athlete-coach relationship, 2) family support, 3) transition duration, timing and multiplicity, 4) skill transfer and transition familiarity, and 5) athlete burnout. It is argued that these factors affect the athletes' sense of athletic self through a process of identity engulfment and/or identity evolvement. The types of transitions, factors affecting transitions and identity development are captured in a system-based approach adapted from Stambulova's (1998) perspective of a sport career. In doing so, an alternative perspective of career transitions in sport is presented, one that accepts the dynamic interplay of a number of factors affecting the athlete's perception of transitions and subsequent identity development and adaptation. The system-based approach

provides the flexibility to analyse career transitions in sport from the athlete's perspective rather than through a rigid model based on the generalisations of a number of athlete experiences. It also provides a framework to analyse career transitions from a long-term athlete development perspective that acknowledges the interrelatedness of past, present and future predictable and non-predictable transitions. The limitation of this research is acknowledged in terms of the recognising the biographical 'I' in the thesis and the challenge of positioning my own story alongside those of the elite athletes interviewed.

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I would like thank Dr. Gill Clarke for her guidance and patience in reading numerous iterations of my work and providing direction to my writing and ultimately understanding of transition in my own life.

Chapter 1

Career Transitions in Sport

1.1 Introduction

> The nature of cricket is such that it tears away at the nerves of all who want to take it seriously – or are forced to take it seriously. But of all the subjects in this book, the great majority were beset by deteriorating health, acute financial difficulty, helpless addiction to the bottle, marriage or sexual problems, or a kind of intrinsic instability, even madness, innocently induced by chemical changes in the brain or in some cases the hideous experience of front-line warfare. The mounting depression became overwhelming. The adversities of later life proved too crushingly heavy. That they played cricket – many of them for livelihood- may after all be seen as incidental, though the nagging question will always be there, for young and old alike: did the compulsive nature of cricket and its inherent uncertainty damage the soul?
>
> (Firth, 2001: 241)

Career transitions in sport have received increasing attention in recent years because of the media attention on high profile athletes exhibiting maladaptive behaviours to transition events, most notably career retirement. A reported total of 221 references have been generated on the topic since 1965 with the greatest number of references (115) occurring in the period of 1990-1997 (Lavellee *et al.*, 1998). The research has tended to focus on career retirement from related fields of study to understand the phenomenon as well as developing and evaluating strategies to deal with the issues. The emphasis on retirement from sport is not surprising given the social context of career exit in sport and the attention given to traumatic exits of high profile athletes by the media. Drahota and Eitsen (1998:263) comment on the emerging research in the area of career transition in sport and the problematisation of this social phenomenon:

> The role transition of athletes to a new career has presented a challenge to sociologists of sport. We know that this is a difficult time for athletes because they lose what has been the focus of their being for most of their lives, the primary source of their identities, the physical prowess, and the adulation bordering on worship from others, the money and the prerequisites of fame, the camaraderie with team mates, and the intense highs of competition. All of these are lost to professional athletes who are in their twenties and thirties when they exit sport.

1.2 Stories from the Field

I guess I never really new about career transitions when I was playing sports in Canada. I can only remember sitting in my university residence a few hours after the coach told me that I was not good enough to 'make' the University team. I never experienced not making a team. My world seemed empty and I felt lost and ashamed of not being the best. What was I going to do now? How would people view me if I was no longer the athlete everyone had come to know me as?

The above excerpt from my field notes portray emotions that exemplify the sense of loss and despair experienced by many athletes including myself following career termination. A number of studies have demonstrated that career transitions in sport result in significant mal-adjustment for the athlete (Werthner and Orlick, 1986; Crook and Robertson, 1991; Gordon, 1995). However, Coakley (1983) suggests that the transition of career retirement from sport is not inherently a traumatic event (Greendorfer and Blinde, 1985). Coakley advanced a developmental perspective in describing how retirement from sport is not always a negative experience but may serve as an opportunity for social rebirth rather than a form of social death.

From my own experience, the traumatic feelings associated with my perceived loss of identity did not at the time feel like a period of rebirth. However, over time, I have reflected upon the transition event captured in the aforementioned excerpt and used it as both a motivation to understand myself and gain insight into the social processes I experienced at that moment in time and its impact. Listening to and reading the 'stories' of other elite athletes and reading research relating to this social phenomenon has deepened my understanding of my own experiences and given some comfort to me in the fact that I am not alone in experiencing these type of emotions. The journey to understand my own story began at the end of my career and as with many athletes the process of reaching that final transition escaped my attention until the end of my career.

My own story in this research is important insofar as it impacted on the research direction, although I acknowledge the cautionary note of Sparkes (2001) regarding becoming too self-indulgent in using one's own story. As I reflect on that single event which marked my exit from elite sport I realise that my focus on the end is misplaced and should instead address the numerous sport and non-sport transitions experienced throughout my career and their impact in shaping my identity as an athlete.

Making sense of feelings regarding that traumatic event required more than just an examination of the event itself, but an understanding of other transitions in my career and life that impacted my retirement and subsequent adaptation to the event. Career retirement is but one transition in a series of transitions that may be experienced by an athlete or worker (Super, 1980; Wyllemann *et al.,* 1995; Patton and Ryan, 2000). Hill and Lowe (1974) characterised sport career transition as a

multidimensional conceptualisation. It is more than a single event; it is a dynamic process involving a number of decisions, and possibly stages, over time, often in a serial form. Greendorfer and Blinde (1985) view retirement from sport as part of a lifelong development in which each phase of life has its own parameters that relate to the period that precedes or follows it. From this perspective, career transition is characterised by a process that focuses on continuity and continuation of behaviors as well as reprioritising interests.

Behind the headline stories of traumatic career exits and those stories of successful retirements are a number of events that occurred throughout the athletes' life to impact the final stages of their storied career. Therefore research into career transition in sport requires a hermeneutic approach in which specific transitions are investigated while at the same time considering the whole transition process. This 'hermeneutic circle' approach posits that interpretation of a phenomenon cannot be understood until you understand the whole, but it also isn't possible to understand the whole without also understanding all of the parts (Schwandt, 2000). At first a hermeneutic approach may seem to be somewhat of a paradoxical endeavour in which the researcher is forever trapped in a circle of never-ending questions. It is, however, a way of explaining and understanding a phenomenon in which gaining further insight is an ongoing process which takes time.

The hermeneutic approach requires a research methodology that facilitates the on-going process of making sense of a social phenomenon through investigating its key components. In this research a biographical approach was employed as the qualitative research tool to make sense of the social phenomenon career transition in sport through examining athlete transition experiences from a longitudinal perspective. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000:154-155) 'stories are the closest we can come to experience as we and others tell of our experience. A story has a sense of being full, a sense of coming out of a personal and social history'. In this view experience is the stories people live and continually reaffirm, modify, and create new ones through continual retelling of the story itself. The telling of the story assists in educating oneself and others and modifying the life of the person telling the story. The life story can also take on a number of research uses given it potential to unveil 'truths' regarding individual experiences. Life stories allow the researcher to understand an individual's place in

the social order of things and to provide a process for the individual to reflect on and accept their construction of reality.

1.3 Setting the Scene & Overview of the Thesis

Chapters 2-5- These chapters provide an analysis of the research germane to career transition and its application in the world of sport. In the first instance, attention is directed to research relating to career retirement in sport with the full acknowledgement that it provides a valuable theoretical base to explore a broader concept of transition in sport. Chapters 3 and 4 provide alternative perspectives of transition in sport with a re-defining of sport career and transition in sport. Chapter 4 also poses the research questions which have been generated from my perspective of the gaps in the research literature reviewed.

Chapters 5 and 6 – Chapter 5 provides the theoretical argument for use of a biographical approach as a qualitative tool to address the research questions. It also outlines the method used in data collection, analysis and outcome. Chapter 6 addresses ethical concerns when using a biographical or life story approach as well as the strategies employed in the research to acknowledge my own position in re-telling the athletes' stories.

Chapter 7-11- In these chapters the outcome of the data analysis is presented with discussion of the issues and themes derived from the athletes' stories. The types of transitions experienced are reviewed as well as the range of environmental and individual factors affecting the transition experience. The effects of these factors are presented in terms of the effect on athletic and self identity as a determinant of athlete response and adaptation to the transition event.

Chapter 12 – This final chapter summarises the key findings of the research in terms of answering the research question: 1) what is understood by career transitions in sport from a long-term development perspective? It also addresses the limitations of the research and future implications for future research in the area of career transition in sport are also discussed.

Chapter 2

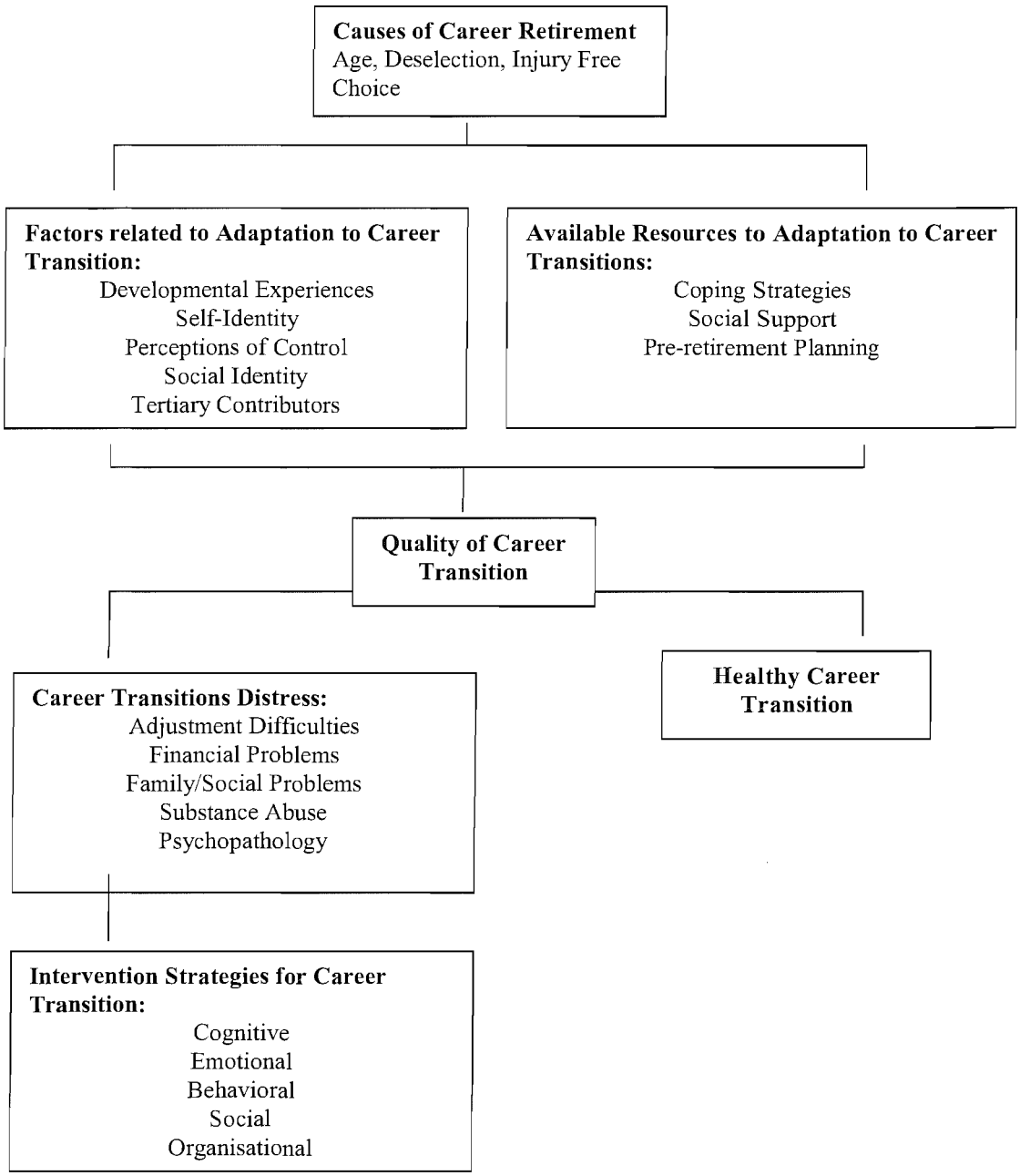
Career Transitions in Sport: Models, Theories and Perspectives

2.1 Introduction

Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) argue that transition models in general do not provide a flexible, multi-dimensional framework that is required to understand career transitions in sport. Grove, Lavallee, and Gordon (1997) suggest that career transition research, and models such as Schlossberg's have made a number of general assumptions and have failed to provide an account of the operational detail of the various components involved in the transition process. For these reasons a number of sport theorists have proposed more comprehensive models of the career transition process in sport (Gordon, 1995; Taylor and Olgilvie, 1998).

A more comprehensive model of athlete adaptation to career retirement in sport has been proposed by Taylor and Olgilvie (1998) (see Figure 1 overleaf).

Figure 1 – Taylor and Olgilvie (1998) Model of Career Transitions in Sport



Taylor and Ogilvie's (1998) model covers the entire course of the transition process and includes the following components: 1) causes of career retirement, 2) factors affecting career transition adaptation, and 3) coping resources and intervention strategies for problematic reactions to the transition process. Taylor and Olgilvie's (1998) model of career transition maps the athlete's experience from a longitudinal perspective as opposed to a cross-sectional one (in which only a 'snapshot' of the transition event is provided) allowing for a better understanding of the social processes involved in the career

transition process. Nonetheless, the model presents a rigid, sequential process that fails to acknowledge the potential meaning associated with the athlete's evolving perception of a transition. Further, the model has been limited in use to the specific transition of career retirement (see Lavalle and Wyllemann, 2000). This focus on career retirement in sport negates a fuller account of career transition experiences throughout an athlete's career and how such experiences shape their perception of self in an evolving and dynamic social context.

This is not to suggest that research literature relating to career retirement from sport should not be addressed in this research. Quite the opposite, it should be the starting point since its findings may provide insights into other career transitions experienced by athletes. Career retirement is an important stage in the athlete development pathway and integral to the athlete's story irrespective of its end position in the storied plot. Presenting research literature relating to career retirement is part of the process of unraveling the athlete's transition experiences and making sense of the beginning, middle and end of athletes' storied career.

It is not the intention in this research to systematically review each aspect of Taylor and Ogilvie's model (1998) but rather to use it as a general framework to address some of the sport career retirement research that relates specifically to factors affecting the transition process. This chapter therefore briefly reviews the literature relating to identity and the areas of: retirement, career planning and life skills, injury, social identity, and perceived ability. In addition, the factor of social support with specific attention to the athlete-coach-parent relationship is analysed. Finally, the career transition in sport literature relating to resources and approaches directed at intervention for career retirement in sport and career transition process in general is considered.

2.2 Factors Affecting Career Transitions in Sport: Issues of Identity

2.2.1 Identity and Retirement

Brewer, Van Raatle, and Linder (1993) define athletic identity as the degree to which the individual defines herself or himself in terms of the athlete role. It has been suggested that athlete identity can have both a positive and negative impact on the adaptation to sport transitions including retirement. Several researchers (Werthner and Orlick, 1986; Baillie and Danish, 1992; Gordon, 1995) have found that athletic identity is positively correlated to career retirement difficulties as well as inversely related to the degree to which the athlete engages in career planning and preparation for a life after sport. Athletes who have been involved in a sport almost to the exclusion of other activities will have an identity that may be characterised as uni-dimensional (Coakley, 1983). Further, athletes with this narrow identity will likely have few alternative sources of satisfaction and will typically experience career retirement as a traumatic and disturbing process.

Lerch (1981) suggests that the level of adjustment to career retirement is dependent on the significance of sport in the lives of athletes. Thus, if an athlete's role is more meaningful than another, then an athlete may find it more difficult in dealing with these other roles upon retirement. Conversely, if sport as a role is not a priority for the retiring athlete, the reallocation of time and energy to other roles will be less problematic. Lerch (1981) uses continuity variables such as connection to the sport, income after retirement, and level of commitment to sport upon transition, to test the application of the continuity theory to the sport domain. Using retired baseball players, Lerch predicted that optimal adjustment to retirement would be shown by those players who have a high involvement with the sport after retirement, a stable income, and a high commitment to sport in terms of repaying the benefits gained from playing sport.

In an extension of this perspective, Blinde and Stratta (1992) proposed that the acquisition of alternative skills in preparation for role transition may support voluntary retirement from sport. A strong indicator of the likelihood of successful transition following withdrawal from sport is the degree to which athletes contemplate alternative roles during their playing career, a situation referred to as anticipatory socialisation. Werthner and Orlick (1986) in a study of 28 elite Canadian athletes found

that the transition to retirement was easier and far more satisfying for athletes when they had something challenging and concrete to turn to. As an athlete anticipates the impending move into a new role, other skills or activities may become more important. There is a reshuffling of priorities of various roles with a decline of investment in the singular role of athlete. The degree to which an individual feels prepared to move into new roles may be determined by the commitment to the sport role, and ultimately the nature of withdrawal from the athletic role.

Closely linked to the time-related concept of anticipatory socialisation is the notion of the construct of role aptitude. Blinde and Stratta (1992) identified the construct of role aptitude, which encompasses the skills, knowledge and disposition that an individual possesses as an important factor in determining the athlete's ability to move into other roles following a career transition episode such as retirement. It is suggested that some athletes do not develop their potential for future roles and therefore, may possess a lower role aptitude. As a result, their acquisition of transitory skills, knowledge or predispositions to undertake subsequent roles may have been impaired and could have been responsible for difficulties encountered following career retirement. On the other hand, those with high role aptitude may be more likely to consider alternative roles, which would allow for the development of a wide range of skills, and thus, more adaptable to new roles. Along similar lines, Murphy *et al.* (1996) demonstrated that athletes with strong athletic identity were more likely to make commitments to roles without planning or suitable investigation. Identity foreclosure, which is the process by which individuals make commitments to roles without engaging exploratory behaviour, is inversely related to career maturity and has the potential to hinder the development of intervention strategies during career transitions (Petitpas, 1978).

2.2.2 Athlete Identity: Career Planning and Life Skills

Although career retirement as a transition is one of the few certainties in an athletic career, athletes often fail to plan for retirement. Crook and Robertson (1991) suggest that there is reluctance by elite athletes to discuss retirement while athletes are actively competing and coaches are particularly resistant to retirement preparation, fearing that it will detract from their concentration on sport. This reluctance may also be related to fear. According to Orlick (1980) the thought of entering an

employment environment other than sport, where their talents may be of little use, frightens athletes. The thought of starting at the bottom of a field, years behind their peers, leaves athletes frustrated and with a loss of self-esteem. Orlick (1980) suggests that the athlete needs to prepare for retirement through positive actions such as education, career training and alternative leisure pursuits. However, Blinde and Stratta (1992) suggest that normal career planning can be ineffective and possibly counterproductive to the athlete's unexpected exit from sport. In their study of 20 intercollegiate athletes deselected from teams, they found that premature termination minimised the effect of anticipatory socialisation developed through the traditional three or four year cycle of college sport participation.

The ability to plan and prepare for retirement is also closely linked with athletic identity. Murphy *et al.* (1996) found an inverse relationship between athletic identity and career maturity, with a tendency for student-athletes high in athletic identity to have minimal career decision skills. This was further corroborated by Grove *et al.* (1997) in a study that tested 48 Australian national/international athletes in terms of their identity profile and questioned their adjustment to retirement from top level sport. It was found that athletic identity at the time of retirement was positively correlated with anxiety about career exploration and negatively correlated with pre-retirement training for elite athletes. Thus, the athlete with the greater affiliation to their athletic identity is more likely to suffer maladaptive behaviour in the career decision making process. The often single-minded pursuit of excellence that accompanies elite sports has potential psychological and social dangers. The narrow focus and high investment in a single goal may lead to restricted development and an ability to cope with transition issues.

Dacyshyn (1997) suggested that career planning may not be the central issue for all athletes making the transition out of sport. Dacyshyn (1997) through interviewing several elite gymnasts from a Canadian university reconstructed their experience of transition within and from elite sport. She suggested that the single mindedness of athletes with a narrow identity may counteract the development of personal management skills with regards to setting one's own goals in other areas of life, determining and planning activities of interest, as well as choosing and managing personal relations. Athletes are

often encouraged to remain dependent on sport administrators and coaches for decision-making. The decision when to train, how to train, where to live, and even how to live are typical decisions taken away from the athlete, all in the name of elite sport. According to Dacyshyn, transition problems will always exist if a sport system maintains this 'win at all costs' attitude to athlete development. Koukouris (1991) found similar concerns within the Greek sport system. He reported that one of the biggest problems in Greek sport is the mal-administration which leads to conflict between athlete and coach. He suggested that that the exclusion of athletes from decision-making, blatant discrimination between favored and non-favored athletes, and interference by administrators in selection of teams, has led to elite athletes becoming disengaged from sport and adapting poorly to a life after sport.

2.2.3 Athlete Identity and Injury

Sustaining a serious injury was found by a number of researchers to have a negative consequence on athletes' ability to maintain their sporting identities, with a resulting detrimental impact on their mental health (Brewer *et al.* 1993; Sparkes, 1999). In a series of four studies, Brewer (1993) found that athletic identity was positively correlated with depressive reactions to actual and hypothetical sport injuries. Brock and Kleiber (1994) augmented the findings of Brewer through assessing 5 to 10 years post-injury the self-esteem and life satisfaction of college student-athletes who incurred a career ending injury. It was found that only those student-athletes with a high investment in playing professional sports (and therefore presumably high in athletic identity) tended to report lower self-esteem and life satisfaction.

Much of the research into injury and athletic identity has focused on how the athlete normalises pain and injury. Sparkes (1998) provides narrative analysis of an elite athlete stricken with a debilitating and potentially career-ending illness. Sparkes identified the loss of a disciplined self (a state of primary immediacy in which the body becomes predictable through regimentation) and the gloried self as having a major impact on the way the athlete defined the body-self relationship. Illness disrupts the body-self relationship leading to a fragmented sense of self. Despite the fragmentation of self, Sparkes found that the athlete maintained her athletic identity at the apex of her hierarchy of identities as she struggled to regain the gloried self. These phantom selves acted as a major constraint to the athlete in thinking with

regard to the development of future senses of selves. The athlete assumed that the restored self was an inevitable outcome of the fragmented self and would be a natural sequel to the state of illness. Sparkes identifies identity dilemmas arising from a preoccupation with retrieving the former self despite the collapse of the social and personal athletic self. Thus the athlete's identity became what Sparkes referred to as an 'achilles heel' to the survival of the self. This dilemma is magnified over time with increasing difficulty in maintaining 'performing' identities. During this period new, emerging identities were found to be viewed as negative as the athlete clung to athletic routines and avoided long-term planning since it the future became defined as an extension of the present.

Research exploring the athlete's response to the injury transition rarely extends to how the athlete actively manages the transition from sporting injury to the eventual return of their athletic status via rehabilitation. Having said that, Hockey (2005) has identified the use of identity work to manage the return from injury to the status of athlete. Identity work was viewed as a strategy that maintained the athlete's sense of athletic self during bleak periods in which injury occupied the athletes' biographies. Employing autoethnography, Hockey (2005) represented the kind of strategic work required to maintain athletic identity in the face of prolonged injury. One strategy was the maintaining of athletic routines through 'rehab time' which focused on remedial exercises associated with performance skills. Rehab exercises were conducted over the same training routines to prepare the injured body for a return to the athletic setting, middle distance, road racing. The practice of seeing and talking training routes maintained the athletes' distance-runner identities. The identity work process also involved an embodiment of the distance-runner self through wearing the 'serious' running shoes and dressing in appropriate, competitive vests through the rehabilitative period. The embodiment of athletic self was also maintained through self-massage of the injured area and other muscles in an attempt to feel the runner's body. Finally, employing the use of stories of past 'gloried performances' as identity talk was determined to valorise the athlete's capacity to endure and conquer. Such stories gave 'voice' to the athlete's bodies and further develop athletic identities.

Kleiber and Brock (1992) argue that research on the psychological effects of career-ending injuries almost entirely focused on the athlete's short-term distress typically during the period of

rehabilitation. Therefore the use of a 'narrative' approach was proposed by Kleiber and Brock as a means to understand a person's experience of injury recognising that to be injured is part of an unfolding 'story', a story in which the presumed ending has been dramatically altered. Through life-narrative observations and therapeutic interventions combined with medical treatment, the injured athlete may not only be restored to the former athlete but to the former person as well.

2.2.4 Social Identity

Werthner and Orlick (1986) indicate that athletes with a broad-based social identity that involves family, friends, education, and life interests will demonstrate better adaptation to career transitions. These findings have ramifications for the type of intervention or counseling given to the athlete. Ogilvie and Howe (1986) refer to the athlete's socialisation process as role 'restricted', especially when the athlete defines themselves in terms of their popular status. Reconstructing the public athletic identity will require the cooperation of other people to release the athlete from the public expectations demanded by that role. Webb *et al.* (1995) contributed to the knowledge of the identity variables of private and public athletic identity. A private athletic identity was identified as those elements of an athlete's identity that are potentially unavailable to public knowledge whereas, public athletic identity refers to that which is derived from public performances and manifested in the athlete's public reputation in the social role of athlete. In *Webb et al.'s* investigation, they found support for the notion that when retired athletes suffer a loss of self-esteem, it is more likely to be as a result of the strength of their public identity rather than their private one. Social support was identified as a key factor in re-building self-esteem for athletes who perceive a loss of private and public identity.

The loss of social identity was identified by Blinde and Stratta (1992) as a significant aspect of retirement from sport, specifically when the retirement resulted from de-selection from a team.. They used Kubler-Ross' (1969) stage theory of death and dying as a framework to understand the effects of de-selection. They found that athletes experienced intense anger and frustration regarding their unexpected de-selection and expressed their anger towards those administrators they held responsible as well as to those teammates who did not appear as disturbed by the cutting process. The athletes who were de--selected from a team directed much of their anger towards the coach and refused to engage in

the stage of bargaining regarding being re-selected as a matter of 'saving face' and preserving pride. The de-selected athletes, more so than the athletes, whose programme was cut, experienced deeper and longer periods of depression with physical and mental disruptions of their daily being. Although almost all the athletes progressed to the last stage of acceptance, it was evident from follow-up interviews that de-selection produced long-term negative consequences for the athlete and affected their decision regarding how long they were to disengage from sport or terminate sport participation altogether.

Gallmeier (1989:40) documented participation and attitudes among Canadian minor league ice hockey players when confronted with failure to make the team as a result of being 'gassed (cut), by being traded, or by being placed on waivers'. Depending on whether another team selects a waived player or the club finds a suitable trade with another club, the athlete moves along the continuum of failure as either having been cut, waived, or traded. He observed a continuum of failure between the three different mechanisms of failing to the make the team. Other players view the failed athlete as if they no longer exist, as socially dead or at least socially ill. Rosenberg (1984) uses the thanatological concept of social dying and death to explain this type of avoidance behaviour, suggesting that current athletes to protect themselves from admitting the uncertainty of their own careers.

2.2.5 Burnout

Closely associated with the concept of social identity is the social phenomenon of burnout, which is often cited as a factor affecting the athlete's decision to retire. Smith (1986) defines burnout as a response to chronic stress leading to the point where the athlete feels unable to cope with the demands asked of them. Most definitions of burnout incorporate the aspect of stress response; however some researchers have criticised a stress perspective as providing a limited understanding of the issues (Coakley, 1992). Coakley (1983) viewed burnout from a more sociological perspective, in which an athlete's decision to quit sport is influenced by factors such as family background, race, gender, and socio-economic status. The social organisations of sport may also prevent the athlete from having control over their life. Although they may have had the initial choice about participating in a sport, their subsequent involvement becomes controlled by coaches, sport administrators and parents. As a result, Coakley contends the athlete, especially an adolescent one, develops a uni-dimensional identity and

lacks control during a time period in which it is important to a young person to develop independence. This leads to a further sense of entrapment and prevents the athlete developing roles outside the athlete identity.

Coakley singled out the attractiveness of alternative interests as a major cause of choosing to retire from sport. Athletes sense the value of sport and question whether sport success is worth the costs and sacrifices in terms of missing out on the opportunities their peers are experiencing. This attitude may be accentuated if the athlete realises that he or she does not possess the skill to match increasing standards and expectations. Coakley suggests that there are three factors that influence the athlete's commitment to staying in sport: 1) the satisfaction based on rewards and costs associated with sport, 2) the attractiveness of alternatives, and 3) the resources the athlete has invested in sport. In weighing up these three factors, the athlete engages in a process of re-arranging their social networks and activities so that their remaining energy can be used in a positive and beneficial manner in their next career. This perspective, known as the Social Exchange Theory, is seen by Rosenberg (1984) to be the most relevant theory to explain career transition in sport since it provides athletes with strategies to cope with transitional issues.

2.3 Factors Affecting Career Transitions in Sport: Social Support

In addition to the factors related athletic identity, social support has been identified in the transition research as a significant factor in shaping the athlete's perception of career retirement and subsequent adaptation to the event. Social support refers to an 'exchange of resources between at least two individuals perceived by the provider or the recipient to be intended to enhance the well-being of the recipient' (Shumaker and Brownell, 1984:13). Involved in social support are behaviours that express emotional support, appraisal support, giving information, listening to the concerns of another, and offering emotionally sustaining behaviours (e.g. empathy). Research supports the conclusion that social support is critical to handling life crises, job stress, bereavement, and other life stressors (Rosenberg *et al.* 1989).

Rosenberg *et al.* utilised a multi-dimensional model of social support that involves eight types of social support: 1) listening support; 2) emotional support; 3) emotional challenge, perceived challenge to help the recipient evaluate her or his attitudes, values, and feelings; 4) reality confirmation support, confirming the recipient's perspective of the situation; 5) task appreciation support, perceived appreciation of the recipient's efforts; 6) task challenge support, perceived challenge of the recipient's way of thinking about an activity in order to encourage greater involvement; 7) tangible assistance, in the form of financial support or other products; and 8) personal support, providing services such as carrying out tasks (e.g. running errands). It is suggested that specific social support is matched with certain life stressors or situations. Further, Rosenberg *et al.* (1989) suggested that certain types of support groups/individuals were better able to provide specific types of support than other supporters. For example, it was suggested by Rosenberg *et al.* (1989) that coaches provided task challenge support, task appreciation support, and emotional challenge support, but were identified as specifically providing reality confirmation support, listening support, and emotional support. Rosenberg *et al.* (1989) suggested that friends provided the widest range of support compared to other social supporters. Parents also provided a range of support, but like friends, did not provide the greatest support of any specific type. Both parents and friends, owing to their lack of expertise, in most cases, demonstrated low technical challenge support. Surprisingly, parents did not provide shared social reality support, reflecting a distancing by parents from their son or daughter's athletic life, which became more apparent as the athlete grew older (Wyllemann *et al.* 1995).

2.3.1 Athlete-Coach Relationship

Researchers suggest that an athlete's relationship with their coach has the potential to positively and negatively impact the athletes' training processes, performance outcomes and personal lives (Carron and Bennett, 1977; Martens, 1987; Coakley, 1993). Ogilvie (1994) suggest that the athlete-coach relationship is a two-way interaction process, impacting both athlete and coach. Consequently, the athlete-coach relationship has been identified as one of the primary psychosocial factors influencing personal experience of both the coach and athlete in sport (Smoll and Smith, 1989). Blann (1992) identified the role and obligation the coach has in preparing athletes for retirement from sport,

suggesting that the coach is an integral member of an internal support system that can prepare the athlete prior to retirement as well as assist in post-retirement stages.

To test the influence of coach-athlete compatibility on the interaction between athlete and coach, Kenow and Williams (1999) assessed the perception and evaluation of coaching behaviours of 68 female intercollegiate basketball players in the USA. The study explored whether the coach-athlete compatibility significantly related to athletes' perception and evaluation of coaching behaviours. A significant relationship was found between athlete-coach compatibility and athletes' perception and evaluation of coaching behaviours. Athletes who were more compatible with their coach perceived fewer negative cognitive/attentional and somatic effects from their coach's behaviour during competitive situations. Conversely, athletes with negative compatibility reported higher levels of non-communication and increased somatic and cognitive state anxiety.

The social support given by the coach can be a major factor in the adaptation process to a serious or career-ending injury, as well as the other forms of sport career exit (e.g. de-selection, age). In a study of 199 retired elite Canadian athletes, Sinclair and Orlick (1993) found that coaches provided little if any support to most retiring athletes. Koukouris (1991) found similar results with elite Greek athletes regarding the coaches' involvement in post-retirement preparation. It was found that coaches exhibited a positive attitude towards their athletes during the athlete's playing career but demonstrated a sharp decline in social contact and involvement with the athlete following their retirement. To understand the coach's attitude and relationship to the athlete experiencing transition within and out of sport, Blann (1992) explored career transitions in the career development of coaches. It was found that coaches were reluctant to explore new careers outside of coaching. Blann (1992:64) posited that 'coaches cannot, and will not, encourage athletes to consider alternative career paths, as long as they do not understand the need to do so for themselves'. The findings of Blann are supported by Hawkins *et al.* (1994) who found in a study involving both coaches and athletes that coaches, specifically male coaches, had a lower awareness for the need of career development than athletes.

The athlete-coach relationship is potentially most at risk during athlete injury periods. Robins and Rosenfeld (1998) conducted a survey of 35 American male and female collegiate athletes regarding

the amount and type of support given by coaches, assistant coaches, and athletic trainers, as well as the perceived effect of the support on their well-being. The athlete's perceptions were compared during pre-injury and during rehabilitation. There were few differences in satisfaction regarding support given by the three support providers during pre-injury, however, during rehabilitation the coach and assistant coach scored significantly less than the athletic trainer in the amount of support provided to the injured athlete. It was also found that the athletic trainer provided emotional support in addition to task challenge associated with recovery. Some of the athletes responded that their coach expected emotional support during rehabilitation to come from trainers even though the overwhelming response from the 35 athletes was that they would have appreciated emotional support from the coaching staff to ease the uncertainty regarding future involvement in the team. The athlete's confusion and uncertainty is founded in the observation that the coach provides task appreciation, task challenge, and emotional challenge during pre-injury situations. These challenges are described by Douglas and Carless (2006) as 'hardship factors' in which the coach provides or utilises challenging situations to develop resilience. Resilience was determined to be a factor of performance excellence but during rehabilitation task and emotional challenge ceased, even though it would seem that these forms of support would be beneficial to maintain during recovery periods.

2.3.2 Athlete-Parent-Coach Relationship

The relationship parents have with their athlete-sibling and the coach may be a source of potential role conflict and hence may precipitate sport career termination. Wyllemann *et al.* (2000) reported that parental encouragement and support not only enhances the athletes' level of enjoyment, but may also create a special bond between the athlete and the parent(s). On the other hand, researchers have also found that 'pushy' parents and those exhibiting extreme and/or maladaptive behaviour to their child's sporting career were a source of stress for the athlete and contributory to premature retirement from elite sport (Martens, 1993). There is little known about the impact of the parent-coach relationship on sport retirement, although several researchers have suggested based on their theoretical knowledge and practical experience that the coach-parent relationship could be a significant influence on an athlete's adaptation to transition (see Hellstedt, 1990). Communication problems, power struggles over

who has control over the athlete's interests, and interpersonal behaviours (e.g. jealousy of coaches' unique knowledge of their child's ability; parent(s) challenging authority of coach) were typical of role conflict between the coach and the parent(s) (Wylleman *et al.*, 2000). Vanden Auweele and Wylleman (1993) found that the age and gender of the coach and the parents' level of involvement in their child's sport were related to the quality of the interaction. Wylleman *et al.* (1995) also demonstrated that disengagement from sport (referred to by the researchers as sport dissociation) is less likely for young athletes when the parent-coach relationship is characterised by mutual consultation. The support of the parent does not decrease in terms of its importance to the athlete, but rather the nature of support changes from being protective and nurturing to gradually a more emotional, logistic, and financial one. For many parents, the transition in their role in their sibling's sport career can lead to a conflict of interest as the athlete requires more logistical (e.g. driving to training/competitions) and financial support, but on the other hand, wishes for more psychosocial autonomy as they grow older and a greater degree of control of their sports career.

The potential conflict between academic and athletic requirements has been documented by Wyllemann and DeKnopp (1996). In doing so, they identified transitional conflict between the need for the student-athlete to cope with transitions in their athletic career, but also with the basic transitions inherent in each level of education.. The student-athlete who is undergoing physical change (adolescence), together with transitions in competition requirements (moving from one age group to another), must also contend with increasing demand in skill (reflected in selections and/or technical requirements for competition) as well as coping with the equalling important educational issues such as choice of subject to study, passing examinations, entry requirements for higher and further education, and applying to schools/colleges.

Conflict between the academic/athlete roles may be exacerbated by a coach who forces the athlete to concentrate on the athletic role at the expense of the educational one. Coaches may view education as a distraction to the process of 'winning'. The effect of a coach is not reserved to school-aged athletes. Koukouris (1991) in a study of elite Greek athletes found that many of the participants (137) felt their coach was indifferent to their personal needs inside and outside the club, and unable to

perceive them as a whole person. In a study of injury rehabilitation, Robbins and Rosenfeld (1998) suggested that coaches may not provide holistic or personal support for the injured athlete because it may undermine their authority and take up an unequal amount of time compared to other athletes in the team. Thus, disengagement from sport may also be the result of some coaches' desire to satisfy their own egotism and self-interest.

2.4 Resources for Career Transition Adaptation

The success of an athlete's adaptation to career transition is to a large extent determined by the resources available to them to deal with problems should they arise. Social support has been identified as not only a factor that affects the quality of adaptation to career termination but also an available resource to enable the athlete to better cope with transition difficulties. Social support is the basis for the use and development of other forms of adaptation resources, namely: coping skills, and intervention strategies and/or programmes.

2.4.1 Intervention Strategies

Research about intervention and/or counselling techniques for injured athletes has stimulated a number of assumptions for counselling retiring athletes. Danish *et al.* (1992) identified an intervention based on a developmental-educational framework that fits the varied background and needs of a number of practitioners. Danish *et al.* were originally concerned with the belief that the profession of sport psychology had matured to such an extent that it contained divisions and disciplines that were misleading and confusing especially when applied to diverse sport-related problems. For example, they suggested that clinical psychologists look for the problem in order to treat it, whereas counselling psychologists identify strengths in order to better use them to deal with difficulties. The fundamental difference lies at the heart of contrasting approaches to providing a remedial intervention. Danish *et al.* (1993) focused on delivering a life development intervention framework from which different techniques and practices could emanate. The framework's starting point is the basic assumption that change is a natural occurrence in one's life and that it is essential to understand any stage of life within the context of what has happened in the past and what will happen in the future. Changes resulting from change are termed critical life events, which can be anticipated events or non-events that evoke a

stressed response. According to Danish *et al.* (1993:407), life development intervention emphasises 'optimising rather than re-mediating performance'. The goal should not be to prevent the crises from happening, for that is impossible; nor should it be to prevent the crisis from impeding growth. Rather, from a life development perspective, the use of strategies depends on when the intervention is implemented in relation to the life crisis and the nature of the life event itself. Interventions can be applied before, during, or after the event. Intervention strategies used by sport psychologists to facilitate adaptation to career transition include goal setting, imagery, relaxation techniques, pre-retirement training, and specialists counselling techniques.

The specific counselling techniques identified in a life development intervention approach reflect the practitioner's training and the timing of the intervention. Although the framework supports the use of a variety of specific techniques, it is suggested by Danish *et al.* (1993) that counsellors should possess the ability to assist the athlete in setting goals as well as in identifying and acquiring transferable mental and physical skills from one domain to another domain. Danish *et al.* (1993:407) define transferable skills as life skills that 'have value to athletes in and out of sports and can help them manage present life situations and successfully encounter future critical life events'. An important consideration in coping skills training and development is the extent to which sport-specific skills generalise to other life domains. The use of specific intervention strategies such as goal-setting, team-building, mental rehearsal, and stress management are designed to help the athlete cope more effectively with the demands of the sport career. These skills are often of immense value beyond the athletic environment because the skills can be applied as life skills in other areas of life. Smith (1999) considers the generalisation effect of coping skills to be of significant importance in developing counselling or intervention strategies for athletes to deal with transitions within and out of sport.

Lavellee (2005) evaluated the effectiveness of a life development intervention on career adjustment in retired professional athletes. Utilising a control group (n=39) and intervention group (n=32) consisting of soccer players, Lavallee found significant benefit of the life development intervention programme in assisting athletes who experience career retirement difficulties. Lavalle suggests that athletic excellence requires an involvement and commitment that necessitates other areas

of life are sacrificed as a means to maintain their performance excellence in elite sport. Lavelle challenges such a notion, suggesting that the development of life skills training may lead to positive adaptation to retirement because of a better understanding of how to use existing support networks and transfer skills from between life domains and the athletic domain.

In a different athlete population, Papacharisis *et. al.* (2005) examined the effectiveness of a life skills program for youth in sport clubs. Life skills were taught within the context of the sport training environment and evaluated in terms of athletes' positive self-belief, goal-setting, problem-solving, and positive thinking. The results of the research indicated that when life skills training is appropriately embedded in sport practices, the life skills learned are not at the expense of learning sport skills. It was found that the athletes performed better as a result of applying the life skills. Papacharisis *et al.* suggest that the development of life skills in a sport context also prepares the young athlete to deal with the complexities of life and increasing the chance of the young athlete becoming a better student, athlete and member of the community.

2.5 Concluding Remarks

Taylor and Olgilvie's (1998) model of career transition in sport provides a theoretical account of the causes of career retirement and the factors affecting the athlete's adaptation to the retirement event as well as potential intervention strategies for mal-adaptive responses to the transition. However, a criticism of this sport-specific model and other models adapted from career theory is that they have failed to capture the transition process in sport because of its reliance on a rigid, sequential relationship between causes of a transition, factors affecting the transition, and response to the transition (followed by resources for intervention, if available and required). Further, Taylor and Olgilvie (1998) fail to recognise the importance of other transitions in the athlete's development pathway other than from the perspective of their potential to affect the single transition of career retirement. As a model of career transition in sport, it lacks the flexibility or depth of analysis to account for other transitions as significant factors in the athlete's long-term development pathway. It is this gap in research relating to

career transition in sport that provides the basis to the research question: What do we mean by career transition in sport?

Although the literature relating to career transition in sport may predominantly focus on the specific transition of retirement, it does provide a wealth of knowledge regarding the transition process in terms of the factors that may lead to a transition situation and the adaptation response from the athlete. As such, this chapter highlighted the research relating to athletic identity as a factor affecting the perception of a transition such as retirement and subsequent adaptation to such an event. Social support was also highlighted as a factor affecting the career transition process with the athlete-coach and athlete-parent-coach relationship considered primary factors in the process.

Chapter 3

Re-Defining Career Transitions in Sport

3.1 Introduction

The research of career transitions in sport has tended to focus on career retirement and transition models from related fields of study to understand the phenomenon as well as developing and evaluating strategies to deal with adaptation issues. Perhaps this is not surprising given the traditional emphasis in career research that focuses on career entry and exit. Louis (1980:69) described the imbalance of emphasis on career research as follows:

> I believe that the critical middle range between finding a job and moving along a career path has not been adequately addressed in career development- especially lacking is guidance in adapting to the new job and the organization. Inattention to such middle-range activities has resulted in serious limitations in the practice of career planning and development and over-emphasis on career choice and exit.

The emphasis of research in the area of career exit poses a challenge to sport because of the resulting, ill-defined understanding of what constitutes a sport career. Traditionally, researchers in the area of careers have viewed careers as fixed positions that have clear and stable boundaries. However, the rapidly changing world of work, in response to the global economy has created an environment where individuals can expect careers that will be discontinuous and transitional in nature. Sport has occupied a fickle position in relation to the concept of career as a result of its dichotomous professional versus amateur status of competing athletes. The notion of professional sport as a career is ill-defined and lacks the traditional 'look' of a career owing to the early age that most athletes take up their sport and the fact that most elite sport careers finish long before the traditional age of retirement. Amateur sports have even less defined boundaries with participation in sports fluctuating between 'being serious' and 'just having fun'. The criteria which determines when sport participation moves from being amateur to professional is not defined and it is greatly influenced by the cultural and social context in which sport performances take place. It is not the intention here to unravel the debate regarding amateur versus professionalism in sport but to acknowledge that athletes participate in sport for a number of reasons and purposes and therefore may experience different career-related challenges. Further, the changing

context of career has created a sliding framework in which sport attempts to define itself as a profession and position its current practices and perspectives in dealing with career athletes. Stambulova (1994) notes the potential grey area surrounding what constitutes a sports career and suggests that understanding what we mean by a sport career is essential to establishing a continuous support system for the athlete.

The over-emphasis of career transition research on career retirement also undermines other stages in the career pathway. The notion that retirement occurs in isolation from other career experiences poses a challenge to sport because of the emphasis placed on athlete development pathways and stages of development. The stage-related approach to athlete development has received considerable attention in the world of sport through application of Bayli's (2001) long-term athlete development model. The model underpins sport structures in countries such as the United Kingdom and Canada and promulgates the importance of all stages in the athlete development pathway and not just the end stage of retirement. Given the importance of each stage, transition between stages becomes an important aspect of the long-term development process. As such, it is important to re-define 'sport career' and 'transition in sport' from a long-term development perspective that moves perception of career transitions in sport beyond the single event of retirement.

This chapter reviews the research literature regarding what is meant by the term sport career. It provides a definition of sport career that acknowledges the athlete committed to achieving success in sport within the context of a professional and amateur sport structures. This chapter also reviews the research literature regarding what is meant by the term transition in sport, offering a long-term development perspective that reflects the current philosophy underpinning athlete development in the United Kingdom.

3.2 Defining Sport Career

The term career is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary (1998:197) as 'one's advancement through life, especially in a profession'. This definition enshrines the notion that a career only includes those aspects of work in which 'a course of professional life or employment...affords opportunity for progress

or advancement in the world' (Arthur *et al.*, 1989). The perception of the term career being associated with 'professionals', such as doctors, teachers and lawyers, is challenged by a number of scholars (Arnold, 1997; Schein, 1985; Arthur and Lawrence, 1984). Arthur and Lawrence (1984:5) define career as the 'evolving sequence of a person's work experience over time'. A central theme in their definition is the relationship between society and the individual and the perspective that a career provides on the individual's internal growth in identity and its unfolding interaction with external matters, such as the achieving of official positions in organisations. Arnold (1997:16) defines career as the 'sequence of employment-related positions, roles, activities and experiences encountered by a person'.

Arnold's definition of career reflects the historical view of career as a pre-determined set of stages or progression within an occupation and an organisation. The choice of career and organisation was often seen as likely to be the same for the rest of a person's life. Having made a choice it was assumed that an individual would follow the career paths of those before them. Organisations were highly structured to allow for steady progression up the managerial levels. Young managers were developed through a series of promotional steps, each closely linked to an age range. Managers would sometimes reach a plateau but this was usually attributed to a personal choice of comfort rather than a barrier to further promotion. This view of career was appropriate to a period of time characterised by stable markets and organisations (Herriot, 1992). Herriot and Pemberton (1995) described the early relationship between the individual and the organisation as a 'relational contract', based on trust and mutual respect. The employer or organisation offered security of employment, promotion prospects, training and development. In return, the employees were expected to offer loyalty, conformity to requirements and commitment to the organisation's goals. Schein (1985) referred to this security-for-loyalty agreement as a psychological contract.

With the increase in global competitiveness and new technology, many organisations engaged in downsizing (reducing number of staff and possibly range of products) and delayering (removing levels of bureaucracy not essential to organisational objectives) as a means to cut costs and improve efficiency and productivity (Gutterman, 1991). The changing face of organisational structures and aims has lead to what Herriot and Pemberton (1995) describe as a revolution in the nature of employment relationship

within industry and organisations. The 'relational' contract has given way to a 'transactional' one that is based on broader skills, longer hours, short-term contracts, and an expectation that the employee will tolerate change.

The traditional and historical account of career development as a career ladder with pre-determined steps or stages is accompanied by equally pre-determined and predictable decisions regarding choices along the career 'trajectory' (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997). The concept of career as a 'trajectory' implies that if we know the starting point, angle and the velocity, then the end-point and the different points reached at certain times can be predicted. Within the concept of trajectory is the notion that future progression is known and the choice and decision to achieve progression is made for you. Much of the predicted starting points, angle, and velocity identified in the concept are based on patterns observed in large populations and dependent on social class, gender, ethnicity, academic achievement, and geographical location of an employee.

Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997:38) treat the concept of career trajectory with caution, suggesting that:

> It is a fallacy to apply models based on the explanation of patterns in large populations to the interpretation of the actions of single individuals. Because the patterns resulting from behaviour can be measured, it is sometimes assumed that they are a sufficient explanation for the behaviours that they are made up of.

Hodkinson and Sparkes challenge the applicability of the career ladder or trajectory concept to understanding career decisions. They point out that the breakdown of the relational contract between employer and employee has resulted in a range of turning points either imposed by employers or initiated by employees in anticipation of fractious career development opportunities. Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) use the term careership to denote this uneven pattern of routine career experiences interspersed with turning points. These turning points are described as moments in a person's career when he or she has to take stock, re-evaluate, revise and re-judge their position. Further, they point out that turning points are in all aspects of our lives. Even within traditional forms of employment with defined career ladders, individuals may fail to match the traditional norm as a result of the influences of

outside life pressures that may precipitate a mismatch between personal motivations and official structures

Pedersen (2001) offers a sport-specific case that demonstrates how the concept of career has moved away from success defined by stages accomplished towards the individual and how they construe their career and manage it within the context of personal, organisational and environmental change. As careers become more unpredictable the individual moves to define their own marketability through increasing their expertise and managing career decisions for personal gain. In her study, Pedersen focuses on the vertical path of steps and phases in the sports career within institutional settings and considers how an athletic career is possible today for women athletes who are mothers. This question raises the further question of what are the social and historical conditions for the mother-athlete to achieve excellence in her athletic career. Pedersen argues that the careers of elite sports mothers have not originated from social traditions or facilitated by institutional structures, but rather through each athlete acting as a self-made expert in coping with the issues and problems arising from the complex interplay of the spheres of life and sport. She interprets this complex interplay using an analytical distinction between external and internal spheres of competition across the three dimensions of skill, attitude and discipline. The internal sphere of competition refers to 'the management of personal achievement in the world of sport and to the ability to combine the demands of other life spheres' (p. 264). It includes the ability to use broader skills to manage issues such as diet and long-term planning. The external sphere of competition includes the formal aspect of training and performance such as coach-athlete relationship and access to resources. The interplay between these two spheres of competition suggests that success in sport is more than being a 'talent', belonging to the right sex or making the decision to have children or remain childless. For the athlete to achieve excellence, there is a convergence of the spheres of life and sport as well as the positive use of 'turning points', such as childbirth, to help the athlete understand her athletic career within a social world. In Pedersen's (2001:264) research, one 'mother-athlete' stated that before having children:

> ... I've gone all out to be selected. Now, I do not consider the selection that important I don't see it as a strain. Now, I enjoy doing sport more than I did at that time. That's why I think I can perform more optimally.

Dalton (1989) and Denzin and Lincoln (2000) describe these turning points as 'epiphanies' and similarly characterise the experience as an event that significantly transforms the identity of the individual and facilitates change and growth. Hodkinson and Sparkes identified three forms of turning points: 1) structural, determined by external structures (e.g. compulsory retirement age), 2) self-initiated, the person is instrumental in bring about the transformation, and 3) forced, through actions of others (e.g. redundancy). Some turning points can be planned or seen but others are not predicted and may only be seen in hindsight. The unpredictability of turning points challenges the notion of 'knowability' in the career trajectory model. Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) suggest that the routine experiences before and after a career transition are of central importance in career transformation and adaptation. Routine experiences between turning points are characterised by a period of growth or denial that defines career development arising from the career turning point or epiphany. Hodkinson and Sparkes identify several possible routines: a) confirmatory routines- reinforcing a career decision already made; b) contradictory routines- experiences and actions that undermine the original decision; c) socialising- a confirming of identity or career transformation through a period of socialising into a new role; d) dislocating- living with a new career identity despite neither wishing to be socialised to accept it or undertaking action to initiate a transformation; and e) evolutionary- routines that occur as a result of gradual change and outgrowing of their original routines.

A definition of sport career was also offered by Stambulova (1994:222) who defines it as the 'multi-year sports activity of the individual that is aimed at self-improvement and achievement in sports'. Stambulova provides an account of sport career research in Russia explaining the political and cultural influences on sport careers over the last 70 years. She proposes two scientific approaches to the research of sport career: the synthetic description model (SDM) and the analytical description model (ADM), which reflects both a traditional and liberal definition of career. The SDM involves subjective descriptors such as esteem and level of awareness which reflects a more holistic and development perspective of careers. The SDM also involves objective characteristics such as length of career, age, 'costs' of involvement and level of performance and achievement, which interact with each other throughout the sport career and provide an overall superficial description of the athlete's sport career.

The ADM reflects a more traditional view of career in that it examines the course of the sport career as a series of predictable stages which can be presented at a number of levels such as age-related categories, phases of sport achievements and multi-year preparation.

The concept of careership and a development perspective of career provide an expanded or alternative definition of sport career. The definition of sport career presented here recognises the existence and importance of turning points throughout a sport career as opportunities for growth and development. The term 'turning point' is presented here as being synonymous with transitions. What follows is a definition of the term transition in sport that relates to the notion of careership and long-term athlete development.

3.3 Defining 'Transition' in Sport

Schlossberg (1981:5) defines work-role transition as 'an event or non-event resulting in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world, thus requiring corresponding changes in one's behavior and relationship'. This definition takes into account non-events such as not receiving a promotion or being denied a transfer in job location. It identifies change as a common element to transition with attention given to both the objective, definable events that define a career and the subjective attitudes and perceptions held by an individual about their career. Louis (1980) proposed that a career transition occurs when a person changes from one role to another (objective change) or changes perception or orientation to a role already held (subjective change). She further identifies subjective, intra-role transitions, where an individual adopts a different orientation to an existing role, as well as an objective, inter-role transition involving employment entry or re-entry, inter-organisational transitions and workforce exit.

Danish *et al.* (1997) uses the term transition in sport to describe turning points or the period in which athletes review their identity, roles, and motivations to participate in sport. This very broad definition allows for different types of transitions in one's life. Sinclair and Orlick (1993), for example, describe positive or smooth transitions from high performance sport. Stambulova (2000) offers a crisis-oriented perspective of career transitions in sport. From a generalised view of the crisis concept in sport

psychology, it is possible to conclude that from a short-term perspective, crisis is a phase of destabilisation in the athlete's psychic state. From a long-term perspective, crisis can be viewed as a transition in which an athlete has to, but is not able to resolve a difficult situation without support or psychological assistance (Stambulova, 2000). The crisis perspective also suggests that a transition is associated with some essential changes in the athlete's world and behavior. Danish, Petitpas and Hale (1993) stress that despite how we commonly interpret the word crisis; it is not synonymous with mental illness. Stambulova (2000) argues that the term crisis is very applicable to the study of sport careers. Whereas the term transition focuses on a change in athlete's behavior and life, the term crisis is used to characterise the inner conflict confronted by the athlete when able to cope or deal with a difficult situation. Crises stimulate athletes to search for decisions and to self-improve. It does not always imply that the outcome will be negative but may result in positive change and growth.

3.4 Concluding Remarks

This chapter provided an overview of research relating to defining the terms 'sport career' and 'transition' in sport. It offers Hodkinson and Sparkes' (1997) notion of careership as a platform to acknowledge turning points or transitions as potentially powerful periods of time in an athlete's life and career in which identity development may occur with the reaffirming of values and goals. In defining sport career from the perspective of careership, it acknowledges unpredictable nature of an athlete's career path and the importance of 'turning points' in shaping career development.

In this research, 'turning points' were considered synonymous with the term transition. Transition was defined from a crisis-oriented perspective offered by Stambulova (2000) in which crisis denotes a process of resolving inner conflict leading to a change in an athlete's behaviour and perception of career and life events. The crisis-perspective of transitions is consistent with the definition of sport career presented in this research. Both terms acknowledge the opportunity for growth and development as a result of predictable transition between stages of development and non-predictable transitions arising from a volatile social context in which sport careers exist.

The definition of 'sport career' and 'transition' in sport presented in this chapter also reflects a life development perspective. This perspective is important given the importance attached to long-term athlete development models as a philosophical basis to structuring athlete development structures in countries such as Canada and the United Kingdom. Researchers have also identified the long-term potential of transitions as moments of learning and the relevance of previous experience and learning to maximize growth from a transition experience and adaptation to the situation (Danish *et al.,* 1980; Schlossberg, 1981; Blinde and Stratta, 1985; Danish *et al.* 1992; Danish *et al.* 1997). From this perspective transitions are placed within the context of the athlete's life and career and valued as potential moments of learning that could impact perception of past, present and future transitions. The long-term development perspective of career transition in sport does not focus on one transition such as retirement as the main development or crisis experience but acknowledges the interrelatedness of transitional experiences in shaping perceptions and adaptive resources to crises situations. Career theory and traditional models of transition fail to account for the notion of long-term development because of the importance attached to career entrance and exit. As a result transition research has also focused on career entry and exit despite the growing research in the area of long-term athlete development and career transition process which acknowledges the interrelatedness of past, present and future transitions.

Chapter 4

A Long-term Development Perspective of Career Transitions in Sport

4.1 Introduction

The development perspective of transitions in sport careers first gained recognition from Danish *et al.* (1980:115) who identified 'intra-individual similarity' between transitions in a sport career. 'Intra-similarity' is defined as the recognition that a past event or situation is comparable to a present event or situation being experienced. At the cognitive level, the individual is confident that they can cope with a particular issue or difficulty; at a behavioral level, the individual calls upon past sequences of behaviour; and at a psychological level, the event is no longer unique and the individual utilises previous constructs of experiences to deal with an event or transitional issue. Experience with a past situation provides the basis for an athlete or team to transfer skills from one situation to another. Transferable skills are the behaviors used to bridge past and present experiences. Danish *et al.* (1997) believe that the better an athlete or team can identify and accept similarities between transitions in sport, the less stressful the transition period will be. The timing, duration and context of the event were also considered to be important in the athlete's adjustment process and growth. Timing refers to when the transitional event takes place in the athlete's career in comparison to the athlete or societal expectations as to what would be the best time for the event to have taken place. The duration of an event relates to whether the event is perceived as temporary or permanent. The interpretation of a transition from a duration perspective affects the type and severity of emotional and behavioral response.

What follows in the remaining parts of this chapter is a review of long-term development models and perspectives of transitions in sport. These models and perspectives provide an athletic and life framework in which transition occur. They position transition within the context of the athlete's career and non-career activities and acknowledge the link between past, present and future transitions. Danish *et al.* (1992) stress that transitions must be placed within the context of the 'life' of the athlete or team. When placed within this context, transition becomes a process of continuous change and growth with the emphasis on a number of career and non-career transitions. In this manner, long-term development

models are potentially more holistic and encompassing of transitions in sport than the career transition in sport model offered by Taylor and Ogilvie (1998).

4.2 Schlossberg's Model of Adaptation: Implications for Sport

Schlossberg's (1981) model of human adaptation to transition has been utilised by a number of sport theorists to explain the career transition process experienced by athletes (Swain, 1991; Baillie, 1993). Sinclair and Orlick (1994) have taken Schlossberg's model and adapted it to the sporting environment by reassigning sets of characteristics into alternative categories relating sport. Although criticised for its general assumptions throughout the transition process (Taylor and Olgivie, 1998), Schlossberg's model provides a long-term development perspective that is not evident in the research related to career retirement.

In Schlossberg's model, the characteristics of the individual experiencing the transition, the perception of the transition, and the characteristics of the pre-transition and post-transition environment, interact during a transition to produce a successful or unsuccessful adaptation to career change. The characteristics of the individual experiencing the transition include: gender, age, health, ethnicity, psychosocial competence, socioeconomic status, value orientation, and previous experience of transition. The perception of the transition, according to Schlossberg (1981), is influenced by the degree of role change, its effect and the source, onset, duration, and degree of stress resulting from the transition experience. In considering the characteristics of the pre- and post-transition environment, Schlossberg (1981) stressed the importance of evaluating and recognising the importance of social support systems, physical settings, and institutional support structures.

Schlossberg's model also accounted for the effect environmental conditions can have on transitions and divided the environment into three components. The first, the interpersonal, refers to social support such as significant others, family and friends. Whether it is interpersonal or institutional, Schlossberg (1981) viewed social support as critical to adaptation to transition. The second component, institutional settings, refers to structures available to the athlete to support their transition. The third component, the physical setting, includes factors such as the weather or the physical conditions in which the sport is played.

According to Schlossberg the ability of a significant person to control the transition process is affected by eight qualities: 1) psychosocial competence, the use of life skills to cope with transitions, 2) gender socialization differences, referring to the different response to transition or disengagement between male and females, 3) age, which reflects and incorporates life experience and development, 4) state of health, 5) ethnicity, the impact of transition may be unique to a particular ethnic group as a result of available coping resources, 6) socio-economic status, which refers to the ability of an athlete to afford disengagement or a transition, 7) value orientation, referring to an athlete's outlook on life, and 8) past experience with transitions.

Swain (1991) tested Schlossberg's model employing a multiple case design and ethnographic techniques of interviewing and writing to seek an understanding of the experience of 10 professional ice hockey players leaving professional sport. He found that timing of withdrawal from sport was significant because the athlete wanted to be sure that they left at the right time, at a point when their best successes had been accomplished. The timing was affected by internal factors such as growing tired of one's career or developing interests, and external factors such as greater demands for higher performance, increased role within the team, and assuming a role or position in the team that is not a familiar one. Swain's (1991) identifying of Schlossberg's internal and external factors affecting transition timing and ultimately adaptation, is similar to Danish *et al.* (1997) use of 'on time' and 'off time' to predict and plan for career transitions. Swain (1991) also found, in line with Schlossberg's model, that previous experience of transitions assisted the athlete's adaptation because they had become used to sudden changes throughout their career.

Swain (1991) suggested that Schlossberg's model needed to be expanded to include a more detailed list of coping resources. He suggested that education, activities, interests, and other transferable skills needed to be taken into account when examining the athlete's coping strategies in dealing with expected and unexpected obstacles. Similarly, he identified environmental variables such as the coach or support systems that offer advice and help to the athlete in overcoming transitional issues. According to Swain, Schlossberg's model provides a problem-solving format as a result of its process-orientated approach that takes into account a wide range of variables in the transition process, the context of the

experience, the meaning for the individual, and how it changes over time. Although Swain endorsed the position that the process of transition was part of lifelong development, he disagreed with life-span perspectives that attempted to establish patterns or stages in the athlete's career transition history. Schlossberg does not specifically endorse a stage-related pattern of development but does suggest that athletes experience transitions from in a process-oriented fashion that may be viewed as stages. Swain believed that individuals have different experiences in their transitions, and these cannot be generalized to fit into stages or patterns.

4.3 Career Transition 'Stages' in Sport

Despite Swain's (1991) objection to life development stages a number of sport theorists have used the notion of transition stages from life span theory (Super, 1980) to describe and understand long-term athlete development. Stambulova (2000) identified three types of career transitions or crisis: 1) age-related crises (crisis-transitions between adjacent age-related stages); 2) sport career-related crises (crisis-transitions between adjacent stages of the sports careers), and 3) situation-related crises (crisis-transitions that are caused by particular circumstances in the individual's sports career, or life in general). Age and sport-related transitions were described as predictable crises with situation-related transitions less predictable and therefore more prone to be a traumatic crisis. These categories of crises were found to exist in six sport career stages: 1) beginning of sport specialisation,; 2) transition to intensive training in the chosen sport; 3) transition to high achievement sports (amateur); 4) the transition from amateur sport to professional sport; 5) the transition from the culmination to the end of sports career; and 6) the termination of a sports career.

Wylleman and Deknop (2000) also identified transition stages in the development of young athletes' sports careers. The first stage, *Transition into Organised Sport* (approximately 6-8 years of age), represents the first transition from initial contact with sport through play or casual participation to a specialised level of involvement in organized sport. This stage requires the young athlete to adapt to an adult-dominated world, characterised by organized training sessions and competitions, and psychosocial demands to work with coaches and team mates. This stage sees the initial formation of the 'athlete identity', with a new social role of being an 'athlete'. Stage two, *Transition into an intensive*

Level of Training and Competition (12-14 years of age), involves the development phase of the young athlete in which the teenager has become strongly committed to their sport with a strong identity of being an 'athlete'. The training and performance demands, both physical and psychological, are more intense and require a supportive network of family, friends and coaches. The social support network needs to be open and constructive, based on mutual acceptance, respect and consultation. The third stage, *Transition into High-Level Competitive Sports* (17-19 years of age), brings the young athlete into greater contact with national or international sport. This high level of competition and training requires enormous dedication as the young athlete seeks to establish their credentials or professional status. Parents remain significant to athletes in this transition phase with moral and financial support amongst the key mechanisms by which the parents support the athlete. However, according to Wyllemann *et al.* (1998), parental support may be threatened or in conflict with the growing closeness between the coach and the athlete. They recommend that both parents and coaches engage in a mutually supportive and consultative relationship, thus providing the athlete with a conflict-free psychological environment. The fourth stage, *Transition Out of Competitive Sports* – has been at the forefront of sport research through the examination of topical subjects such as 'burn-out'. The cause of transition out of sport for athletes may involve one or a combination of the following: personal choice (e.g. lack of enjoyment), social reasons (e.g. lack of parental support, deteriorating athlete-coach relationship), de-selection, injury, or inability to cope with a specific situation. During this phase, the support of coaches, parents, and sport organisations is crucial in assisting the athlete cope with finding and managing a post-athletic career.

Wyllemann *et al.* (1998) identified additional non-sporting transitions that the athlete must contend with during their performance career. One such transition is academic involvement of the athlete and the possible conflict between the demands of achieving excellence in academic studies and at the same time, in their sports career. Student-athletes also need to negotiate with the possible transition from secondary education to higher or further education. At this level, the athlete faces the task of adjusting to campus life, selecting a course, making new friends and being selected to a team or sport programme. Wyllemann and Deknop (2000:155) summarises the potential transitional conflict:

> These transitions require the student-athlete to adjust to, and cope with, challenges and changes occurring in the combination of academics and athletics. Concurrently, student-athletes are confronted with the duality of their situation. Possible conflict might be imposed between the role of the pupil/student and athlete may occur or may be imposed by the athlete's coach who forces the student-athlete to 'choose' between one or the other.

Wyllemann and Deknop (2000) provide a long-term development plan that builds on research which suggests that it takes eight-to-twelve years of training for talented athlete to reach elite levels (Ericsson and Charness, 1994). This is called the so-called ten-year or 10,000 rule. For athletes and coaches, this translates as slightly more than three hours of practice daily for ten years (Bayli, 2001). Bayli (2001) believes that parents and coaches approach training in sport with an attitude best described as the 'peaking by Friday' approach in which there is little regard for the long-term commitment required to produce elite athletes.

Bayli (2001; 2004) developed a long-term athlete development model with clear stages of development for either late specialisation sports or early specialisation sports. Few sports can be categorised as early specialisation sports (e.g. gymnastics) with most athletes experiencing a seven-stage development process. The name of the stages vary from sport-to-sport and from country to another; however the development ascribed to each stage is consistent in sport in all countries. The stage titles used here are examples of ones used in Canada. The first stage, Active Start, denotes the initial learning of movement patterns and habits in the early years prior to structured education. The second stage, called Fundamentals, emphasises structured fun with the overall objective of develop care movement skills. This stage usually involves 6-10 year old, males and females. The third stage, known as Learn to Train, usually involves 10-14 year olds males and 10-13 year olds females. In this stage, young athletes learn not only learn how to train but also the basic skills of a specific sport. Competition is encouraged but the major focus is on learning the basic technical and tactical skills and ancillary capabilities such as warm-up, stretching, nutrition, recovery and mental preparation. The fourth stage, known as Training to Train (males 14-18 year old/ females 13-17 year old) introduces the athlete to training for the purpose of winning. Fifty per cent of time is dedicated to learning sport-specific skills under a variety of competitive conditions, the remainder of time is still focused on training. The fifth stage of athletic preparation, Training to Compete, involves the athlete focusing on tapering for specific athletic

competitions. The athlete's mental, physical and ancillary capabilities are fully established and used to establish high intensity and high volume training sessions which now constitute twenty-five per cent of the athlete's time. In this stage, the typical ages are males eighteen years and older and females seventeen years and older. The sixth stage of the athlete's career is called Training to Win. It involves athletes nineteen years and older and reflects a stage in the athletic career characterised by high intensity training and multiple periodisation plans in which the athletes peak for major competitions such as the Olympics and World Championships. The seventh stage is Active for Life. This phase or stage involves the athlete re-training for roles after competition and sustaining a healthy participation in sport.

4.4 Posing of Research Questions

There are an emerging number of models and theories relating to career transition in sport that describe career transition as a process for athletes characterised by development opportunities to adapt to crisis situations. The development of these sport-specific models builds on a changing and more encompassing definition of career and life-span theory which emphasises the development nature of transition in a stage-related process. The advocacy of long-term athlete development models to underpin sport organisation programming has also brought both sport and non-sport transitions into the foreground in terms of planning athlete development pathways and directing intervention to potentially problematic transitions.

Long-term athlete development models such as Bayli's (2001; 2004) have focused attention to the whole athlete career, diverting attention away from the potentially more sensationalistic event of career termination. As such, there needs to be a corresponding shift in career transition research from career retirement to career transition throughout the sport career which also includes career retirement. At present there is a paucity of research in career transition in sport that attempts to understand the athlete's experiences from a long-term development perspective that accounts for the interrelatedness of the past, present and future transition experiences. This research seeks to move beyond descriptive

models of career transition as isolated events in sport and to understand the transition experience within the context of long-term athlete development that emphasises the interplay of sport and non-sport transitions in shaping the athlete's perception and subsequent adaptation to the situation. Adopting the position that transition in a sport career offers the opportunity for growth and development, this research also seeks to understand the factors affecting the athlete's adaptation response to such transitions. With these issues in mind, the main research questions become: What is understood by career transition in sport within the context of long-term athlete development? In addressing this research question, it is important to analyse the career transition process utilizing a methodology that allows for an analysis of transition from a long-term development perspective. As such, a biographical methodology is offered in this thesis as an appropriate tool of qualitative inquiry into the social phenomenon of career transitions in sport.

Chapter 5

Epistemology, Methodology and Methods

5.1 Introduction

There is a growing acceptance of qualitative research as a valuable methodology in understanding the contexts and psychological dynamics of sport (Dale, 1996; Strean, 1998). However, which kind of qualitative research is becoming and will become acceptable is more difficult to ascertain given that qualitative inquiry involves multiple methodologies and research paradigms. Qualitative research is used in many separate disciplines, but does not belong exclusively to any one of them. Sport theorists now recognise that qualitative research can provide rich and detailed data to acquire an in-depth perspective of the nature and quality of interpersonal relationships in sport (Wylleman, 2000; Dale, 1996). Grove *et al.*(1998) specifically called for the use of qualitative research to arrive at a framework for understanding distressful reactions to career transitions out of sport. Despite the growing argument for the use of qualitative research in sport, Wylleman (2000) warns that there is a danger of using methodology as a starting point since it may direct the research question rather than the other way around. He argues that the research question(s) should be established and then investigated using the most appropriate methodological paradigm. In this research, the first research question examines career transition in sport from a long-term development perspective and thus, requires a methodology that can account for the transition experiences over a period of time. This chapter examines the case for a qualitative approach in sport-related research as well as explaining the emergence and application of biographical research as a tool for understanding the experiences of transitional athletes and the social world in which these transitions occur.. This chapter also provides a framework for the research procedures that includes: data preparation, initial analysis, core analysis and outcomes.

5.2 Qualitative Research and Career Transition in Sport

I utilised Strean's categories, as summarised in Figure 2, were used to establish the appropriateness of qualitative research in sport which gives it some relevance to evaluating the use of qualitative inquiry in researching the psycho-social phenomena of career transition in sport.

Figure 2 Strean's (1998) Categories of Qualitative Research

Category	Examples/Descriptions
Description	Processes, relationships, contexts, biographies, taxonomies
Interpretation	Generalisations, clarify complexity, develop theory, refine knowledge, change behaviour
Verification	Testing assumptions, corroboration- theory development
Evaluation	Policies, practices, innovations – provide support
Allowing for Surprises	Life stories, epiphanies - capturing hidden unknowns

These five categories of outcomes from qualitative research are relevant to this research in the following way:

1. Description – A qualitative approach is well suited to describing the processes and contexts of the athlete's transitional experience. It supports the notion that career transition is a process involving a number contexts and significant others which requires thick description to understand the meaning behind the account of the experiences. Further, biographical research has the capacity to capture the complexities of the transition process over a career and life period.
2. Interpretation – This category of outcomes from qualitative research supports understanding of social and psychological aspects of sport. As with career transition in sport, interpretation may provide an avenue to understand the complex nature of transitional

experiences and the influence of external and internal factors in shaping adaptation behaviour.

3. Verification – Linked to the idea of testing assumptions, qualitative research may provide the means to determine applicability of several theoretical assumptions or concepts relating to career transition highlighted in the review of literature in previous chapters.
4. Evaluation – A strength of qualitative research is its potential use in evaluating causal factors and relationships. Qualitative inquiry not only investigates the link between variables *x* and *y* but also the processes that connect the variables. The complex nature of career transition in the world of sport requires an understanding of the relationship between causal and developmental factors influencing career transitions in sport. Moreover, qualitative evaluations can help to bridge the gap in understanding the athlete's transitional experience and inform what interventions may be taken to aid this process.
5. Allowing for Surprises – Qualitative research provides opportunities to identify unanticipated phenomena and influences not considered prior to the study. In the case of career transition in sport, a review of the literature highlights the potential relevance of epiphanies, turning points or crises in the career transition process. A qualitative approach that captures the athlete's 'story' is best suited to account for potentially unexpected findings and data arising from investigating diverse and often traumatic sporting experiences.

5.3 Biographical Research and Career Transitions in Sport

Biographical research is part of the broader practice of qualitative methods. The term biographical research encompasses a number of methods that seek to 'understand the changing experiences and outlooks of individuals in their daily lives, what they see as important, and how to provide interpretations of the accounts they give of their past, present and future' (Roberts, 2002:1). The biographical method refers to broad range of techniques including: autobiography, biography, life history, personal history, case history, case study, epiphany, ethnography story, ethnography and life

story. The varied number of techniques associated with biographical research reflects the range of research opportunities and the general scope of the field. However, Reinharz (1992) identifies the different and interchangeable use of these terms as a challenge to the field of biographical research.

Many of the key issues confronting biographical research are rooted in the debate of 'realism' and 'constructivism' in the study of lives. In its simplest terms, realism holds that stories reflect a lived reality and that there is some objective knowledge of reality in which lived experiences are empirically and materially verifiable. .For constructionalists, the emphasis is on how the story is formed and the historical and political contexts and social structures and norms that shape the experience and how it is told and interpreted. Miller (2000) suggests that biographical research takes a pragmatic approach to the realism versus constructionalism debate through relying on similarities in procedures and approaches. Life stories are 'real' events and experiences which are embedded in institutions, social structures and bodily realities in which individual existence is situated. Nevertheless, how these events and experiences are perceived and remembered and placed within the individual life are necessary to understand how 'reality' through the eyes of the individual is formed. This pragmatic approach places an emphasis on gaining an insight into individual lives which may reflect wider cultural meaning. Biographical research accepts that storied accounts may be collected and used in different in ways for different methodological and theoretical purposes thus avoiding being 'trapped by realist or constructionist imperatives' (Roberts, 2002:8). In this research, the use of biography provides the opportunity to understand the athlete life story as 'reality' and to gain context and recognise meaning of experiences in the past, present, and future.

5.4 The 'Life Story'

In this research, life stories were used as the technique for data collection and theory generation. According to Atkinson (1998:8) a life story is:

> the story a person chooses to tell about the life he or she has lived, told as completely and honestly as possible, what is remembered of it, and what the teller wants others to know of it, usually as a result of a guided interview by another...

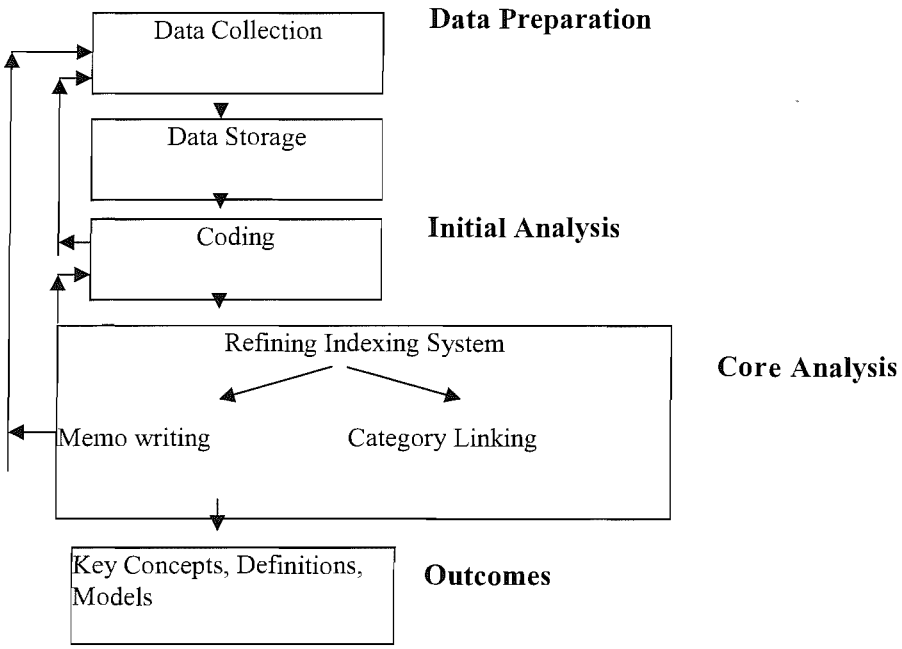
> A life story can be told in many ways and can take a factual form, a poetic form, a metaphoric form, or other creative expressive forms. A life story gives the vantage point of seeing how one person experiences and understands life over time.

The life story can also take on a number of research uses given its ability to potentially unveil 'truths' regarding individual experiences. Life stories allow the researcher to understand an individual's place in the social order and to provide a process for the individual to reflect on and accept their construction of reality. Further, life stories allow for an understanding of the individual's perspective of social events and causes and how they view the impact of social processes on their own development. In addition, they can provide insights into identity development and the relationship between conflict and resolution, change and growth. This is particularly relevant to career transitions in sport and the notion that careers in general potentially have a number of planned and unplanned transitions that may result in conflict in identity and provide opportunity for change and growth. Because a life story is not the life experience itself but only a re-presenting of it, telling a story provides the opportunity for the individual to answer the question, 'Who am I'? For some, in telling a story, self-image and identity gains clarity and strength and the values and attitude developed over a lifetime can be reaffirmed or affirmed (Atkinson, 1998).

5.5 Methodological Framework

I used the model offered by Pidgeon and Henwood (2000) which provides a clear procedural approach: data preparation, initial analysis, core analysis, and outcomes (see Figure 3). The model was used as a framework to systematically approach the preparation for and the analysis of the narratives generated from the athlete's story although some of the techniques and strategies differed from those offered by Pidgeon and Henwood (2000).

Figure 3 Procedural Approach (Pidgeon and Henwood, 2000)



5.6 Data Preparation: Data Collection and Storage

5.6.1 Issues of Sampling

As a starting point for the life story or biographical interview, Atkinson (1998:27) identifies the importance of selecting the right persons(s) to be interviewed:

> Deciding on who you want to interview may be a matter of answering some of the following questions: Who would you like to learn more about? Who has been a model of how to live life for you? Who do you know that has learned some important things from his or her particular life experience? Who would you like to know better? Whose life is a mystery to you? Who are you most fascinated by?

The selection of the respondents for this study was not a random trawl through agencies or organisations that might put me in touch with potential interview candidates but rather emerged through contacts and acquaintances resulting from my job in the sport industry. Briefly, my then position as a senior manager in a university sport environment with responsibility for managing sport scholarship programmes and athletes allowed for continual contact with elite athletes as their mentor and facilitator of support services. Atkinson (1998) supports the use of people who emerge from everyday interactions to be respondents since they are more likely to be better judged in terms of their suitability for the research and the biographical approach.

The number of collected stories is an issue in biographical research and worthy of discussion here in order to explain why I used eight life stories. Some researchers contend that a single or only a few case studies cannot provide an adequate portrait of society or to evaluate what is specific to the individual and what belongs to the wider group, institution or society since it is not a representative sample (see Roberts, 2002). On the other hand, the intimacy of the life story provides the opportunity to 'know' a life outside common experiences and can establish authority and credibility in the text when accompanied by insightful commentary-interpretation (Roberts, 2002). Erben (1998:4) points out that too much emphasis on research technique such as size of sample can 'dull the understanding of the relationship between method and the purpose of the investigation'. The selection of the respondent becomes more important than the number of respondents since the participants must have considerable experience and knowledge of the subject specialism and be willing to assist in the research process. The initial choice of ten respondents as opposed to a single case study was made in order to undertake a comparative analysis as part of the textual analysis.

Ten athletes were asked to be involved in a series of interviews exploring their relationship with their coach and career transition. Of these eight accepted the invitation.. Two athletes declined the invitation as they felt the process of 'telling their story' was very personal and they openly admitted that they were not used to being open with another person. One athlete explained reluctance because of the way she was brought up and that it was not the 'done-thing' in her family to talk about how she felt. A general profile of the eight athletes is presented in Appendix A. Further, information regarding their backgrounds and accomplishments are provided throughout the telling of their stories in this thesis.

All the athletes involved in this research are past or present elite performers in their respective sports having competed in international and national competitions. No selection of athletes were on a deliberate classification of professional or non-professional basis since it was felt that such a distinction is arbitrary and vague in the current climate of funding that occurs for world-class athletes. Given this inclusive definition of sport careers (see Chapter 3) and confusion in using performance for pay as a criterion for defining a professional athlete, I decided to invite athletes to participate in the research based on their commitment to sport. Their commitment was measured in terms of the level

(international, national) competitions attended, and the years of service given to their sporting goals. This is not an attempt to shy away from the potential difference that a professional athlete compared to an amateur athlete may have experienced regarding career transition and the relationship with their coach. Moving away from the money factor, I adopted the position that the number of years of service, dedication and exposure to 'world of sport' is more likely to produce description rich texts relating to the nature of the career transition experience. I acknowledged that the younger athlete may also have different, yet equally traumatic experiences relating to transition situations and the relationship with their coach. Therefore, chronological age was disregarded as a measure of experience or as a condition for being a respondent since young athletes may have a wide range of experiences and transitions throughout their personal life and sport career.

Like age, the gender of the eight athletes was also not controlled, nor was the type of sport in which they were involved (i.e. team sport versus individual sport,, single gender sport versus cross-gender sport). This intentional circumventing of variables reflects the non-positivist approach to the methodological rigor adopted in this research. Empirically-driven scientific traditions stringently attempt to control variables that may or may not control the results in the quest for an objective view of the tested hypothesis (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). The biographical interview as a qualitative methodological paradigm, seeks to encompass all aspects of the experience and understand the subjective perspective relating to the phenomena. Vergeer (2000) endorses this approach to participant characteristics suggesting that a body of knowledge around interpersonal relationships in sport needs to be broad in scope, include a range of athletes and issues from a number of sports. Further, this research focuses on investigating real-world situations without manipulating reality and adopts a holistic perspective to understand and derive the participant's meanings of their sporting experiences. This approach suggests that themes and theoretical concepts developed around a social phenomenon might evolve into more abstract concepts and propositions that capture the way the social phenomenon can be observed in other social contexts (Poczwardowski *et al.* 2000). Therefore the question of controlling variables such as participant gender, age and type of sport played becomes less of an issue from the perspective of whether the findings from the participants can be generalised to other athletes and sports.

In this research, the question of generalisation becomes more focused as to what other settings and subjects can the findings be applied and less as to whether the findings can be replicated in similar controlled investigations. What is important here is the ability of the reader to apply the findings to his or her own situation and learn from the findings even if the parameters of this particular research do not match those of others.

5.6.2 Pilot Interview

In preparation for the interview a pilot interview was conducted with an elite athlete using the same guiding thematic fields and approach to be used with the main research participants. The purpose of the pilot study was to: a) test the appropriateness and use of the thematic fields used for questioning, b) implement the environmental circumstances and recording tools for the environment to ensure proper organisation and appropriate surroundings; c) to practice the collection of field text through probing questions that guide rather than lead the dialogue, and d) to apply data analysis techniques to be used for the field text of the research participants.

The pilot study was carried out with Maria (a pseudonym), a retired national and international athlete. As the former British national champion in high jumping and member of the Great Britain athletics team Maria highlighted many serious and personal issues regarding her transition experiences within sport that affected her retirement from sport due to injury. The pilot also interview raised a number of issues which affected the nature and approach to subsequent interviews with the other research participants.

First, the interview was conducted using a series of prepared questions that followed Maria's chronological life and career. It became evident from the pilot interview that the pre-setting of questions was valuable in having a number of questions available to explore the stages of their career. However, the questions did become cumbersome in terms of ensuring that they were all asked and the interview did not have any gaps. Further, the attention given to finding the next question from interview documents interfered with focusing on the respondent's experiences. From my field notes, I observed:

> Kept searching for the next question and wasn't listening to the respondent. Felt that I was missing important points and opportunities to ask more probing questions.

The analysis of the transcript from the pilot interview suggested that Maria had to deal with major transitions throughout her career, the most serious being a career-ending injury. In her personal life, sport became an avenue to develop an identity and 'protective armour' against the life 'crises' of an alcoholic father. Her identity as an athlete was further galvanised through her relationship with her coach who guided her through the stages of development from junior to international athlete. Career-ending injuries and personal life transitions were tackled with equal determination. In terms of injuries, Maria trusted the advice and coaching techniques of her coach despite later in retirement admitting that it was his lack of knowledge and poor coaching that lead to her injuries that threatened an end to her career. Her loyalty to her coach deepened with each transition overcome and with her identity as an athlete more strongly defined and closeted from the understanding of others. Her decision to quit her sport was delayed because of fear of the unknown after sport and for feelings of guilt of letting down her coach who she rationalized had given up so much of himself to help her through her career and personal life transitions. It was only pregnancy that provided the alternative identity of being a mother that gave her the conviction to retire and begin a new life after sport.

Maria's experience provided a potential additional theme to explore in subsequent interviews. Namely, the role of the coaches in shaping the identity of athletes through the manner in which they handle the athlete's life or career transition experiences. Coaches who use life and career transitions as challenges to 'toughen' the athlete and prepare them for future intense sport-related performance may be deepening the identity of the athlete and further restrict the possibility of identity foreclosure upon career retirement. While the intentions of the coach may be to bring the best out of the athlete the opposite might be happening in terms of preparation for life after sport or the transferring of skills to handle similar transitions.

The pilot interview also raised a number of issues regarding the preparation of the interview participant. Maria was known to me as a family friend and was someone with whom I had previously had general discussions regarding career transitions. These informal discussions prior to the interview were reported by Maria to have been very helpful to her in understanding what a transition is and what it meant to her career as an athlete. She revealed that she entered the interview very aware of the

transitions in her life and felt far more prepared to bring these out in the interview. As a result of Maria's disclosure regarding the value of a pre-interview discussion, interviews with the other athletes in this study were preceded by an informal discussion. The intention was that by so doing, both the athlete and I would become more comfortable with each other and further, the athlete might able to better prepare for the interview as a result of a better understanding of the concept of career transitions. Although a formal letter went out to the respondent stating the purpose of the research, the informal pre-interview also provided the opportunity for me to share the aims of the research and the clarify involvement of the athlete in the interview process.

5.6.3 Accessing Participants

Prospective respondents were contacted and asked if they would be interested in taking part in the research and interview. A brief explanation of the purpose of the research was given as well as an introduction to the biographical approach to be adopted. Arrangements for the interview were made by telephone and email with confirmation by letter. The letter (Appendix B) outlined the purpose of the research and the format the interview would take. At the commencement of the interview the respondent was offered the option of using their real name within the research writing or a pseudonym. All took the latter option. Each was asked (and agreed) to sign a release form that would allow other researchers to read the transcript of the tape or listen to the tape.

5.6.4 Setting

The transparent and thorough approach in preparing for the interview and explaining the purpose and method of the research was also part of establishing a comfortable and relaxed environment. The text was the story I was getting from the interview but the context in which that story is told can be just as important in obtaining an authentic account. Creating the setting or context that helps the person feel comfortable is fundamental to a good interview (Atkinson, 1998).

5.6.5 In-depth Interview: Categories of Questions

Atkinson (1998) suggests that although life stories can be approached through a fairly uniform research methodology, it is primarily carried out as an art form. Although there are a set of questions that could be used, the interviewer may apply them in his or her own way. Patton's (1990) recommends

providing a flexible framework in which respondents can express themselves in their own terms and speak openly about their own experiences. Atkinson (1998:21) highlights the flexible and subjective approach typical of life story research:

> As works of art have their own standards of judgment, so do research methods [life story] based primarily on subjectivity, flexibility, and inevitable human variables.

With this in mind, I have taken heed of Blinde and Greendorfer (1985), Coakley (1983) and McPherson's (1984) call for research to identify the conditions and characteristics associated with athlete patterns and perceptions of career transition experiences. I developed a series of categories primarily adopted from Schlossberg's (1981) transition model to frame the range of conditions and characteristics affecting the athlete's transition experience (see Figure 4). This is not to suggest that the focus of questions were exclusively limited to the parameters of this model. My reading of other career research literature also supported the inclusion of other questions. The category of types of transition was introduced as a result of initial work by Taylor and Ogilvie (1998) in describing transitions as voluntary and involuntary.

Figure 4 Categories of Interview Questions

Interview Categories	**Question Focus Areas**
Environmental Characteristics	Transition Timing, Duration, Coach-Athlete Relationship, Social Support, Parental Support
Individual Athlete Characteristics	Education/Training, Career Planning, Career Accomplishments/Losses
Perception of transition	Transition Awareness, Transition Preparedness, Skill Transfer, Career Identity
Transition Type	Types: Voluntary, Involuntary, Sport, Non-Sport

5.6.6 In-depth Interviews: Question Construction

A range of questions (Appendix C) were developed to guide the interview but from my pilot study I learned that it was not feasible or appropriate to stick slavishly to a set of pre-determined questions. Thus, the questions were not used to dictate the response but rather to stimulate initial dialogue in a

specific direction. Thompson *et al.* (1989) reinforce the use of questions as a means to format the interview but then they point to the need to allow the dialogue to be set by the participant. Questions followed the dialogue and were directed at learning more about the participant's experience rather than confirming my own previously held views related to the discussion topic. This approach is also recommended by Atkinson (1998:42) who suggested that:

> ...you create your own shortlist of interview questions...as your personal set of working questions. Having a pre-selected list of questions to take to the interview but being able to adapt your situation and person and being flexible as the interview progresses is the key here.

The interviews began with questions relating to both their personal life and sporting career (e.g. Where were you born? Who do you play for? Who is your coach? Which club do you belong to?). In addition to providing general biographical detail for the research, by starting with general biographical questions the aim was to put the participant at ease with the interview process. These first questions opened up the dialogue and gave the interviewee the floor and the interview progressed from there.

The first interview lasted for approximately two hours with several interviews taking place over two sessions. In some cases the follow-up interview was conducted as part of meetings between the elite athlete as a scholarship holder and myself as their mentor. Extensive field notes were used to capture the feelings of the athlete in response to the issues raised in the interview. In the cases where the second interview was conducted to clarify issues and to allow the athlete to continue with their story, a summary of the first interview was provided. I asked questions regarding some of the information shared and resulting from ongoing data interpretation and analysis. The respondent was also given the opportunity to expand on any issues or points raised in the first interview.

5.6.7 Permanent Record

The dialogue was taped using an audio tape recorder and later transcribed into a text version on a CD ROM and word-processed transcript. After transcription the text was given to the participant in their preferred format (CD ROM or word-processed text) to review for accuracy with the opportunity to discuss points of issue in a subsequent meeting. A copy of the tape and the fully completed text was provided for the respondent as a show of personal ownership of their story.

5.7 Initial Analysis

Having collected and transcribed the 'rich' data, the next task was to construct a second version of this data that would allow sorting and re-presentation as the interpretation developed. In establishing a narrative approach through the life story technique I used an analysis of narrative in which categories or patterns of information were identified within the structure of the text through a process of inductive analysis. Plummer (1983) suggests that analytic induction is appropriate for the analysis of narratives or life stories through scrutinising individual experiences and cases to produce low-level generalisations which then start to define and characterise a given phenomenon. Plummer (1983) suggests that multiple stories could be used to achieve 'theoretical sampling' and constant comparison' in which life stories are scrutinised until new themes or features no longer arise, and a form of 'theoretical saturation' is reached. Charmaz (2000) emphasises the importance of saturation as a means to validate the relevance and 'empirical fit' of emerging concepts and theories with prior theory and initial categories of meaning ascribed to the social phenomenon. I chose inductive analysis as a means to discover and refine conceptual categories of meaning that emerging from the athletes' life story and my own transitional experiences.

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) advocated a number of pre-set categories that provided a general framework to identify research-specific coding schemes. I used the interview question categories and areas of focus (Figure 5) to determine membership categories. Membership categories are defined as broad patterns or themes relating to the research focus (Darlington and Scott, 1992). Lofland and Lofland (1995) and Bogdan and Biklen (1992) also referred to membership categories as accounting schemes for codes which are not content specific but point towards general domains in which codes can be developed inductively.

The athletes' stories were subjected to detailed review through my reading and re-reading in order to understand the participant's view from an empathetic position (Sparkes, 1998). In doing so, I examined each line of text and identified important themes through a process referred to by Charmaz (2000) as line-by-line coding. The task of identifying significant codes of meaningful text relating to the research phenomena was accomplished using selective or focused coding as advocated by Charmaz

(2000). Any information I considered important or relevant to the membership categories was given a descriptor word. This initial coding stage is similar to process used by Cote (1999) in which meaningful pieces of information were picked from the text and subsequently referred to as 'meaning units'. I made coding notes in the right-side of the margin next to the meaningful word or phrase. In the left side of the margin I wrote the membership category I thought the coded meaning unit best related to. Abbreviations were used to make the coding process easier in terms of making notes in the margin. A single side of paper (Appendix D) was used to note the membership categories, the associated codes, abbreviations, and the paragraph and page number the code was identified.

This 'start list' as advocated by Miles and Humberman (1984), served as a quick reference and organiser during the coding process. Codes were continually added to each membership category with more sophisticated referencing as I moved from description codes to inferential codes as a result of detecting a deeper meaning or theme relating to the code. In this manner, each category had a number of codes with potential sub-codes that reflected more abstract interpretation of the first descriptor code.

To further assist in data analysis and theory generation I employed a 'category card' (Figure 5) as described by Pidgeon and Henwood (2000). I referred back to my 'start list' and labelled an individual category card for each membership category and one of its codes / sub-codes. The membership card provided a useful organisational tool as well as providing more opportunity to document further information regarding the incident or evidence supporting membership category and code / sub-code. Codes and membership categories were continually compared between each card with codes and membership categories changed or re-named in the comparing and contrasting details with other cards.

Figure 5 Category Card

Card 1		**Understanding of Transition / Voluntary**
Para.		
1	1	found social friends more exciting
2	2	friends do not understand what I do e.g. teased about not drinking
3	3	chose to go to go international competitions because coach said it would be good experience.
Links with: Card 12		**Notes:**

Transcripts were read, re-read and compared with codes or meaning units re-visited to understand its meaning in the context of the research questions. This process, known as *extension*, allowed for codes to be joined and re-formed making a new code with more relevant meaning (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The process of coding data was an on-going one that not only facilitated the generation of categories but also generated the making of comparisons between different sources of information. The constant comparative method is an essential component of inductive analysis and requires a) comparing different people, b) comparing data from the same person at different points in time, c) comparing incidents, d) comparing categories with other categories, and e) comparing data with categories (Strauss and Corbin, 1994).

5.8 Core Analysis

The process of initial coding provides a number of concepts and facets to the data which required refinement and analysis. Specifically, the coded concepts must be refined, extended and related to each other in achieving the process of complete theoretical saturation. My own experience of data analysis wasn't so much a linear experience in which the data was analysed and left believing it to be complete but rather proved to be somewhat more circular in nature. Transcripts were read and re-read to make sense of parts of the data which in turn lead to the fuller awareness of the whole or meaning related to career transitions in sport. In a cyclical manner, the emerging concepts and categories fed the analysis

of the individual transcripts and provided more information and questions for the second interviews with respondents. Two procedures were used in the core analysis: memo writing and writing definitions.

5.8.1 Memo Writing

Theoretical memos are used in parallel to and often stimulated by the coding process. The memo can consist of reflections, hunches, comments and explanations, links to literature and theoretical reflections. I adopted a memo writing procedure which used a card system similar to the category card. The memo cards were different colours to the category cards and less structured in terms of content but did allude to where support for the emerging link or new concept or thinking could be found.

5.8.2 Writing Definitions

The act of splitting categories or merging two categories into one eventually achieves a state of saturation in which the coding of additional data no longer provides additional insight. Pidgeon and Henwood (2000) suggest that it is at this point that the researcher needs to make the analysis more explicit by summarising why all the entries have been included under the one label or category. In doing so, I adopted the technique advocated by Pidgeon and Henwood (2000) involving the writing of definitions for the concept that explicitly characterises the qualities which brings the entries together under the relevant category. Although this process was time consuming I was able to begin the linking of concepts that gave basis to integrating categories and deriving models of understanding career transition in sport.

5.9 Outcomes: Capturing the Data

In presenting the data, categories of transitions were used to describe the different types of transitions experienced by the athletes. Categorising transitions was the first step in the coding process in order to make sense of the athletes' experiences and therefore a beginning step in presenting the data. Since individual and environmental factors were adopted from Schlossberg's (1981) model of transition adaptation to frame the categorical questions used in the interview as well as guide the coding process it

also seemed a logical framework to present a discussion of the research findings. The coding process also focused on the athletes' subjective perceptions of the transition experience. The outcome of this coding process is captured through a discussion of the effect of transition on the athletes' athletic identity.

Chapter 6

Ethical Considerations and Issues of Truth and Validity

6.1 Ethics

Although this chapter includes the title 'ethics', an awareness of ethics is implicit in the whole process of the study. I have endeavoured to respect my research participants throughout the research process, treating and sharing their and my stories as a privilege. Letters of introduction, formal and informal introductory meetings and including the research participant in the reviewing and sharing of findings are a few of the systematic strategies adopted to ensure a high standard of ethical behaviour. This standard extends to maintaining a professional approach in ensuring a respectful setting and acting as someone who would listen without passing judgment. I was heartened and surprised at the degree of involvement the participants provided, with most interviews extending far longer than the suggested two hours. Many participants explained how the interview had increased their awareness of their own sports career and enjoyed the collaborative process of sharing their ideas. The interview process raised a number of ethical issues in the collection of data and outcome of the interview. This chapter presents the ethical issues of researcher-participant relationship and positioning of the researcher in presenting the finished text in the research.

6.1.1 Researcher Relationships

Maykut and Morehouse (1994) recommend that the interview process begin with a personal introduction and a statement of the purpose of the research and the use of the transcribed interviews. They suggest that this will create an open and honest exchange and lead to the establishment of trust and rapport. In addition to the formal letter which outlined the general nature of the research, I took the advice of Maykut and Morehouse (1994) by conducting an initial meeting which was not taped or transcribed. This approach was found to be useful in the pilot study in terms of familiarising the interviewee with the subject; matter and creating an environment in which the athlete was not surprised by the line of questioning. I strove to reassure the interviewed athletes that their story was not a case of being right or wrong. In several cases, the interviewed athletes sought reassurance that their story was not atypical of what I was looking for. Again, I reassured them that I was not seeking any confirmation

of a theory but rather wanting to hear their story in order to better understand the nature of career transition in sport.

Methodological and ethical questions also surround the relationship between the researcher and respondent and whether the power relation is fundamentally unequal or whether it can be modified through the research process and still meet the researcher's role of aiding personal realisation and raising of consciousness (Roberts, 2002). In several cases the trust and rapport with the athlete was already established in terms of the power dynamics that existed as a result of the interviewee being a student athlete on a sports scholarship and myself being the Director of Sport of the higher education institution they attended and ultimately the person overall responsible for their scholarship. The interviews with these sport scholars took on a different meaning in terms of trust and rapport compared to the athletes interviewed who were external to the higher education institution at which I worked; insofar as this necessitated a reframing of our relationship with me viewed as a researcher and interviewer and not their administrator of support services provided under the terms of their sport scholarship. This relationship took time to establish but was facilitated through mentor meetings that I conducted as Director of Sport with sport scholars. In most cases, the research interviews facilitated more in-depth discussion in our mentor meetings and the line between what was a research interview and a mentor meeting became increasingly less apparent. Sparkes (1994) commented as to how relationships change during the course of research with the possibility of forming very different and special bonds. In several interviews, both first and second time around, the interviewee provided very personal and emotional accounts of their career and life transitions. I did not expect at first the powerful and emotional impact that the interviews might have on the athletes. However, after two or three instances of emotional outpouring I became aware of the power of the interview process as a means for these athletes to understand their past, present and future. Grove *et al.* (1997) noted that athletes who are dealing with recent or imminent transitions such as retirement or injury may engage in spontaneous account-making about their experiences. Such account making is likely to begin with a denial phase and intensify during what they termed a 'working-through' phase, and mature during the completion phase. Grove *et al.* suggested that narrative accounts assists in both the stress appraisal as well as establishing adaptive behaviour. Many

of the interviewed athletes became intrigued by their own story and asked for follow-up meetings to better understand the traumatic meaning derived from the meeting. The sensitive and potentially traumatic nature of the interview also supported the importance of the implementation of an initial meeting with the athletes to set the parameters of the research topic and prepare them for discussion of potentially sensitive issues.

The athletes that I did not act as mentor to were less forthcoming with personal and traumatic information. This may have been because they had no such experiences. However, on several occasions when their story pointed towards a very difficult time in their life (e.g. death in the family) there was a changing of topic and intentional circumventing of the issues. I chose not to enter their private world with direct questions, fearing a loss of trust and collaboration for the rest of the interview.

As the study and interviews progressed I became more open with the athletes I interviewed and met on several occasions. I shared my own personal experiences and the literature relating to the field of career transitions in sport. Sparkes (1994:70) refers to this form of collaboration as the 'trading point phenomenon'. One of the athletes was employed in her post-career life as an athlete advisor and was well acquainted with career transition literature. We discussed her life experience quite openly in relation to the literature. On another level, the process of collaboration with all the interviewees was a process of mutual growth in which we both became aware of each other's issues and a spirit of collectiveness emerged as we shared our experiences. For some of the interviewed athletes it was the first time they had been the opportunity to understand their complex and mixed emotions relating to career transitions. Sparkes (1994) suggests that biographical research is a means of social intervention that not only recognises the researcher's role in the process of making meaning of experiences but also an important factor in aiding personal or collective realisation and generating solidarities. However, Atkinson (1998) questions the degree and type of investment the researcher makes in the interview process through sharing stories, in building trust and establishing solidarity in the field. I became acutely aware of the trust and openness I engendered and felt responsible for continuing to support the athlete's raised consciousness of their career-related transitions. I did so through providing the transcripts of the interview and offering the athlete the opportunity to meet informally to discuss my

observations made from continual developing and comparing of codes and categories emerging from the data analysis.

6.2 Crisis of Representation

Within the qualitative paradigm, it is acknowledged that there can be no such thing as a neutral report, reflecting an inadequacy of means to openly describe and interpret social reality. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) suggest that there is a crisis of representation that reflects the inability of the researcher to capture lived experience. Sparkes (1998) considers the active role of the researcher in the interview process as potentially problematic in terms of the degree and type of personal investment the researcher makes in giving a 'voice' to those who have not been heard. Sparkes (1995:159) describes the issue of representation:

> No textual staging can ever be innocent. Whose voices are included in the text and how they are given weight and interpreted, along with questions of priority and juxtaposition, are not just textual strategies but are political concerns that have moral consequences.

Atkinson and Coffey (1995) identified emotions and range of experiences as part of the researcher-self as important components of the research process to be collected, written about and represented in the writing process. Sparkes (1995) encourages researchers to be self-reflexive in the way they report their findings and the reasons for choosing to do so. How we choose to write about others have implications for the participants in the research in terms of how they are understood and 'read'.

Ethics not only involve how the research is conducted but also the legitimation of the product in terms of how the finished text is presented. In accepting the presence of a crisis of representation and acknowledging that all research is persuasive fictions, I was left not with the struggle of whether to present my research as a fictitious interpretation, but rather the dilemma of choosing which kind of fiction to tell. How stories are presented and interpreted underpins some of the central questions about

narrative analysis in biographical research: In telling stories does the person reaffirm and reconstruct the self? What is the role of time and longitudinal experience in shaping the recollected story? How can the unspoken self –the embodied or unconsciousness elements which might influence the narrative – be reconstructed and evaluated? The issues of time in the construction of narrative and the way individuals move backwards and forwards between past/present/future using reconstructions from memory are key themes in biographical research and worthy of identification. However, given word limitation I refer the reader to more elaborate discussion of these questions and issues and biographical issues in the writings for instance of Sparkes (2002), Roberts (2002) and Denzin and Lincoln (1994).

In choosing a way to present my research I was confronted with a number of forms of representation including ethno-poetic, confessional tales, realist tales, performance, and autobiographical autoethnography (May, 2002). In selecting how to tell my tale I was mindful of Sparkes' (1995) warning not to get carried away, rushing out and producing an experimental text. As a novice qualitative researcher, I have chosen three forms of representation that best serve my study.

6.2.1 Realist Tales

Van Mannen (1988) describes realist tales using a number of defining characteristics. First, the participant's point of view is extensively presented through the use of quotes in the 'writing up' process. The net effect of using quotations is to give the reader a strong sense of the participants' voices. Sparkes (2002) comments that the volume, density, and organisation of the quotations as 'data' suggest that the participant is telling the story as it happens and that he just happened to be passing it on to the reader untouched.

Second, the author is absent from the finished text with only the experiences of the participants and their social world rendered in the text. Although the author is absent from the finished text, the choice of what and how data is interpreted and presented is left with the researcher. In pursuing the line of realist tale, I present the stories of the eight athletes using the categorical themes emerging from the process of data analysis to frame the discussion of findings. The presentation of text followed a 'model of study' of life stories referred to as life course. In doing so significant experiences and historical events were related to categories of meaning emerging from constant comparison of the eight athletes'

experiences. I acknowledge that although at times my voice is seemingly absent from the text, my presence in the presentation of the text is evident in my role of selecting quotations and shaping the presentation. While the quotes are taken from the participants, the selection, editing and presentation is mine. The text is not multi-vocal but offers only one reading of a tale and that is my own.

6.2.2 A Confessional Tale

The realist tale representation is criticised for the researcher's lack of presence in the text and acknowledgement of the self in the research process. Parker (1998) considers the researcher's biases as an important aspect of qualitative research considering the potential impact their preconceptions may have on qualitative data. Sparkes (2002) suggests that at times it may be possible and desirable to modify the realist tale by having authors indicate their social positioning. Indeed, Sparkes suggests that confessional tales exist in a symbiotic relationship to the realist tale of the same research and do not replace the realist accounts but stand alongside them to say what is unsayable in the realist telling. In this study, I also adopted a confessional tale to stand alongside the realist tale of the athletes' experience of career transition in sport. I used my research and field notes to give the reader an insight into the issues affecting the research process and to give an account of my personal thoughts of my own identity development and involvement in the research process. In doing so, these confessionals 'explicitly problematise and demystify fieldwork or participant observation by revealing what actually happened in the research from start to finish' (Sparkes, 2002:58).

The use of field notes were selectively placed in the text and edited to give representation of the researcher-self and to reinforce the point that the realist tale is told from my point of view. These tales are boxed in the text as parallel adjuncts to the research monograph. In choosing to share selected points of views of the research process, I invite the reader to understand the problems and tensions contained in the process and to show how findings and conclusions came into being. In doing so, the silent voice of the realist tale is augmented by my personal voice in which I reveal how I felt, reacted and coped. Sparkes (2002:59) suggest that this is an 'important move as there is an intimacy to be established with the readers, personal characters to develop, and trials to portray'. However, I acknowledge the issue raised by May (2002) which cautions against the confessional tale being too present in the main text and

possibly diverting attention from telling the story of the field. Dale (1996) suggests that other researchers may criticise this open acknowledgement of presuppositions as being non-objective. However, he counters this position in asserting that all qualitative research contains presuppositions on the part of the researcher and to avoid this fact is potentially more damaging in terms of validation than to recognise its existence from the start. In earlier research, Stanley and Wise (1993) also endorsed an open acknowledgement of the researcher's emotions and feelings in the interactive interview process suggesting that reflexive researchers should monitor their own autobiographical presence in their interpretation of interview text.

6.2.3 Autoethnography

The confessional tale provided in the textboxes reveals some of the personal aspects of the fieldwork and my dealing with issues such as access, immersion, field roles and so on. In presenting my research journey and experience I have confessed to being a 'naïve explorer or social intruder who learns to live on the margins, engaging in a quest of discovery, and maybe learning something about themselves along the way' (May, 2002:318). Thus, the confessional tale foregrounds my voice and concerns of the research process. However, there is also my personal story of living the life of an elite athlete and experiencing career transitions in sport including a traumatic retirement transition. As such, I have chosen autoethnography to account for my experiences as an elite athlete.

Autoethnography has been defined as an autobiographical genre of writing and research that examines the dialectics of subjectivity and culture (Hockey, 2005:40). Autoethnography relates the research process to both the social world and the self and draws on personal stories and narratives and consolidates intertexuality between ethnography and autobiography (May, 2002). As a former elite athlete, the autoethnographic approach positions my athletic experiences within the research process as a means to potentially illuminate wider cultural or subcultural aspects of career transitions in sport. In doing so, I accept the criticisms of autoethnography as a potential for romanticising the self or engaging in gross self-indulgence (Atkinson and Silvermann, 1997). Sparkes (1998b) also suggests that it is difficult to determine the amount of personal information from the researcher to include with the further

potential risk of self-absorption. However, I balance these risks against my authorial presence as a former elite athlete to better decode the data in an accurate fashion that closely matches the lived experiences of the research participants.

I adopt the perspective of Mykhalovsky (1997) who argues that personal experience and autobiographical text can be sources of insightful analysis reacting against the insularity of academic writing. However, the decision to write my own story into the text was not an easy one. It exposed my own frailty as an athlete to the point of my being embarrassed by my own interpretation of the social world in which I existed. As such, the process of writing my story became one of personal account-making and introspection together with offering insights into the subculture of elite sport. In this manner, it should be hoped that my personal story would add a further level of insight and perspective not necessarily evident from the field. Further, my own emotive account and the sharing of my story with the participants led to a subtle transition in terms of my ability to be empathetic rather than sympathetic to their transition experiences.

I do not hold that my story stands above the stories of the research participants but rather is subject to the same rigors of truth and legitimacy and perceived in a temporal, historical and cultural context. I have presented my story at the beginning of specific chapters of the research. In doing so, I have attempted to maintain a visible authorship accepting that it is neither authoritative or a magical rendition of a unique experience. Atkinson (1998) suggests that the interspersal of 'authentic' voices from the research participants and the confessional and autobiographical accounts of personal experiences of the researcher provide a textual seduction, leaving the reader less likely to question the authority of the researcher and more likely to attribute relevancy and immediacy of 'being there' in the social phenomenon.

6.3 Issues of Truth

In terms of studying human behaviour, Sparkes (1998b) argues that the traditional scientific approach which requires the phenomenon to be observable, measurable, and lend itself to verification by other

observers might be too restrictive for those studying human behaviour because it essentially asks only 'why' something happens and not 'what' was it like. Further, Sparkes (2002b:201) contends that:

> When it comes to telling alternative tales, orthodox 'scientific' views of validity (and reliability and generalizability), based on positivistic epistemological assumptions that adhere to correspondence notions of truth, makes little sense.

Moreover, when it comes to personal narratives, Riessman (1993) suggests that these are not meant to read as an exact record of what happened and cannot be subjected to prevailing procedures for establishing validity. Validation in narrative studies cannot be reduced to a set of standardized technical procedures and according to Reissman, 'traditional notions of reliability simply do not apply... and validity must be radically reconceptualized' (p.65).

Sparkes (2002b) identifies this approach as a letting go perspective in which the notion of validity is abandoned completely. Indeed, Sparkes (2002b) presents in what he defined as a 'diversification perspective', a radical reconceptualization of the notion of validity to judge different forms of inquiry. Sparkes (2002b) suggests 'looking elsewhere' to establish criterion of truth and legitimation. In doing so, he advocates reflecting on the emerging criteria suggested by leading scholars for passing judgement on different forms of qualitative inquiry (see Sparkes, 2002b).

Drawing upon the trustworthiness criteria outlined by Guba and Lincoln (1994) and maintaining a flexible, open-ended approach posited through the authenticity criteria (Lincoln and Guba, 2000), I incorporated a number of strategies and practices in the research process in legitimising the 'truth' emerging from the data. Lincoln and Guba's (2000) fairness criteria referred to a balanced account in the text representative of stakeholder's views, concerns, perspectives, and claims. Fairness as a criterion incorporates an energy and commitment to inclusion of all voices and to treat each story in a balanced and fair manner. In pursuing fairness in the research process I provided a full and rich description of each participant's story and included negative case analysis to balance the perspective or 'truth' emerging from the raw-data themes. Respondents were interviewed two or three times to allow for analysis of raw data and refocusing of research questions in light of emerging themes. Respondents were included in this process of refocusing the interview questions by making them aware of themes emerging from their story through debriefing sessions. Respondents were also provided with their text

to review throughout the interview process and at the end of the interviews not only as a form of member checking but as an opportunity for reflexive observation and to understand how research findings are constituted and formed in the research process. In reference to the process of member checking, Dale (1996:317) claims that 'without this final step, the validity of the study is questionable, and one can only hope that he or she has captured the experience as it was lived'. In this manner, by utilising member checks both in process and terminally, validity became an additional form of data and interpretation (Sparkes, 1998).

According to Lincoln and Guba (2000) validity in qualitative research might also involve evaluating the effectiveness of the research process in empowering and enabling participants to create change in their social world. Further, the researcher may also be involved in training respondents in specific forms of social action to enact positive change in their life. The idea that a researcher may be involved in empowering respondents for social change is antithetical to the position of traditional, quantitative researchers (i.e. positivists or post-positivists) which holds the researcher to an objective role in the research process in order to safeguard against researcher bias. However, Grove, Lavallee, and Gordon (1998) identified the need for a fully engaged researcher when dealing with career transition research. Grove *et al.* argue that most forms of inquiry identify the types of coping mechanism athletes may use in dealing with career transition issues but qualitative methods such as account-making, in-depth interviews and field notes observations can elucidate how coping mechanism are used and which processes are at work. In this manner, the researcher is fully involved and provides a confiding environment with timely feedback, compassion, and empathy. Therefore, the process of telling one's story or account making as part of the research process is conducted in parallel with the act of reconciling transitional issues and enacting positive change through a new identity and positive application of past experiences. In this research, the interviews were conducted with a high degree of empathy and reciprocal, account-focused interaction. In each of the eight biographical accounts personal issues relating to career transitions were identified as unresolved 'business'. I provided accounts of personal experiences to corroborate respondent's feelings or to provide examples of how I interpreted a similar experience from a different perspective. Field notes documented observations of

my own and the athlete's possible stages or phases of understanding and acceptance of our own transition story. This process placed me within the interview process as an equal participant in bringing about positive personal and social change in both the athlete's and my own situation.

Ontological and educative authenticity were also designated by Lincoln and Guba (2000) as criteria for determining a raised level of awareness of the research phenomena by the respondents and by persons who associate with research participants for social or organizational purpose. In a related parallel criterion, Sparkes (1998) identified fidelity and believability as a relational criterion that judged the data to be convincing that the events occurred and were experienced as interpreted by the researcher. In delivering this broad-based criterion of authenticity, believability, and fidelity, I provided thick, first-person descriptions of the experience of the respondents and provided transcripts for the participants for their feedback (member checking) on whether the description accurately represented the experience. This approach is congruent with the criteria of transferability proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1989) which proposed the technique of thick, first-person description and availability of database for participant analysis as a means to allow the reader to have enough detail and accuracy of information to be confident that the researcher is not out of touch with reality (believable) and that their version of reality can usefully or meaningfully re-describe their situations (fidelity).

The method of data analysis and interpretation used in this research were designed with trustworthiness, authenticity, believability, and fidelity in mind. The criteria were not blindly replicated as a set of abstract rules or procedures to presumably cover the issue of validity but rather were adopted as lists of practical activities having value for this research situation and purpose of inquiry. As Smith (1993) points out lists of techniques and criteria are open-ended and can be expanded and shortened in ways that do not affect the central ideas presented in the list. In this manner researchers are more likely to use lists rather than abstract standards, as part of the process of engaging with a practical tradition of qualitative inquiry and acquiring research craft that is provided within a community of scholars and passed on over time. The two qualitative studies of Gould *et al.* (1996) and Hardy, Jones, and Gould (1996) regarding burnout amongst tennis players were particularly useful in providing a list of exemplars of procedures and criteria to address the issue of legitimising truth.

Sparkes (1998:372) summarises the debate regarding the use of multiple criteria to address the issue of validity in qualitative inquiry:

> The emergence of a multitude of criteria for judging the qualitative research process and product clearly signals that there can be no canonical approach to this form of inquiry, no recipes of rigid formulas, as different validation procedures or sets of criteria may be better suited to certain to certain situations, forms of representation, and desires of legitimisation.... The process of sorting out conflicting interpretations and applications for qualitative researchers occurs through debate, discussion, and practical exemplars.

6.4 Closing Thoughts

In this chapter I have sought to explain my approach to the research and how my belief system has shaped each stage of this journey, including data collection, analysis and interpretation. I acknowledge that I am somewhat of a novice in qualitative inquiry and my methods of representation is a clear indication of attempts to engage in reflexivity as a process and resource of accountable and ethical positioning of the researcher-self in the research process. By recording the story of my research I have learnt about my self as well as the topic of my study. In the following chapter I detail the nature of the transitional experiences of the elite athletes involved in this research.

Chapter 7

Types of Career Transitions in Sport

7.1 Introduction

> I was too confused to understand that my negative reaction to retiring from competitive ice hockey was not just ice hockey but also about my adjustment to a number of other transitions in my life. I guess I was using ice hockey, something I knew and trusted for so many years, as my anchor to cope, or even hide from so many other transitions in my life. When that anchor was taken away the other transitions were brought into the open. I dealt with some of them better than others but my perception of them was narrow since I never held them as important since I always had my hockey. Over the years, as I rehearse my story time and time again, I can now see with more clarity that the transitions in my life are all connected with a common 'thread' that makes up who I am today.

In exploring the lives of the eight athletes participating in this research, addressing the question of what do we mean by career transition in sport from a long-term development perspective began with identifying the type of transitions in their stories? As with my own reflective note above on the diversity and impact of transitional experiences, a number of transitions were identified in the lives of the athletes using the method of thematic coding. Categorizing transitions was initiated as much of a need to organise the data as it was to develop a framework to acknowledge and analyse different transition experiences and explore the potential interrelatedness of different types of transitions.

> The volume of information facing me in the transcripts scares me. I don't know where to start the process of coding. Re-reading the transcripts it seems the best way to tackle this is to use category cards to put them and classify the athlete's experience into different types of transitions.

The coding of the data into transition types was initiated from the work of Taylor and Ogilvie (1998) and Wyllemann which identify transition types based on being voluntary or involuntary, respectively. The classification of transitions above embraces both sport and non-sport transitions over the course of an athlete's career and acknowledges Pedersen's (2001) notion of life and sport spheres interacting in a complex process that shapes the athlete's career path. The classification of transitions also builds on the work of Stambulova (2000) who identified three types of career transitions: 1) age-related crises (crisis-transitions between adjacent age-related stages); 2) sport career-related crises (crisis-transitions between adjacent stages of the sports careers), and 3) situation-related crises (crisis-

transitions that are caused by particular circumstances in the individual's sports career). What follows in this chapter is a discussion of transitions experienced by the athletes during and between specific life and career stages over a period of time.

In the Initial Analysis stage, the coding produced a number of transitions which were placed into first-order themes based on transition characteristics of being sport-related or non-sport related. A second-order coding produced the thematic factor of predictability that characterised the transition experience. As a result, the types of transitions and their level of predictability combined to provide the four general dimensions or categories of meaning regarding the athletes' transition experience. The four categories included: non-sport, predictable; sport, unpredictable; sport-related, predictable; non-sport, unpredictable (Figure 6).

Figure 6 – Types of Transitions

Sport-related/predictable	Sport-related/Unpredictable
Non-Sport/Predictable	Non-Sport/Unpredictable

This chapter provides an overview of the types of transitions determined from the data analysis. It is not intended to provide the whole life story within this chapter but rather to use specific examples from the raw data to substantiate the thematic presence of specific categories (or types) of transitions. In doing so, the reader is introduced to the athlete through understanding the transition events and the athlete's social world that have shaped their sport careers and personal lives. Atkinson (1998) suggests that life story 'emancipatory moments' when accompanied by appropriate contextual and theoretical

analysis provide meaning regarding the individual and social dynamics which seem to have been most significant in shaping the life.

7.2 Non-Sport, Predictable Transitions

Wyllemann *et al.* (1998) identified a number of non-sporting, predictable transitions that the athlete must contend with during their performance career. One such transition is academic involvement of the athlete and the possible conflict between the demands of achieving excellence in academic studies and at the same time, in their sports career. Student-athletes also need to negotiate with the possible transition from secondary education to higher or further education. At this level, the athlete faces the task of adjusting to campus life, selecting a course, making new friends and being selected to a team or sport programme. Wyllemann and Deknop (2000:155) summarises the potential transitional conflict as follows:

> These transitions require the student-athlete to adjust to, and cope with, challenges and changes occurring in the combination of academics and athletics. Concurrently, student-athletes are confronted with the duality of their situation. Possible conflict might be imposed between the role of the pupil/student and the athlete and may occur or may be imposed by the athlete's coach who forces the student-athlete to 'choose' between one or the other.

In this research, data analysis revealed a number of education-related transitions resulting from predictable, stage-related development in the UK education system: secondary-to-university, university years, and graduation. Further analysis of education-related transitions revealed a number of associated types of transitions. These included: a) secondary school –to-university, difficulty of work, b) secondary school work/exams, c) moving to university – new housing, domestic arrangements, friends, and living responsibilities, d) missing school work/days, and e) finding a job after graduating.

Mary, an international rower, experienced a challenging transition of secondary school to university. She attended university in Great Britain following her secondary experience in boarding school. The transition from secondary school to university proved to be a life-altering experience. Rowing was part of her introduction to university life but was not the entire basis for her crises, she commented:

> Well it wasn't I must admit...I wouldn't say it was the time rowing, for me it was more I'd been in quite a restricted environment. I went to a girls' school before my sixth form and there was nothing to do but work. There was nothing else and I was there...I had only three weekends out a term plus holidays and all I did was study and I was very good at it. So you know the harder I worked the better results I got and I enjoyed that aspect of it but I didn't have to be disciplined because there was nothing else to do. So when I went to university it was like LIFE, time to explore life and I didn't go to lectures, or do lectures, I just didn't go. Missed lots of assignments, failed my first examinations and I suppose I made out that it was because my parents aren't there and I had to look after my younger brother and sister who were at school which really wasn't the case because schools were looking after them and you know I was spending weekends rowing and I was tired but...really it was that I had no discipline because I never had discipline before.

For Mary the transition from secondary school to university was problematic because of her lack of self discipline to adjust to the new demands of living in a less structured environment. Her lack of discipline remained throughout her university years, causing tensions with her tutor:

> Well my tutor sort of met with me occasionally and reminded me that they hadn't seen me at lectures for a couple of weeks and they didn't have any assignments from me and perhaps I would like to do something about it. So you know I got by.

Her balancing rowing with 'getting by' was accentuated during her final exams as she strove to achieve respectable grades:

> You know I did the minimal amount of work possible. I did quite an intensive degree: physiology and biochemistry which isn't exactly an easy degree, you know like basically it is nine to five lectures and practicals every afternoon. And I got a 2-2 grade which I was over the moon about, but some of my lecturers weren't because they knew I was capable of better.

The issue of balancing university studies and 'life' (rowing) was a constant in Mary's life during her university years. She explained how rowing helped her in discovering herself and creating a life that she had not experienced before:

> Yeah definitely it helped me discover life. Making lots of different friends and you know training. We were novices so I wouldn't say that we were at a certain high level and we were spending lots of time training. I wouldn't say that it took time away from studying, it was just great fun. I preferred doing that than studying.

The transition of graduation from university and its signalling the point in life when it was deemed necessary to find a career coincided with Mary's sport-related transition of taking up rowing as a full-time career. She coupled the two transitions in her career planning process thus:

> Well I mean basically I was going to become an accountant. I did the 'milk round' and got a job in accountancy in London and then obviously rowing went really well that summer and I thought I don't think I'm going to be able to do accountancy and rowing in London. So I wrote to the firm and said look I don't think I can row and do all the exams perhaps you would consider me

> at a later date and I went and got a job in London just to pay the bills and went to London to seek my fortune, not in the financial sense but in the glory sense.

The transition of managing university studies and starting a new career was also experienced by Mark who took up archery in his third year of university. He had immediately experienced academic difficulties as archery began to take a central role in his life:

> It [archery] actually was rather overwhelming. My course actually did start to suffer, or my coursework did actually start to suffer at that point because of archery.

Like Mary, the transition out of university coincided with a transition in his perception of his athletic career and its relationship with future career goals:

> I think...certainly after I finished my first degree...I had a six-month break whilst I was looking for work and then when I found work you know didn't have as much time as I you know would wanted...still shot but didn't shoot as much as I would like. And that in a way forced me...that am eventually slowed me down as...you know as in how much I shot. And then I came to this university, not having 24 hour range facility made me think about my shooting, much more than just go down and shoot...just shoot for shooting's sake. Now there is two training sessions a week so I could you know not waste time. So that discipline I suppose... that sort of enforced discipline I suppose was a big plus but you know it was an impact that happened. I think certainly since I've started my PhD which I have been doing for the last two years I've had to re-negotiate with myself the balance that I have of archery and my career as it were.

In a similar fashion to Mary and Mark, Aiden (international archer) felt that his archery career became more difficult to manage as he made the transition from high school to university. He highlighted the stresses of taking care of his personal life alongside his career as an elite archer:

> It has taken the wind out of my sails I suppose because living at home everything was done for me, so I would shoot and I could reach my potential. That's a lot harder now. I've stayed at the same level but it is harder to stay at this level than it was to peak before.

Like Mary and Mark, the main crises for Aiden during his university years are managing the expectations he has for his athletic career, academic and social life:

> I suppose the only thing that is really standing in my way right now is me more than anything. It is probably just my subconscious saying I'm too lazy to do it. I could probably do everything I wanted to do now to be the best but to me it feels that there are not enough hours in the day to fit in social, University and training, because I do like to have a social life as well. Maybe I could cut down on that a bit and do more training?

In a similar note, Jon found the stress of school final exams alongside the demands of his shooting career as a continual source of crises. Like many of the other athletes, finding the right balance was constant transitional issue:

> I think there was a little bit of difficulty...I don't think so much in GCSEs I think more for A levels but I think that had an...well it was certainly a reflection of the position I had in the squad. I was captain at that time, but GCSEs weren't too bad. Obviously when we had exams I could go training but certainly on Tuesdays and Thursday afternoons we'd go out for fours [four rowers per boat] or so and then at weekends we'd have matches. So it was really trying to find the balance and I think I found it that year but I think when I did my AS exams and A levels I think I prioritised my shooting too much. I actually became quite passionate about my sport and a lot of people started to criticise me about that and it was ... it was very difficult to work out the right balance.

Jon recognised the conflict of interests in his life between shooting and academic studies. He understood the need to 'find the balance' but openly admitted to his own failings in finding and maintaining the balance:

> I did notice myself a lot more stressed in my sixth form year...personally I think that I quite well in my sixth form year. I was Deputy of House, I was a House Prefect and I would...I arranged...I basically helped and organised plays and concerts and things, so I was doing a lot of extracurricular stuff and ...one of the things the Head Master said to me was the fact that those who have a good balance between their extracurricular and their academic often achieve very well in their academic grades. But I think for me I did get very stressed and...it was a lot of pressure and I didn't really find the balance. I found a balance I was comfortable with but I don't think perhaps it helped my academic side of things.

Although experiencing similar academic-sport transitions, Henna's transition to University was very different from the other athletes. She chose to attend an American college on a full tennis scholarship. Moving away from home to attend university took on extra meaning because of the distance to travel back to England and the difference in cultural expectations. Henna recalled the mixed emotion of embarking on a tennis scholarship to America:

> I was just so excited going to a different country, going to America which was just like this huge place and knowing that I was going to get a chance to travel and...it was like...I was only 18 and I was moving away from home for the first time to a completely different country. I don't think I really took on board until I actually got there and it suddenly sunk in that I wouldn't be able to just pop home.

The pressures of balancing school commitments with sport were evident during Henna's high school years. The challenges relating to the demands of both commitments were managed through an understanding school that allowed her to have time-off to train and compete. Henna describes the effect of such a transition coping measure:

> Yes school was never really a problem and they always knew that I was...that I played a lot of tennis, so they understood that sometimes I would take of school on a Friday to go and play and sometimes I would take the lunchtime out so that I could go and play tennis with my coach or something like that. I was actually quite lucky with school because they quite understood and

> they knew that I had these commitments that I wanted to stick to and they were quite pleased about it and quite proud they had someone in the school that was quite sporty and fairly good at it.

7.3 Non-Sport, Non-Predictable Transitions

Aiden's difficulty in balancing school work with his athletic career was also exacerbated by non-sport and non-predictable transitions. During his final school exams he also had to endure his parents deciding to 'split up'. This family transition occurred three months before his final exams and added to existing difficulties that his parents had with his athletic career. Despite this mix of transitions, Aiden was proud of his accomplishments during this difficult time:

> I didn't get a lot of support from my parents. My mum was quite... 'Oh yes that's really good', perhaps more of an interested parentish type thing. My dad was negative about it because he was always concerned about my academic side of things and he was like, 'Oh you're not getting an A level in shooting' and when I went to University it was 'Oh, you are not getting a degree in shooting'. I have had to stand up to them quite a bit. I'm happy with the fact that I've got to where I wanted and I've managed to achieve the extracurricular things that I wanted to do as well. I did have a small, well quite large family issue that came up right through my Levels so...my parents decided to split sort of April time so that was three months before I was due to take my final exams. So I think that there was a kind of mixture of things. But for me, I feel quite proud because although I didn't quite get the grades that I wanted but I still got into university...given my situation and the level of commitment that I put into the sport.

Non-sport, non-predictable transitions were also evident in Mary's rowing career. She had endured numerous unpredictable transitions such as injury and loss of form. However, the death of her mother proved to be extremely traumatic and disruptive to her personal and athletic life:

> And the following year we went on to become World Champions which was wonderful in the double with Susan (pseudonym). But we had a lot of problems too. Jana (pseudonym) had a bad back and unfortunately my mum died that year and I got this sort of under performance problem...

The impact of this life transition was far-reaching into her athletic career. Mary tried to maintain her rowing at her coach's urging but she was unable to manage her life transition as well as manage a sport-related transition, namely attending Olympic trials. She describes her response to her coach's demands to meet the challenge of her career and life transition thus:

> It was quite tough and I got to the final trial and I was in a terrible state and knew that I wasn't right and I said to my coach, 'Look, I really don't think I can do this'. He said, 'Mary you have to do it'. And I had to do it and I bombed and all these people who had never beaten me before beat me and were all strutting around saying they were going to be in the double with Jana and

> you know...and I was just, my pulse rate was about 75 in the mornings and I knew that wasn't right and I went to see the team doctor and she pulled me out and I went to see a bereavement counsellor and had about six weeks just to get myself back and yeah we got back in time for the Worlds and we won the Worlds which was great.

The mention of her mother's death was a difficult part of the interview. How much information could I ask for? In the end I made the decision that it was her story and she could give me as little or as much as she wanted to. It did not all come I am sure but she made a few references to this event at later times in the interview. I felt that she was making the connection between her mother's death and other events in her life and bringing that into her story as she could understand the link. I certainly felt at that time that the story I was getting about her life was only part of the story. There was a story that would differ from this one in a few years time as she reflected on her life and the events that shaped who she was.

7.4 Sport-related Transitions / Predictable

A significant transition experienced by each of the athletes was the single event or short period of time in their formative athletic careers that demarcated their transition to the status of elite athlete. In many cases it was a formal recognition of 'making' a specific team or attending a high-level competition.

Ella, a national and international swimmer, enjoyed a number of sports but eventually chose swimming as her main sport:

> I was very good at cross-country. Got to County and Regional level in cross-country and when I came over here (England), my coach told me to choose between...which sport because both were taking up quite a bit of time and he wanted me to increase my swimming hours...so I chose swimming. Don't know why...think it was... I was succeeding in swimming at the time, was doing well at it, enjoying it and...I think when you enjoy something it is just...you don't have to ask any more questions.

Aiden, an international and national archer with the Great Britain team, identified a series of events that he considered as challenges in his career and which defined his progress to becoming an elite athlete:

> I suppose when I started winning the Regional Championships I started winning all of them, doing really well. Shooting real good scores and I started thinking, 'Wow, maybe I'm going to try to make something out of this'.
> And I started going up to National competitions and did fairly well at them as well. People who were beating me at Regional level were still beating me at National level, but there wasn't anybody else in the Country it was just me and them, and then when I started beating them, I started going up to the top in the country.

Chloe, a national and international track athlete, was equally clear in recalling a certain time in her career that defined her rise to elite level status.

> Probably English Schools I came second. I got my England vest to go onto the International Schools and I came first at that. I was really, really pleased with my England vest. To get my England one was brilliant. And to do well in the competition was really good as well. And then the next step on was to get my Great Britain kit, which I did the year after that, which was good.

Her testimony also reflects predictability in achieving milestones in her quest to become an international standard athlete:

> Yeah they were my goals. I set out goals throughout that year and I said I wanted to get to the International event. And the next year was obviously to get my Great Britain Vest. I went to the European Olympics the next year after that which was when I got my GB kit.

The level of planning by Chloe reflected a stage-related approach to her athletic development. Her transition into higher level sport was preceded by a pathway of development stages clearly identified in her own goals. Chloe had followed a structured approach to her development that was not only embedded into her performance planning but symbolised by the sport organisation for track and field athletics in Great Britain through awarding of 'vests'.

Ella also followed a structured programme of development that began in her early years:

> I was in a competitive programme from the age of 8 just following a Learn to Swim programme that my parents had put me into. The coach that I was under recommended that I went to one of the leading clubs in the south...
>
> I started at 9 and under a very strict coach that they had there. Expected you turn up for training seven times a week and if you couldn't attend more than 85% you were asked to leave the club. At that age as well there was a lot of skills but there a lot of successes in terms of badges that you were trying to achieve like your 5,000 metres which I got at 10, and so there was always little stepping stones even though you were too young to compete there was always something to aim for. I think I liked the challenge. Still like a challenge.

Her development continued under the guidance of club coaches following a specific development pathway:

> They had squad coaches so...from the ages of 9 to about 11 I was with a coach, then you progressed to the next level and to the next level. I was at Portsmouth [city in England] until I was about 13 and then my parents moved out here, where I looked at the area and the squads available...

In a similar fashion, Henna (a national and former American collegiate tennis player) was introduced to tennis through organised structures:

> It was more short tennis when I was younger. That is the tournaments that you played and then tennis is just like building me up to when I was about 7 or 8 when I could actually start playing proper tennis and I was able to like take it on, but the short tennis was very organised. You have like County tournaments and you have Nationals and so it is still really structured and stuff like that. When I was with County I played the first one – Under 7s, then Under 8s, Under 9s, Under 10s, Under 11s, and then that was it and then you went on to play proper tennis really.

For Aiden, the development pathway to becoming a national and international archer began with a participation-based introduction (similar to Balyi's Fundamentals and Learn to Play stages of long-term athlete development) to the sport followed by a linear progression of County Squad to Regional Squad to National Squad :

> It all started when I was about 10 years old and we drove past an archery field and I was just looking down and said to Mum and Dad that I would like to have a go at it. Dad said that when he was a kid he always wanted to have a go and Mum and Dad signed me and my brother up to a course at the local Leisure Centre and started with that and then joined a club and carried on ever since.
>
> Coming out of County going to Regional I realised the level that I had to work at to get higher, and I pushed with my first regional. Other ones that stand out were winning the British Championships as a junior which was great because I shot my personal best, so I couldn't have done any better. That was in 2000 so I was just 17. I won both days with two personal bests which I was very, very pleased with and that got me on to National Training Squad and it just went up from there.

The development pathways experienced by Chloe, Ella, Henna and Aiden, generally fitted the long-term athlete development model offered by Bayli (2004). In his seven stage model the athlete moves though sport structures and programmes in his or her journey from 'playground to podium'. The presence of these stages in the stories of the four athletes is not surprising given the prominence of Bayli's Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) model in shaping UK Sport's vision of 'whole sport plans' for player development . This is not to suggest that an athlete development model such as the proposed by Bayli (2004) provides a standard model for every athlete. Balyi (2004) suggests that LTAD has been too often been wrongly used by sport organisations as a template for program planning rather than as a philosophy underpinning athlete development; a philosophy that recognises individual patterns of maturation and technical development and adaptation to training and competition environments.

Doug, an international beach volleyball player, also followed a structured pathway set out by the national governing body of volleyball in the United Kingdom. The sport organisation's age-related

stages and corresponding competition structure provided a development pathway, but also challenged his perception of himself as a volleyball player:

> ...at the start of the juniors it was almost like I was told that I couldn't really be the good person or whatever, or a top player and I gradually was showing success and stuff. Like in the last year, the very last tournament we had, like the coach said, 'that's amazing stuff'; he really congratulated me and that was a lot. We actually won a big tournament and it was quite satisfying to be like a major player. But after that the transition just went. There wasn't any transition to the senior team, and ...all of a sudden we are chucked into senior team training and I just couldn't handle it mentally because again it was fear of failure but it was on such a big scale because I was watching these people that I was like training with were my role models...

Doug was unable to negotiate the coupled age and development related transition despite the predictability of the transition:

> In between SouthWest and England I would play for the southern England and that was a two year programme as well...until seventeen so I started playing when I was fifteen. Yeah we set minimum standards all the way through the whole cycle and the minimum standard started out like small things...

For Doug the transition proved to be too difficult with little support or ability to manage the change to the highest level of competition:

> It was at the end of the two year cycle and there was no...there was one under 21s tournament and apart from that there was nothing. You just went straight into the senior team and at that time the senior team was at its very best, it's very strongest...
>
> I always could be in better physical shape, but mentally no way. I couldn't handle the grief I was getting from other players for making mistakes and stuff...

Doug's experience highlights the potential problem with rigid structures that cause athlete transition difficulties because the athlete's development does not match the sport organisation's development structures in terms of age-related progressions.

7.5 Sport/Unpredictable Transitions

The athletes' life story focused on a range of sport transitions, but it was the unpredictable transitions that generated the most data as well as the most challenging dialogue in terms of accessing the athletes' meaning attached to the transition experience. Coding analysis of the data revealed four dominant unpredictable transitions relating to sport: 1) non-structural transitions, 2) injury, 3) de-selection, 4) coaching, and 5) retirement.

7.5.1 Non-Structural Transitions

In the previous section, predictable, sport-related transition reflected the stage-related pathways identified by Bayli (2001; 2004). It also highlighted the existence of transitions between stages which has also been identified by Stambulova (2000) as a specific type of transition. The predictability of the stages also provides a degree of predictability to the timing and duration of the transition between the stages. However, a number of the interviewed athlete's stories did not follow a stage-related development pathway mapped out by their sport organisation or coach and therefore experience a number of transitions in spite of an athlete development pathway rather than as a result of one.

> I knew injury and de-selection were going to be unpredictable, sport transitions but I kept reading and re-reading the transcripts and identified random transitions that I really could not put in a category. I then realised that all of these transitions had one thing in common – they did not occur at the right time in the athlete's career and did not have the characteristic of being part of a long-

Mary experienced a number of crises as a result of not having a structured pathway with planned transition stages in her development. Mary learned the fundamentals of rowing at university in a very short period and experienced an unstructured stage of learning the basics and how to train for the sport:

> We had no training programme, we just went out in a boat. We were organised and went out in a boat and had lots of enthusiasm, but no structure at all, absolutely none.

Despite this haphazard beginning to her career in rowing, Mary's rowing experience at university was positive and initiated a major transition in her life and career. She moved into high level sport, following three years of competing for the university rowing team:

> In the summer of my third year we went to...did quite a few regattas, did really well, also in my second year a really good coach came on board – we advertised for him and...It was more of an accident again but he was a really good coach and I remember someone called Barb [pseudonym name] who still works for British Rail [firm] and she had been an international herself and coached a few internationals, came down in the winter of my third year and came out with us and videoed us and basically sort of said, 'I've got a video of the women's squad training and here's the video of you training and really there isn't that much difference, it is just that they are a lot fitter than you and they go a bit faster, but they are doing the same things wrong' and that was when I thought 'Oh well maybe I could be really quite good at this and my coach had also you know raved a lot about me and said that I had a lot of natural ability and was very strong.

The decision to train and compete full-time with the intent of rowing internationally was not part of a planned sequence of events negotiated by Mary with a rowing sport organisation or coach. There

did not exist a linking of stages of development with one stage progressing to another nor was Mary fully aware of the link between past, present and future stages. Rather, it was a traumatic period in her life characterised by uncertainty and inadequate support structures from the national rowing organisation:

> Well obviously we had to make the top crew at the club and it was the leading women's club, but again we didn't even have a coach to start with. We had someone's husband who had written us a training programme, and then we managed to get a cox who came along and he had some quite high level rowing and coached us, and then we managed to get a coach but then he started having an affair with two girls in the crew which meant everyone else fell out including the two girls. So we didn't have a coach for very long. But in the end we did manage to get a coach who had coached under 23 level, but he also coached the Olympic team in 1984 and this was 1987/88 at this stage so when he came on board that made a huge difference. We started having a training programme. I didn't have a long-term plan because we didn't really understand how rowing worked. There was an initiative to get rowing on telly involving fast sprinting and we did quite well in it. In fact our four in the end won it and I think Bill [pseudonym], our coach, then actually got quite excited by that plus the fact that we were all really enthusiastic about rowing, we wanted to long a long way. And then we went to the National Championships and he sort of had this idea that we could put together an eight that would be the National Team eight. And we nearly beat them. Which was great and I thought 'Oh wow' we're really doing well and when somebody asked me what is your ambition and I said that I would like to win a medal for my country. And everybody laughed and said don't you know British women always come last at international events, and I didn't know that, but by that time I couldn't really do any other sports so I was a bit stuck. So I thought maybe the selectors might have tried to strengthen the crew by selecting some of us but that never happened. They decided to not send an eight; they decided that it was good enough to just send a club crew so they didn't send an eight to the Seoul Olympics. Which disappointed me but there were a few girls who knew the structure we needed to make it at the trials [Olympic] and Bill agreed to coach us for the next year and the idea was basically to put an eight together that would first go to the Worlds. And I was just over the moon about that, 'That was great'. You know a dream come true. I could see a pathway of how to get there. Because at that stage there was no pathway for women...was very, very disorganized. There was no funding at all. All the funding went into the men's side of the sport. But I didn't know this at the time I just believed that if I was good enough and trained hard enough then I would get there.

Mary's story highlights a number of unpredictable events and non-events that challenged her identity as an athlete. She achieved extraordinary achievements (Olympic and World Championship silver medals) despite being continually challenged with unpredictable crises arising from poor long-term athlete development structures. A distinguishing theme of Mary's story that characterises the unpredictability of her career is the late introduction to her sport and her meteoric rise to national and international standards. She seemed to have combined her introduction to the sport (i.e. learning the fundamentals) with the later stage of specialisation and experienced these two stages in a short period of time and at a later time in her life than most other athletes following a more predictable athlete

development pathway. The potential outcome of this transition process experienced by Mary is not attaining full development in these stages.

Other interviewed athletes also demonstrated irregular development pathways with skipped stages of development, or experienced stages of development at non-traditional age groups and in an irregular (mostly short) time frame. Jon, a national and international small bore rifle shot athlete, was also introduced to his sport at a late age, during his second year at school (14 years old). He describes a well-planned introduction to shooting:

> The shooting squad is one big squad really...it's a process. Because I became captain in...well I was Secretary as I was doing my GCSEs which gave me effectively three years of having a position within the squad so you kind of understand how the squad runs. And the way it works is that you do this thing called Introduction to Games, you get all the Houses down and you get them to do a grouping and when you see how good they are you then invite them back. With that you probably get about four or five a year...From that you then pick an eight or two eights if you feel that the squad was strong. so for me it was quite exciting to be picked and joining this squad and the squad wasn't that big, it was probably about 20 or 15...

The transition from learning the sport to gradual increased training and competitions was very structured and predictable. However, the move to high-level competitions such as national and international events was far more rushed and surprising to Jon:

> I joined the competitive squad really half way through my first term. I then actually shot...you might call it a National Competitions, its what we call Schools Meeting held at Bisley and this basically 50 schools from all over the county. Yeah, I mean, I was a bit shocked to be picked for the team. It was very... it is a very scary thing to be involved with for your first competition. So really my first time of joining the squad, of being in a major team competing was my second term of my second year and so you'd call that about a year, just over a year of starting to shoot.

Jon reasoned that his rushed introduction to large competitions was more out of necessity to keep the sport 'alive' in school sport and ensure that you were represented in competition irrespective of your ability:

> In previous years its very rare for someone as young as me to be picked for the competitive team, but I think...it would be quite interesting to look at the patterns of how these teams change and what sort of age groups you have in them, but it was a pattern that more and more young people had to be introduced because you just couldn't just get those numbers of shooters at the top end of the school.

In 2004, Jon was selected to represent Great Britain Under 21 team at a competition in South Africa as well as tour Canada with a select team from the British Rifle squad. His development spanned only five years from first being introduced to the sport to representing Great Britain at high level competitions. In

comparison, Bayli's and Stambulova's age-related, athlete development pathway to high-level competitions (Train to Win) can span between 10-12 years depending on whether the athlete is female or male. This corresponds to Ericsson and Charness (1994) 10 year or 10,000 day rule in terms of the time required to achieve elite level status in a sport. With this as a guide, Jon's development was meteoric although the level of his accomplishments at the elite level suggests that his short pathway to elite level competitions had also created crises in his performance and subsequently his perception of himself as an elite athlete:

> I am not sure how I am going to explain this – but we were talking about this development progressive line, Canada [competition] in its sense was the whole progressive line for myself and for me you know, I'd been selected for this team and my scores and the stuff I had been doing before that was obviously showing that I was good enough for the team. The fact was that I shot absolutely appallingly out there and for me that was a really horrible experience because you know you can do better than that and you have the temptation to turn around and say, 'Sod it, I just can't be bothered any more'. I did that a couple times out there.

Jon's performance crisis in a major competition in Canada was an unpredictable transition that shook his confidence. It is difficult to say with any real certainty whether his poor performance was a direct result of 'rushed' stages of development, but potentially his crisis in performance and identity formation was facilitated in his belief that he had taken the correct development path in his build-up to being selected to Canada:

> You learn so much in your first year at the competitive level and I think my second year I did learn a lot as well but it was those two years that I put together. My second year I did extremely well. I broke my class. I picked up quite a few prizes which obviously did show and have reflection on what I did in the first year, so the two years combined was what put me forward to this team in Canada.

Mark, a national archer, also experienced a number of unpredictable transitions resulting from a long-term athlete development pathway that was irregular in duration and onset. His introduction to the sport of archery began in his first year of university. It was very brief before committing fully into training and competition stages of development:

> When I first started up in Scotland there was...it rather a large club and there was, I would say, twelve of fifteen people starting at the same time as I was which was great. And then for the first year in archery they actually have...they separated you off as Novice Class so for the first year you are a novice.

For Mark, archery became the most important part of his like after only a year of shooting:

> It was... actually it was rather overwhelming. ...my course actually did start to suffer, or my coursework at that point because of archery. I mean there would be times when...I did a mathematics course which was generally morning lectures nine to twelve and ten from then on from about twelve or one o'clock I'd go down and I would shoot and sometimes I would shoot for six or seven hours a day and then there would be other days when I wouldn't feel like going into my lectures at all...

After only two years of shooting, Mark attended his first national competition and attended his first international competition representing Scotland. Being introduced to international competitions at an early stage in his development pathway led Mark to adopt a training regime that reflected the elite status of his competition plan. Unfortunately, the untimely management of his staged development led to inappropriate training and competition expectations which ultimately led to injuries associated with over-shooting. Further, his identity as an archer was formed and affirmed based on inappropriate goals and performance indicators.

7.5.2 Injuries

The transitions arising from a lack of performance pathways closely match the concept of 'off-time' transitions (Blinde and Stratta, 1992) in which the athlete is less able to engage a process of anticipatory socialisation because the transition is not accounted for through a planned, stage-related programme of performance development. Injuries were considered 'off-time' transitions that were not directly influenced by sport organisations in terms of being an identifiable transition in a performance pathway. Six of the eight participants experienced one or more traumatic injury that lead to a questioning of their career development and identity as an athlete. Mark experienced a number of transitions relating to his school and identity as an archer as a result of his unpredictable and unstructured development as an athlete. He also experienced a number of injuries arising from over-training and poor training during his early experiences in archery:

> I would just go down to the galleries and you know I could just shoot for...eight or nine hours a day which was just silly because I damaged ligaments in my fingers...or I'm fairly sure it was because of that. I would have no rest periods, I didn't do any weight training or circuit training to assist my shooting, it was just shooting and I became very good...there's no two ways about it but I think in many ways it did hamper you know my later archery career in a slight way. Just the way that I ...possibly viewed training. You know I thought it was the end all to be all.

For Mark, injury was not a single event with a start and end but rather a process that impacted on his perception of development and performance. He chose to ignore his injury and persisted with competing:

> I was young and dumb enough to just carry on shooting...The fact that it slowed me up over time and built me up asymmetrically I suppose. Without training the other parts to match up, you know both sides of the body...the back. You know...I just didn't think at that time. I didn't think I had to deal with it at that time, but if I were to go back seven years I would have done things differently.

Udry *et al.* found that most athletes suffering injuries experienced as a processing/awareness dimension which is highly specific to each athlete in terms of the amount of time this process takes. They also found that that in some cases, the athlete is not denying the injury but simply trying to determine the severity of their injury.

The process of determining the severity of an injury is in itself a transition process characterised by processing more and more information released from doctors and physiotherapists. Three athletes were experiencing traumatic injuries at the time of the interview. Their revelations were very emotive and revealing of the crises they were enduring. Ella had sustained a serious back injury training for the Commonwealth Games. Her initial reaction was one of disbelief rather than denial:

> I knew it was pretty serious. It made me stop in session straight after. I think it was a set of kicks and I remember the set totally and I remember stopping in the middle of the set. They were doing some recovery and I just clung onto the side and thought to myself, 'Don't be stupid and finish the set off'.

She continued to train and manage her injury in secrecy in order to go to the Games:

> I went into the Commonwealth Games without my team knowing the full extent of my injury. I had a lot of treatment, fire fighting treatment up to the Games which enabled me to train. My coach still believed that I was strong enough to perform well, so I went to the Games, two weeks before I was supposed to race in which time that team made me train twice a day, which I managed but to start but what they didn't know that I had to see a physio three times a day to get through it...which I did. Swam in the 50 Fly with a personal best and broke the Ireland [country] record...which I was amazed about. Missed the semi-final by point two of a second and then had to go straight to the hospital to have an x-ray on my back and a scan which they then told me that I wasn't allowed to swim again for the rest of the competition, but I did on the Friday and probably did more damage than good.

From that point, Ella has engaged in a process of determining the extent of injury and planning her management of the injury, she revealed how she had:

> Seen a number of specialists for the last two years, all of which had many different opinions and very hard to understand which one or which group of people were telling you the truth or their version of the truth or...what they felt at the time. After seeing many specialists and having many scans and people prod and poke I think it was time that I had to just take the next step and just go for surgery.

Chloe, an international athlete was experiencing 'shock' regarding her injury at the time of the interview for this research. She saw the injury as a career defining crisis in her sport career:

> Definitely a big challenge. This is the worst injury that I ever had so I feel really lost at the moment. I don't know where to go but obviously the physios will help me. I've got to sort out what sort of training I need to do as well now. It is going to completely change me...I thought it was going to go away, which was a bit silly.

For Doug an injury threatened his volleyball career, and resulted in losing a minimum of a whole year of training and competitions as he sought to overcome the injury:

> I tore my quadriceps at my knee. It's almost completely off; it was just hanging on by the last few threads. This whole year, last year has been focused for me on trying to get fit and it was the most frustrating period of my life because I think it was never going to get better and it almost didn't until I found a specialist that had a new steroid treatment.

Spoke to one athlete today and was taken aback quite a bit by her crying about her injury. I did not know what to say but just re-assured her that it was going to be OK. Pretty stupid thing to say actually since I did not know that. She talked a lot about how the injury would stop her life. Powerful words I thought! When she left she said that she felt better for talking about it. I now realise the power of story-telling.

7.5.3 De-selection

De-selection in sport is a process involving not proceeding to the next level of achievement or winning competitions. It can also involve not being selected to a team or being removed from a team. The reasons for being de-selected may include lack of skill or poor performances. However, de-selection may also occur as a result of lack of opportunity arising from the limitations of sport-related systems or structures or the occurrence of an 'off-time' transition. Schlossberg (1984) referred to this as a non-event that may cause internal reflection and a different way of perceiving oneself. For Mary, following her winning the first medal for British women in rowing, the competition and achievement pathway became far more predictable and structured under a far more interested national rowing organisation:

> Yeah really chuffed and the next year was Olympic year so it was all systems go but of course the jealousy from so many of the other girls in the team and they just want to do this and every single training session and there was so much pressure and of course I'm the type of person who likes to win everything.

Mary's expectation and performance plan suggested to her that she would achieve a medal at the Olympics, a major transition and turning pointed she was expecting and planning for. However, in preparing for the Olympics following her medal performance at the World Championships, her rowing partner became very ill, forcing a re-pairing of rowers just six weeks before the Olympics:

> I was put in a pair with another girl...and we went on an altitude training camp, and we had never been to an altitude camp before and the coach didn't know about it and it was a very bad decision to go. Plus the fact that we could only get on the water about once a day, the water so rough because of the altitude. So by he time we got to the Olympics you know, we came fifth which was an incredible result considering but you know it still wasn't a medal and we had so much promise and I was so disappointed, but it was my first Olympics and I just remember watching the other rowers getting their gold medal and just then I realised that at the World Championships, your mum, dog and your Dad watch but at the Olympics the whole country watches and just how much bigger the Olympics are. So that was a huge learning experience for me as well.

Her disappointments at not achieving the predictable stages in her competitive career were not limited to the Olympics. Nonetheless her disappointment at the Olympics, Mary rebounded back after finding a new coach:

> Bob [pseudonym] said that he would come up during the week and at the weekends we would weight train and he would coach us and there were a couple of girls who were doing it and then a guy whose sort of been around for yonks said that he would coach, he'd be the chief coach...you know everything we did was miles faster than anyone in the pair and so the Worlds that year were in Prague and we'd like won all the regattas up until the Worlds and at the Worlds we bombed and we came fourth and it was just one of the worst experiences in my life.

Mary had endured loss at Olympic competitions and World Championships at a time when her ranking and recent form suggested that she would be a strong favourite to medal. The other seven athletes also reported loss of form and competitions that lead to crisis in confidence, although perhaps not as prolific as the loss of Olympic and World Championship as in the case of Mary. However, the standard of competition in which an athlete lost the championship or their form did not seem to be a factor in the level of crisis experienced by the athlete. The level of crisis was more attributable to the athlete's perception of their loss of standing in terms of its unpredictability and the athlete's ability to rationalise their situation.

7.5.4 Coach-related Transitions

Henna experienced a form of de-selection transition in her tennis career in which she lost her form and standing at tournaments and competitions. She acknowledged her performance crisis:

> It is the fact that I knew that I had actually played at a better level and then I had gone...I had receded rather than like progressed and that was really hard because I just knew that I could be a better tennis player and that I was somehow failing myself by not doing it and that I had gone backwards and I was just like I don't get why it is happening because I know that I'm a lot better than this and its frustrating.

Henna's attributed her loss of form to poor coaching. She believed that the stage of development she was experiencing required a more tactical and motivating coach:

> I think at the beginning she was just like right I know what I have to do, we have to develop her technical side, and then once we got past that she just didn't push me to become a better player and to really reach my full potential. She didn't want to put that much effort in, because for her I think it was just like another pupil for her to coach, another bit of money for an hour. She tried to plan match play for me but there was nothing anything serious or she was never really passionate about it.

Henna changed coaches as a result of her loss of form and began to be coached by another coach who from the outset improved her performance and perception of her career:

> He changed technical stuff right away. He was like you shouldn't have this grip and he went straight into it...didn't like beat around the bush...just straight in there and sorted it out. The thing with Mick [pseudonym] he went straight...you he know that I had some problems mentally and then my fitness was bad as well and he addressed those straight away and he said that is going to make you a better player and he went through stuff mentally with me to try to sort out my game. For the rest time I could talk to someone about what I felt on court. No-one ever said to me, 'what do you think when you are on court, what do you feel'?

Henna's coaching transition consisted of leaving her old coach and taking on a new coach. To an extent, the leaving of her original coach was reasonably predictable and a decision that she was in control of. The taking on of a new coach was less predictable in terms of how she would react to new coaching techniques and styles. In this transition, Henna experienced a positive transition that also ended her performance crisis. However, she also experienced a negative coaching transition when Mick decided to leave the coaching profession ad move to another country. Henna was upset about losing Mick as a coach and questioned her next career development:

> I was quite upset because I had like thought about really going...taking a year out and giving it a go with him as my coach and really pushing for it and I just, I enjoyed the thought of working with him one-to-one like all the time every single day and him giving me guidance on how to go

> about it because he played the Tour himself...and then when he said he was leaving I was like, 'What am I going to do'?

The loss of her coach was an unpredictable crisis that led to her decision to play in America at an American University. This decision involved a number of transitions (new country, new friends, different playing and training environment) including having new coaches. The transition to new coaches in America was not a positive one and lead to her eventual quitting of her tennis scholarship:

> I think Mike (pseudonym] wasn't great at motivation. I really needed that. Like I would talk to him and he was just like 'You have got to your fitness' and I'd just feel like 'No' and so he lacked the ability to really like just spark like passion in me to go and play...

Her perception of coaching in America was equally as scathing as her perception of her coach's interest in her career:

> ...I finally figured out that they didn't care about me at all and the fact that you know when I was injured they didn't really care about how injured I was. It was like if there was some way I could play, they would chuck a cortisone injection in or anything like that so I could play, so I would not be letting them down...
>
> Well afterwards I finally figured out what it was like I was...I don't know why I was so shocked by it, because I know what Americans are like and what the University system is like, its so competitive. You hear horror stories about coaches and how bad they are so I can't be too surprised but at the end of it its that their job and that's why you get a scholarship. They pay you to play because you get their money and they get the credit for it. So it is not really too surprising that you know they don't really care about whether they cripple you for the rest of your life.

Henna's story contains both positive and negative coaching transitions. In both cases, they were powerful turning points in her career. A common theme from the athletes' stories is that the type of coaching transition most experienced by athletes was the changing of coaches with its process of severing old ties and re-establishing new relationships with other coaches.

Like Henna, Mark also experienced a transition in coaches from his club coach to regional squad coaches. His first coach was a positive motivator, tough and disciplined but caring about the players. He recalled his club coach's tough disposition:

> She was tough like an Alex Ferguson coach...I think it really brought the best out of all of us...she just makes winners out of people.

While playing for his club coach he also had to work with new coaches from the regional squads who were equally disciplined but his perception of the coach was based on fear:

> I think I was more afraid of the coach...I did enough but I never was like the first. Because I knew I was never like the best player, I think I was scared to do something wrong. I used to hide really to be honest within the team.

His two year cycle with the regional squad was followed by equally distressing periods with the senior national squad. He chose to leave indoor volleyball and make the transition to beach volleyball. This decision to change to beach volleyball was precipitated by a chance meeting with another coach:

> I met a lady called Cherie Bell [pseudonym] at one of the senior training camps and basically she and a couple of other players we began to train on the beach with her and basically from my personality I couldn't handle the stresses of indoor volleyball from the coaches and team members...so I moved over and basically I had less pressure on myself...it was more enjoyable.

The transition to beach volleyball brought about a positive coaching transition, one that he could see as supportive of his career:

> It was never any moaning, no aggressiveness. It was more like help....help was always there, you never felt uncomfortable being in this environment. If you needed advice it was there. It was more like an auntie or sister. Our relationship became like that. Whereas my relationship with coaches in the indoor game was totally different.

Henna and Mark's coaching transition not involved a change in coaching as well as a change in coaching style. All of the athletes experienced changes in coaches but it was coaching changes with significant change accompanied by coaching style that seemed to require the most adaptation, both positive and negative.

Ella, the international swimmer, experienced only one coaching transition but still highlighted how that affected her career. She described her first coach (until the age of 12 years old) as very strict:

> Strict but fair and friendly. Would know where to draw the line but was also fun. The coaches were strong in character ...made it fun but challenged me and made it hard...

In later years, at the age of 14, Ella sustained her first injury. By this time she had just moved to another part of England and began training with a new coach. Her injury coincided with a coaching transition which had a combined negative effect. Ella believed her new coach needed to be similar to her old one:

> I think he needed to be stricter. I think that had been the main difference between coming from a very strict background at a young age and then coming into a very relaxed atmosphere as an older athlete, and developing athlete. I think in many respects it needs to be reversed. But yeah it was a very good foundation having very strict dominant people...dictating what I was doing.

Ella strongly believed that she benefited from a strict and technical coach and this had best suited early stages of development. However, she also highlighted that a more relaxed holistic coaching approach

would suit early stages of athlete development with discipline and technical structure coming at later stages of development. In her case, she wanted a strict and disciplined coach to guide her through her injury transition in order to return to swimming as soon as possible. The change in coaching style from a very strict environment to what she described as a 'more relaxed atmosphere' was not the only coaching transition. The new coaching style was not a style she needed to help her cope with the injury transition that she was experiencing at the same time. She needed a known and comfortable coaching style to get her through the injury transition. Instead, she was faced with two coaching transitions which combined to magnify her injury situation. Ella lost 18 months of swimming while she managed her first injury and coaching transitions.

The change in coaching styles was a significant transition for Mark, Henna, and Ella as part of the overall transition in coaches. In Henna's case, the change in coaching style was triggered by a coach that did not have the technical or motivational skills to progress her to the next stage of development. For Henna the poor standard of coaching was a difficult period in her career that led to poor performances and de-selection. Coaching standards and coaching style may be closely associated in that a coach may be a poor coach as a result of inappropriate or poorly evolved coaching styles. In this case, the athlete may experience a change of coaches as a result of experiencing both of these coach-related sub-transitions. However, some coaches may have an excellent coaching style but not the appropriate standard of technical knowledge resulting in a coaching crisis for the athlete.

Chloe experienced a major coaching transition, switching coaches as a result of needing a coach with increased technical knowledge:

> Brian was my old hurdles coach. I'm quite close to him. I can talk to him about anything, but he's only sort of a club coach. I think he got me as far as he could get me with his knowledge and then I had to move on. It was really hard.

The transition was difficult to manage for Chloe, but she realised that her rise in performance standards demanded a better coach. The act of changing coaches was a transition she was not prepared to deal with on her own:

> I went to my world class potential coach and my manager to help with the transition. I got in touch with my new coach, had an interview with him, you know a meeting. He went through what sort of training he does and what he expects from me and it just went from there really.

> My mum and I sat down with my old coach and said you know, I think it is time to move on. She said it in a nice way – I got my Mum to do it, which is a bad thing but...yeah he was alright. He got a bit funny about it. He didn't stop talking to me or anything like that but it was awkward.

7.5.5 Retirement

Of the eight interviewed athletes only Mary had experienced retirement as a transition. Retirement as a transition in sport can be predictable and planned as part of a long-term athlete pathway (Bayli, 2000; 2004) in which the athlete 'graduates' to the next stages in his or her career. Retirement can also be unpredictable especially if it is a result of injury, or de-selection. In the case of Mary, her decision to retire was precipitated by three other major transitions in her life: a) marriage, b) prospect of motherhood, and c) age-related physiological decline. These transitions were predictable, non-sport and sport-related transitions which in conjunction with previous career and life transitions contributed to her decision to retire from rowing following the 2000 Olympics:

> I wanted to spend some time with my husband, you know we had been married for two years and I was away for six weeks at a time here and there. I wanted to start a family. Now it is alright for you blokes but when you're a woman you're the one who has to be pregnant and have the baby etc. It is a bit more difficult and we don't have the setup in this country especially for rowing to be able to have a family and keep rowing. They might have family support in Romania or whatever but not Britain. It was the right time to retire. I mean I pulled my best ergo [ergometer] scoring in Atlanta so I was about 32 or 31 there. My own scores had got worse and worse so I knew physically my physiology was declining, age was obviously kicking in on that side but obviously my mental and my technique had improved so there was the benefit of age and experience but I knew physically that my body wasn't as good as it was, age was kicking in so I knew that I couldn't go on for much longer.

Mary's reasons to retire also seemed to stem from her lack of support from sport organisation to have a family and keep rowing. Although the advent of World Class Performance Funding from UK Sport (a UK government agency responsible for elite sport development and funding) has since addressed the issue of funding world-class athletes, Mary's feelings of abandonment highlight a transition that was precipitated by a lack of athlete development structures. In a final statement that summed up her achievements in rowing Mary explains that she was successful 'in spite of a system in women's rowing rather as a result of one'.

7.6 Summary

This chapter identified a number of predictable and non-predictable, sport and non-sport-related transitions from the biographical data generated from the interviewed athletes. In doing so, the intention was to provide the reader with insights in the athletes' lives and the social phenomenon of career transition in sport. Figure 8 provides a categorisation of the athletes' experiences as types of transitions based on the causality of these experiences in challenging the athlete's perception of themselves and redefinition of their relationship with their social world.

Figure 7 Categories of Transitions

Sport, Non-Predictable	**Sport / Predictable**
Injuries De-selection Coach-Related Non-Structural	Age and Stage-related
Non-Sport / Non-Predictable	**Non-Sport / Predictable**
Family Death Marriage Childbirth	Academic Stage-related Academic – Social/Cultural

Injuries were a common transition for most athletes and represented a major period of crisis in their career. In addition, de-selection was also an identified transition in the athletes' career. Further it was identified that de-selection not only meant failure to 'make' a team but also the failure to negotiate the next stage of development in long-term athlete development pathways as described by Balyli (2004). Both injury and de-selection have been identified in career transition literature as possible causes of transition out of sport (Taylor and Olgilvie, 1994). In this investigation, injuries and de-selection were significant transitions within the athletes' career with the potential of being a career-ending transition. Both types of transitions represented situation-related crises and were predominantly unpredictable. The heightened level of unpredictability associated with de-selection and injuries and the potential loss of

identity and previous status led to these two transition types being extremely traumatic periods for a number of the athletes.

The existence of LTAD (Bayli, 2000, 2004) as a model of athlete development served as a framework to identify transitions within and between stages of development. The athletes demonstrated age- and stage-related transitions that, although challenging and in some cases traumatic, were predictable and therefore required less adaptation. The absence of LTAD also created a number of associated transitions that occurred in the absence of structure and age-related development paths. These transitions were less predictable for the athlete and manifested themselves as an unstructured sporting experience. The key implication of athlete development models such as LTAD is the recognition of transitions between stages and for sport organisations to recognise their responsibility for these system-induced transitions and develop strategies for preparing athletes to negotiate these predictable periods of change.

A key person in that process of athlete preparation for transition episodes is the coach. The athlete's biographical data revealed a significant number of coach-related transitions, usually involving poor technical skill, motivational abilities, and lack of consistent coaching presence during transitional and non-transitional periods. The identification of a number of coach-related transitions highlights the importance of coach development and its link with athlete development stages.

Chapter 8

Environmental Factors: Time-related Factors Affecting Athlete Perception of Career Transition Experiences

8.1 Introduction

Chapter 7 provided a categorical framework based on types of transitions that accounts for transition experiences in the athletes' long-term development pathway. In the following chapters the types of transitions highlighted are re-visited from the perspective of analysing environmental and individual factors affecting the athletes' perception of the transitions and their subsequent adaptation to them. This chapter examines the environmental factors of timing, duration and onset on the career transition process.

8.2 Timing

Timing refers to when the transitional event takes place in the athlete's career in comparison to the athlete or societal expectations as to what would be the best time for the event to have taken place. Danish *et al.* (1997) referred to transitions as either being 'on-time' or 'off-time'. 'On-time' transitions are characterised by a level of predictability in which the athletes have a rehearsal period in which they can prepare for the transition. 'Off-time' transitions are characterised by a sudden change in situation in which the athlete is unprepared for new roles or expectations.

In this study, a number of predictable sport and non-sport transitions were identified from the biographical data. These transitions can be considered 'on-time' and supportive of Swain (1991) and Schlossberg's (1984) assertion that such appropriately timed transitions positively affect the athlete's perception of the event. This study found that the 'on-time' transitions resulted from the presence of stage-related development structures that provided predictability regarding training expectations and competition level and demands. Transitions are part of a pathway of development that allows for anticipation of the event in what Danish *et al.* (1992) refer to as pre-occurrence priming. As such, 'on-time' transitions allow these events to be viewed as a process with no discrete beginning or end.

In the case of Mary, for example, her retirement was a suitable step in ther long-term development pathway. She describes her preparation and rehearsal for the transition out of rowing:

> I mean going back to the decision to actually row and go for it in the first place when I left University and then you know when I basically took a side-step from my career and then again in '97 and 2000. I never wanted to look on my career and see a failure. I wanted to make sure I had given it every single opportunity. I didn't want to be one of those sad people that sits in an armchair looking at the telly going if only I'd done this, I could have won that. I mean maybe I could say if only we'd aimed for the gold we might have got gold, but I knew after 99 that 2000 was my last Olympics. I had made that decision that I was retiring whatever. I wanted to have a family and if I carried on I couldn't and you know to go at the top was fantastic. I don't think I would have made the transition quite as easily if we hadn't won a medal at the Olympics.

Mary's 'on-time' transition out of sport was characterised by mental and physical awareness of the impending transition which allowed her the time to prepare psychologically for it. Her winning the silver medal at the Sydney Olympics positively shaped her view of the transition and was a major factor in her knowing it was the right time to retire:

> That was very helpful. I mean I decided though the year before that it was my last Olympics and I definitely wasn't going to carry on after the Olympics. Irrespective of what the result was I definitely wasn't carrying on, I definitely was going to stop.

This perspective reflects Swain's (1991) findings that the timing of withdrawal from sport is important to all athletes because they want to be sure they withdraw at the right time, and at a point where their best successes were behind them.

'On-time' transitions are specific to the athlete and may not always result in positive adaptations to the new situation or a positive impact on performances if the athlete does not perceive the supposed 'on-time' transition appropriate for their career development. Doug responded to the age-related promotion to senior ranks of the national volleyball team with fear. His technical and physical ability were appropriate for his stage of progress but his mental 'game' did not match the predictable timings assigned to this transition stage. In response to the interview question, 'Were you prepared for the transition to the senior team'? Doug replied:

> No way. I could have always been in better physical shape, but mentally no way could I have handled it. I couldn't have handled the grief I was getting from the other players for making mistakes.

Doug's inability to handle the transition despite it supposedly being 'on-time' highlights the potential danger of institutional or organisational 'on-time' transitions. Although organisational

transitions based on long-term athlete development provide predictability of transitions, it may also result in too much rigidity that does not account for the athlete's individual perception of the situation and his or her mental, physical and emotional preparedness to navigate the change. Clearly, a key area for sport organisations to develop is assessment structures and protocols that determine the athlete's ability to cope with change at this point in their development. Further, assessment of their transition preparedness needs to be matched with support mechanisms that assist the athlete in adapting to new expectations in their new roles. Structured 'on-time' transitions should be viewed from an athlete-centered perspective rather than an organisational one, safeguarding against organisational 'on-time' transitions become athlete 'off-time' transitions.

In this study it was also found that 'off-time' transitions may occur if a transition is not undertaken by the athlete at the appropriate time because of poor organisational structures or 'blocking' from key people or organisations. In Chapter 7 a number of transitions were categorised based on the absence of definable development structures, resulting in stagnation in athlete progress and motivation. Henna almost quit her tennis career because she was unable to make the appropriate coaching transition that matched her technical and competition stage of development. Henna describes the absence of her 'on-time' coaching transition:

> Well after Thelma I went to another coach named Kathy and I was with her from the age of 10 till about 14 and she didn't...like she took me where I needed to go and then I got to a point at 14 when I nearly gave up because I wasn't getting anywhere.
>
> I think in the beginning she was like right I know what I have to do, we have to develop her technical side, and then we got past that she didn't push me to become a better player and to reach my full potential.

Chloe was also frustrated by the lack of appropriate 'on-time' transition relating to coaching. She had a long-term coach that provided tremendous support during her formative years, but a lull in her performances on the track and subsequent loss of organisational funding resulted in a review of her coaching provision. She describes her decision to change coaches as a result of not achieving planned performance benchmarks:

> My time over 2 years just stayed the same, that's when I thought I just needed to change coaches, I'm just not improving. I just stayed at the same level and then I changed coaches and I took 2 seconds off my time.

Coaching transitions highlight the frailty of 'on-time' and 'off-time' transitions in the absence of a structured pathway for all aspects of athlete development including coaching. For Chloe and Henna the decision to change coaches proved to be an 'on-time' transition since it occurred at a pivotal time in their career. However, their transitions could have easily not taken place or the wrong decision taken resulting in continued poor performances and potentially disengagement from sport. In the case of Henna and Chloe, the absence of transition management in areas such as coaching resulted in young athletes negotiating a transition in their careers with no support from their organisations to guide or facilitate the transition.

This is not to say that when organisations mandate a coaching change because of an athlete's change in performance standard, that the athlete responds positively to the supposed 'on-time' transition. For Mark, the change of volleyball coaches when he progressed to senior level lead to an overwhelming fear of failure and his eventual exit from the indoor game and switching to beach volleyball. This study found that 'on-time' transitions required two integrated factors: 1) athlete's readiness (physical, emotional and technical) and, 2) existence of organisational support structures that facilitate and support transitions in all aspects of athlete development.

'Off-time' transitions lack pre-occurrence priming and leave the athlete ill-prepared to deal with the transitional challenges. During 'off-time' transitions the athlete does not foresee the transition and is not ready for its challenges in terms of skills and attitude. A critical transition such as an injury may be considered as unplanned and unexpected resulting in difficulty coping with the possibility of retirement or temporary disengagement. The findings from this research reflect Blinde and Stratta's (1985) concept of anticipatory socialisation and Danish *et al.* (1992) pre-occurrence priming in which athletes have not engaged in rehearsal periods to develop different responses to the event. For the athletes in this research, injuries were found to be the most significant 'off-time' transition.

Ella sustained a shoulder injury early on in her swimming career when15 which forced her out of the water for over a year. The transition was her first test of mental strength in dealing with a crisis that she had not foreseen. Her 'off-time' transition was characterised by an entrenched attitude that it was not an acceptable part of her career. She characterised the transition as being out of her control:

> Since the age of 9 I'd be getting up in the morning at 5'o clock every day, that is my routine and it is strange when someone takes that away from you. Its not necessarily someone has taken it away from you. You haven't stopped or quit because you haven't chosen to stop. I think that is why it is so hard to accept.

Ella found it very difficult to adjust to a transition that was not part of her routine; a routine that confirmed her identity as a swimmer. She recovered from the injury and progressed in her career to national and international events. However, another injury occurred at a time in her career when she was building up to the Commonwealth Games and swimming extremely well:

> Being at University I achieved silver and bronze in University National Competition. Reached National Finals. Was ranked 4th or 5th in the country at 50 Fly. Just started to progress in the 100 Fly. The National Coach would come down to see me and spend some time coaching me. I was enjoying my sport.

Ella described the build-up to the day the injury occurred:

> I'd just had a very successful training camp in Barcelona. Came back after swimming 60k in a week, tired but feeling very happy with my performance in training. Looking forward to University Games which were in about a week in and a half away. Went to the Games, swam very well, got a silver and then three or four days later got an injury on my back.
>
> I knew it was pretty serious right away. It made me stop in session straight after. I think it was a set of kicks and I remember the set totally and I stopped in the middle of the set. They were doing some recovery and I just clung onto the side, thought to myself, 'don't be so stupid and finish the set off'.

Ella found it extremely difficult to prepare for both injury transitions because it represented the opposite of what she was trying to achieve. She viewed injuries as a sign of failure and a threat to her career goals and therefore not something she needed to prepare for or possibly she was not emotionally able to confront. The timing of her second injury was significant (more so than her first injury) factor in her response to the injury since it followed excellent training and performance results and occurred just before the Commonwealth Games. For Ella, Commonwealth Games represented her dreams and goals in swimming and outweighed the cost of the injury at that time in her career. She believed that swimming injured in the Commonwealth Games was a risk worth taking:

> I think there is nothing that I look back on now and say I would have done differently. If I didn't compete in the Games I don't think I would still have been swimming or had the determination to get back into the pool. I think it would have been harder to accept that I had worked that hard and not achieved instead of worked that hard and still reached that level, and got that recognition. It was all for personal reasons for doing it. I think I had put so much time and

> effort into the training twenty odd hours a week in the pool. It wasn't what people thought of me it was what I thought of myself.

Ella's 'off-time' injury transition shaped her career and her identity as an athlete. It's occurrence at such a pivotal time in her career and the fact that she had not rehearsed her preparation for the event added to the enormity of the transition in challenging her personal and career goals.

> Ella is really worrying me. I have heard her talk about her injury for so long now that I can actually see the effect of time on her attitude towards herself and swimming. As her mentor I am trying to open her eyes to the worse case scenario without actually telling her to her face. She has resisted quite a bit whenever I talk about other things to consider for the future. She has cried a lot in my office which I think she welcomes but it leaves me feeling like I am causing her more pain.

8.3 Duration

The duration of a transition event was identified as being the length of time an athlete perceives as necessary to make the physical and/or psycho-social adaptation to perceived transition situations. The notion of duration also links to the athlete's perception of the transition as being either permanent or temporary. In this study, it was found that the athlete's ability to make sense of the transition was affected by the duration of the transition experience in terms of the type and severity of emotional and behavioral response.

Mark dealt with a career-ending injury in volleyball over an extended period of time. His frustration grew as the injury lingered with no end in sight, leading to a questioning of his future in sport. However, with a potential 'cure' in sight, Mark's perspective of the injury became less negative:

> Well the whole year last year was focused, for me was trying to get fit and it was the most frustrating period of my life because I just didn't think it was ever going to get better...and it almost didn't until I found a specialist that had a new steroid treatment. I then turned all my energy into the gym so when I actually came to compete apart from what I couldn't do with my legs, my body was actually in amazing condition, like really good condition.

Mark's reaction to the treatment and favourable prognosis reflects Danish *et al.* (1992) assertion that once athletes believe their injuries are temporary and think they are making progress toward recovery, they become goal-directed and their emotions return to normal. In some situations the injury prognosis is not favorable and the athlete's perception of the injury shifts from being just temporary to becoming career-ending.

Got worried when I heard Mark mention the word steroid. What did he mean by this!? I know how important looking good means to him especially in his sport of beach volleyball. I wanted to ask him what he meant by a steroid treatment but I felt that it was none of my business to investigate. Later, I thought about what are my responsibilities when an athlete tells me something in their story that I should maybe act on?

Ella's swimming injury to her back has also spanned a significant period of time since competing at the Commonwealth Games in Manchester. She has negotiated a pathway of rehabilitation involving many stages leading to the decision to have surgery. Ella describes her decision-making processes thus:

> Seen a number of specialists for the last two years, all of which had many different opinions and very hard to understand which one or which group of people were telling the truth or their version of the truth or just what they felt at the time. After seeing many specialists and having many scans and people prod and poke I think it was time that I had to just take that next step and just go for surgery.

The decision to have surgery was a 'make-or-break' decision which offered some hope of returning the pool. Ella revealed her 'ideal plan' if the operation went well:

> If the operation goes well, I'll be back swimming and if I go back swimming then I will continue with my part-time coaching job and swim as well, which will be all that I need to do to fund what I call 'day-to-day' and just see where that takes me. If I can't swim then I've got the option to travel again.

Ella's perception of her injury is gradually moving from being just a temporary condition to becoming more permanent with the beginnings of realising that it may lead to an end to her career.

The duration of the injury created significant stress in her life with a protracted grief reaction as the outcome of the operation fell short of her expectation. A year after her back operation Ella has made little progress in her recovery with very clear signs of distress and grief over her personal health. In a follow-up an email to me she describes the impact of the injury over such along period of time:

> Life is a bit shit really to be blunt. Just as I thought I was over the hill and enjoying getting back into the gym, swimming and looking forward to things, shit hit the fan big style.
>
> About December my back started to become fairly sore, so I got it checked by a physio and they said it was a sprain - but then i went back for my 6month check and after xrays and MRI it shows that during the op some of my nerves were scared and as the scar tissue built up it aggravated it. Its now really bad - i have constant cramp/pins and needles down my leg and my backs not great. I'm on heaps of morphine at the mo and it looks like another op is on the cards.

I haven't been to uni since before xmas and the surgeon doesn't think I'll be back this yr - so looks like I'll have to defer or something - not happy.

With all of this, the idea of even being able to swim again seems a mile away. I haven't even stepped into a gym since mid Dec. But half of me isn't bothered - it's really strange. I guess its because my pain levels are on the high side. Its more a battle with my mind to get through a day, the meds are so strong I'm often ill and I'm now under 8 stone - my muscles vanished. I've got an appointment with the surgeon on Tues and I'm praying they can sort this out because I can't handle it for much longer. So fingers crossed. I just want a life – which at the moment I haven't – I can't drive – my freedom is lost. So I've got a bunch of questions to ask him. I can't wait to be able to drive, go out with my friends and enjoy myself. At the moment I don't even know if swimming is for me anymore, I know you've always send problems will make me stronger – but this has broken me and I'm not sure that once this is all over I'll have the strength and drive to get back into the pool.

Getting a lot of emails from Ella while I am away on my sabbatical. Can't speak to her in person so trying to write back without giving judgements. I feel like I have abandoned her leaving for a year. I got her to tell me about her life. I even visited her in the hospital after her operation. I feel part of her life now dealing with this injury and I must admit that at times I feel very responsible to her.

Ella's priorities have significantly shifted from being an athlete and returning to the pool to just surviving the ordeal. Her story is particularly distressing to read and was the most severe 'off-time' transition from all of the interviewed athletes. It highlighted the stress associated with managing a transition for uncertain durations and accompanying shifts in self-perception and priortorising of personal and professional goals.

8.4 Multiplicity and Combination

The biographical data revealed that some of the athletes experienced a traumatic transition especially when the transition occurred at the same time as a number of other transitions. Danish *et al.* (1992) referred to multiple transitions as contextual purity. They suggested that athletes experience more difficult adjustments to a transition when it occurs at the same time as other transitions. In the case of retirement, this transition may coincide with loss of finances, increased contact time with family, loss of contact with teammates and fans, change in activity levels, and change in leisure time. Successful adaptation to one transition may trigger the need to adapt to a number of other transitions. The data suggests that athletes are better able to cope with multiple transitions if they are related to one area of their life such as career-related. When transitions are experienced from a number of different life

domains (e.g. family, career, biological, psychosocial) the athlete suffers poor adaptation to one or more of the concurrent transitions.

For instance, Mary's long rowing career contained a number of transitions that could be classified into the domains of family, career-related, biological/physiological, and psychosocial. However, it was the occurrence of a number of transitions from different life spheres at the same time that affected her ability to cope with the transitions. Her inability to adapt to the transitions all at once led to her decision to quit her sport:

> Basically I had a lot of injury in 1996. I had a rib injury which six weeks out of the boat and in fact I was nearly twelve weeks out of the boat which was not good at all. Also, my mum was diagnosed with cancer which wasn't very nice really and she wanted me to get on with a job and settle down properly so I went back to work. I had been working for Debenhams at this stage and I had been working for them part-time or had nine months or six months off coming up to the Olympics in Atlanta. Plus the fact that my personal life was a mess. My boyfriend of five years that I had since 1995, we split up and we had bought a house together and I had to move out and leave the house behind type of thing. There were a lot of other things going on which weren't helpful. That was in 1997 and so I decided right I'm retiring. Went back to work at Debenhams, lived with a friend of mine in London. Didn't get in a boat for a few months...

Despite the trauma of a number of transitions occurring at the same time, Mary did return to rowing and went on to win a medal at the Sydney Olympic Games. For Mary, the presence of multiple transitions was further complicated by the fact that two of the transitions were unpredictable, namely, the illness of her mother and her injury. The unpredictability factor added to Mary's sense of being overwhelmed.

Wyllemann and Deknop (1996) identified potential conflict resulting from concurrent transitions in athletes' educational and athletic setting. Causes for possible conflict between both roles are related to the need for the student-athlete to excel in two domains, deemed by society as important, during one and the same period of their life. Student-athletes may be faced with time management problems, restricted development of relationships and de-motivation to perform at both academic and athletic level. In this study, two areas of academic transitions were identified as problematic in balancing with athletic demands: 1) secondary school final exams, and 2) moving to university.

Henna experienced considerable difficulty moving to college in the United States. As an athlete from the United Kingdom, the potential difficulties in making the transition were not evident from the start:

> It wasn't too nerve-racking to have someone there to go with me, because I was just excited going to a different country, going to America which was like just this huge place and knowing that I was going to get a chance to travel. I was only 18 and I was moving away from home for the first time to a completely different country. I don't think I really I took that on board until I actually got there and it suddenly sunk in that I wouldn't be able to just pop home.

For Henna, the worries of final school exams in the United Kingdom (GCSEs and A –Levels) were mediated by a supportive coach who helped put the difficulties of balancing exams and playing tennis into perspective:

> He would understand...basically because he wanted to know what was going on in our personal life and our schooling because he demanded it. So he knew that when especially when we were going through A levels, that it was just so much more important than GCSEs and we were worried that if we didn't get the grades we wouldn't be able to go to University and all that kind of stuff. He would put it into perspective on things and he would apply it to tennis and how by playing tennis could help you like de-stress and relax your mind and you could go back and you know do even better studying because you had that hour or two hours off just playing tennis and venting your frustrations.

Pedersen (2001) provides an analysis of athletes balancing conflicting demands and transitions within a sport career. She identified analytical themes of converging and diverging life spheres, and turning points in the meaning of life spheres. She also reported that the structures of sport often impinge on the athlete's life spheres of the everyday and negate attempts to construct their everyday lives in order to combine sport activities with other life spheres. Pedersen identified internal (management of personal achievements) and external (competition and training schedule, facilities, and relationships with experts) spheres of sport competition as potentially rival spheres in managing a balanced approach to life and one's sport career. In Henna's case, she struggled to maintain the balance between the effects of 'off-time' sport-related transitions and her academic commitment which lead her to question her ability to return to previous performance levels:

> I think with my tennis it is just more frustration that I want to know that I could have been good if I wanted to do it and that I can still do it and that I can still be good. I think that is the most frustrating thing about being injured for along time is that I've lost a lot of it and I've just...and it is going to be so hard to bring it back. I think that is what is conflicting with you know my side of my new life now with university and stuff because it does take up a lot more time and I don't have as much time for tennis which is frustrating because that never happened in America because tennis came first. So that is the only frustrating thing to it that is going to take a long time for me to where I was.

For Henna, the balance was potentially lost in her perception of herself as an athlete. She found it difficult to hold onto her past identity as a tennis player in the face of new, emerging life spheres.

For Jon, the transition of moving to university was perceived as a positive thing, although he recognised the negative effect it has had on his performances:

> Coming to university has helped a lot. It has made me more independent. It's taken the wind out of my sails I suppose because living at home everything was done for me so I could shoot and I could reach my potential. That's a lot harder now. I've stayed at the same level but it is harder to stay at this level than it was to peak before. So I think this experience has enabled me to be able to carry on after university. I'll live by myself, train by myself and when that is finished just carry on without the training.

Jon also experienced significant conflict in balancing his academic responsibilities, his role as captain of the rifle shooting team and maintaining his performances in competition. His inability to balance transitions led to him neglecting one aspect of his life over another:

> I think there was a little bit of difficulty. I don't think so much in GCSEs. I think more for A levels but I think that had a reflection upon the position I had in the squad. I was captain at the time, but GCSEs weren't too bad. We did these four days training periods at Easter which was huge boost you know you could really tell when someone had been on one of these and someone who hadn't. I had that and then I would train as much as I could during term time. Obviously when I had exams I couldn't go but certainly Tuesdays and Thursdays afternoons we'd go out for fours or so and then at weekends we'd have matches. So it was really trying to find the balance and I think I found it that year but I think when I did my A's and A-levels I think I prioritised my shooting too much. I actually became very committed about my sport and a lot of people started to criticise me about that and it was very difficult to work out the right balance.

Mark also struggled with balancing academic responsibilities and the demands of archery. In his case, academic demands conflicted with his desire to maintain the identity and accomplishments gained from his management of internal and external spheres related to archery. Early in his archery career, training six-to-seven hours a day defined his ability as an elite archer and carved his identity as an elite athlete as he begun to win national competitions. However, new academic commitments and a change in living and training arrangements forced a balancing of new life spheres alongside previously held notions associated with achieving excellence in sport:

> ...I would shoot for six or seven hours a day and then there would be other days when I wouldn't feel like going into my lectures at all and I would just go down to the galleries and you know shoot eight or nine hours a day...You know I saw it as the end-all-to-be-all. I have a much better balance now but when I don't shoot as much as I would like, I somehow feel like that I'm not putting in the hours, despite now balancing it with proper circuit training, weight training and cardiovascular training. And it affects me mentally; I get down on myself...because it is a step down from when I used to train.

> And then when I came to this university, not having the 24 hour range facility made me think about my shooting much more rather than just go down and shoot for shooting's sake.

The ability of Mark to adjust to transitions and make modifications and negotiate possible strategies to balance conflicting spheres or transitions was a recurring theme in analyses of all the athletes' actions as they sought to achieve excellence in sport. In the face of transition situations, the athletes reinvented their life and sport goals in a manner that was most efficient to combine both life and sport career spheres. Pedersen (2001) characterises this process of renegotiation as a struggle between constraint and freedom.

In Mark's case, the process of renegotiating his perception of life and sport career spheres resulted in an evolved self-awareness in his personal life and sport career:

> ...when I do train I tend to reflect on my time pressures better in that I can just be much more pragmatic and say, 'You know, I did actually shoot well then. I'm still getting good scores'. In a way that makes me stronger because if it goes well you I am also keeping myself fit, I'm not shooting as much as I was but I'm still good, so you know I must actually you know for the time spent training or doing cardiovascular work or something like that, I'm getting more you know, more umph per buck. I suppose, I'm you know...for the amount of time that I spend and of course I would love to spend more time shooting and doing it but it is quite comfortable to know that I can take feedback from my training and then put that into my mental side rather than what was happening before. I was thinking mentally and then shoving that into my training and of course my training would go down and it was hard. So reversing that flow is so much better, much more useful.

8.5 Summary of Key Findings

The timing of the transition was a key factor in shaping the athletes' perception of a transition and subsequent adaptation to the event. 'On-time' transitions provided the athlete with the preparation time to recognise the skills required to move to the next stage of development or adapt to the new situation. This process, referred to as anticipatory socialisation (Danish *et al.* 1992), was particularly apparent with structured transitions based on a long-term athlete development models that provide age- and stage-related transition points. In the case of Doug, the organisation-based approach to athlete development did not support his transition to the senior national volleyball team. Although, long-term athlete development models provide structure to programs and athlete development, it should reflect the needs

of the athletes and not the organisation's needs. In Doug's case, the supposed 'on-time' transition became a 'off-time' transition because of the lack of support for the transitory stage and the recognition of the skills required by Doug to navigate this transitional stage in his career.

'Off-time' transitions may also occur in the event of an organisation not supporting the athlete with appropriate development structures. Several athletes reported a frustration with their sport's governing body in terms of the lack of programs to support their next stage of development. In the case of Jon and Mary, 'off-time' transition referred to inappropriate training and competitions for their stage of development leading to potentially harmful development experiences. Using the terminology from Bayli's (2001,2004) long-term athlete development model, these athletes experienced the 'Train to Win' stage at a time in their career in which it was more appropriate to experience a training and competition environment appropriate to the Train to Compete stage.

The athletes' stories supported the notion that their perception of self changed over the course of a transition experience. There was not an identified length of time ascribed to any category of transition but it was found that injury transitions resulted in a poor sense of athletic self as the transition time increased. In the case of Ella, as her serious injury lingered she increasingly struggled with not having the identity of being a swimmer and resisted any strategies or suggestion at developing alternative career pathways. Over time, Ella began to accept the fact that her injury was career-ending but this state of awareness was associated with very alarming statements of emotional stress. Her response to the injury transition reflected the stage-related response to death and dying (Kubler-Ross, 1969).

A number of the athletes reported difficulty in adapting to transitions when confronted with concurrent transitions. Their adaptation to multiple transitions was especially difficult when some of the transitions were unpredictable. Mary, Henna, Jon and Mark reported difficulty in managing academic transitions and sport-related transitions. The conflict between sport-related and academic transitions was a strong theme in this research and highlights the demands that elite athletes face when attending university. In response to this conflict, several of the athletes re-negotiated their academic-sport priorities as part of their transition adaptation process.

Chapter 9

Environmental Factors: Social Support and Career Transitions in Sport

9.1 Introduction

In consideration of pre- and post-transition environment, Schlossberg (1981) highlighted the importance of recognising the potential impact of social support on the career transition process. Previous research has revealed that the availability of social support has been shown to play a strong mediating role in the occurrence of career transitions, as well influencing athletes' adjustment to retirement from sport (Alfermann, 1995; Stambulova, 1994; Werthner & Orlick, 1986; Swain 1991).

Although several researchers have examined social support networks among injured athletes (e.g. Rosenfeld *et al.* 1989; Ford and Gordon, 1999), little research has been conducted in the area of career transition in sport other than retirement from sport. Further, from a process-oriented perspective, very little empirical research has been conducted on the role of social support for athletes in dealing with transitions leading up to the transition of retirement. In this study, the biographical data was analysed using the initial social support dimensions of a) family support and, b) coaching support. Themes were identified throughout the athletes' career relating to these areas and further analysed for thematic links to develop a more thorough understanding of social support as an environmental characteristic affecting the athletic career transition process. In this chapter, each aspect of social support (family and coaching) is examined from a life development perspective to determine its impact, if any, on the career transition process of elite athletes

9.2 Family Support

Analysis of the biographical data resulted in two themes of parental support: a) negative parental support and b) positive parental support. These two categories were further coded using the themes of family setting and athletic setting.

9.2.1 Positive Parental Support

Wyllemann, Vanden Auweele, DeKnop, Sloore and Martelaer (1995) identified parental support to take place in either athletic or family settings, or both. Wyllemann *et al.* (1995) suggested that

athletes perceive their parents to be supportive indirectly in the athletic setting and directly supportive in the family setting. In this study, athletes reported positive parental involvement primarily in the athletic setting. Ella described her parents' involvement from a positive perspective although she recognised that their support was indirect and in the beginning of her career consisted of driving to her swimming practices:

> I think my parents were not supporting background at all. They wanted me to swim firstly just to be safe in the water and it progressed from there. I never looked back from there. They would always take me to the sessions if I wanted to be there for a certain time. Always went to every competition I swam in, but wouldn't have a clue who was my competitors were, what the competition was like, what I was swimming in. So in that respect they were totally relaxed.

Wyllemann *et al.* (1995) also noted that parents can become directly involved in their son or daughter's development in sports through coaching them formally or informally. Henna remarked that it was her Dad who discovered her talent for tennis when she was young through playing with her with a balloon. Aiden's father provided direct support through coaching and motivating him when he encountered tough times in archery:

> He always just supported me and took me to the shoots and acted as a coach. If he saw me going downhill, he would bring me back up. If he saw me up he would try to bring me down a bit so I didn't get too jittery. Because he took us everywhere, he saw us shoot us always shoot, he always knew when we were doing well and when we weren't. He could always give pointers. So he was a coach really.

Wyllemann *et al.* (2000) suggested that as the athlete passes through stages of development the parents' support for their son or daughter also changes according to the demands of performance at each stage. In this manner, parental support can play a significant factor in the athlete's adaptation to these stage-related developments. In this study, several athletes reported positive parental support when encountering transitions at a number of different stages of development. Chloe relies on her mother as her 'best fan' and looks to her for indirect support especially misses her when travelling abroad:

> She comes with me everywhere when I am competing. She's always there cheering me on and supporting me which is good. I love her being there. Like a couple of times that I've been abroad to South Korea and Finland she hasn't been there...there is always something missing.

Chloe's support from her mother during her transition to the international stage (Train to Win Phase) has also been evident in other non-sport transitions. She chose to live at home because of the support her mother and brother could give her as she made the academic transition of going to university:

> It was a hard decision actually. I regret not going away this year. Last year though I don't think I was ready to move out. I only live with my mum and brother and we're quite close as a family, we haven't got much other family around. I like being at home, I just wasn't ready to move away last year because my running was going to the next level and I needed support from my family just to get by. This year maybe I would have.

Wyllemann *et al.* (2000) suggest that one of the most difficult changes resulting from athlete stage-related developments is the changing nature of the parent-coach relationship. The nature of the parent-coach relationship may not only affect the athlete's response to specific transitional changes, but may also be a transition in itself. Hellstedt (1987) reported that coaches often have difficulty working with parents of their athletes as a result of communication problems, conflict, and power struggles over who controls the athlete's interests. In Aiden's case, his father has played a significant role throughout his development in archery. In making the transition from county to regional squad, and then from junior national squad to senior national squad, Aiden remarked that his father 'still helped me all the way through.' However, Aiden reported a shifting role of his father in his career and a positive relationship with his coach:

> When I went to Regional I met Jean [pseudonym] and she helped me as coach, but he [his dad] was always there as well. They would talk about what they had done together, what she had done with me, what he had done with me and they would come up with a common solution, most of the time. Or she would help me and dad would say that was good or talk to her about this.

The importance of positive parental support was also evident in Ella's handling of a serious injury. In this study, non-predictable transitions were found to be extremely traumatic, requiring a range of support including that from parents. Although most research about injured athletes has tended to focus on the coach's support, the role of parents in providing support for their son or daughter cannot be dismissed. Ella's serious injury just before the Commonwealth Games required potentially career-saving surgery. She reported that it was important to her to have her parents come with her to the doctors as much as it was for them to be there:

> I took my mum to the last appointment. I thought I would let her come and see the specialist. She took me there and came in for the last five minutes to have a chat with the doctor. I think that was why they had come. I'm okay with that now because I need their help so much and I know they are worried.

For Ella, the difficulty in negotiating this transition was exacerbated by the need to relinquish her strong sense of independence in her career as a swimmer. Reflecting Wyllemann *et al.* (2000) stages of athlete development, Chloe had become very independent as she entered adulthood and Bayli's (2001, 2004) sport-related stage of Train to Win:

> I think my relationship with my parents has changed since my last injury when I was 14 or 15. They don't necessarily have to take me to appointments or be involved 100% and now I've got my own independence they don't know what is going on all the time. Whereas before they were in control and now I am.

Although she welcomed the support from her parents during such a difficult transition in her life, the call for parental support possibly represented a transition in its own right as she relinquished her independence over career and specifically, the transition resulting from her injury.

9.2.2 Negative Family Support

Hellstedt (1995) suggested that parents can be a source of stress or discouragement to young athletes, by worrying about physical injuries, by forming unrealistic expectations, or by 'pushing' athletes too far. Overzealousness, parental stress, intrusiveness and/or extreme maladaptive behaviours were also some of the negative parental behaviours leading young athletes away from engagement in sport (Iso-Ahola, 1995). In this study, a number of the athletes experienced negative family support in both the athletic and family setting.

Disruption in family life as a result of parental divorce served as a major transition for three of the athletes as well as being a factor in shaping their adaptation to other life and sport transitions. Doug attributed his lack of confidence to years of family disruption and the eventual divorce of his parents:

> ...it happened when I was about 7 or 8 but it was constant you know. It was a period of a couple of years of constant arguments and things like that. But it's always apparently a worry that's been and confidence problems are a bit of a trait throughout the whole family.

Doug's disruptive family life also influenced his negotiating academic transitions. He attributed his resolve to overcome transitions and prove people wrong to his continual battling the lack of support he received at home from his mum:

> ...I've always looked at my life like having to prove people wrong. All the way through my education as well. It was always the same. Things like...not doing well at ...with like GCSEs and my mum saying 'Oh just leave school' and not give me much advice at all, and I thought right I will prove her wrong. And then A-Levels 'Oh, I told you that you shouldn't have done A-Levels'. Quit now and all the sort of thing. 'I'm going to prove my teachers and my mum wrong'.

The impact of Doug's family reaction to his transitional challenges in sport and school fuelled his desire to 'prove people wrong' and capture attention from his parents. Wyllemann *et al.* (2000) found that parents having one child is more successful in sport than other child(ren) creates a significant amount of tension within the family as parents balance family time and financial resources with attempts to support more than one child. In Doug's case, his parents directed attention at his brother who played a more recognisable sport, resulting in Doug's need to convince his family that 'maybe he can achieve something':

> I think it was...its more being...as well as being accepted by my family as well because my brother has always been the centre of attention. As soon as I've ever had any achievements or anything like that it was always like 'Oh whatever'. It was never like any...my mum and dad rarely came to watch...all my friends were...when we were playing in the England team parents used to come week in, week out when we played. But never my family. Its always been a real struggle, whereas like going to watch Sunday League Division 5 for my brother, myself and my dad would go and watch, my mum would go and watch, but for me it was always like no one really wanted to watch volleyball.

Lack of support with academic transitions was also experienced by Jon. He did not receive a lot of support from his parents especially in dealing with academic pressures alongside competition demands. His father did not believe a sport career was worth pursuing which reflects the status he attributed to Jon's shooting accomplishments:

> My mum was quite...like 'Oh yes that's' really good'. Perhaps more of an interested parentish type. My dad was negative about it because he was always concerned about my academic side of things and he was like 'Oh you're not getting an A-Level in shooting and when I came here [university] and saw you [scholarship coordinator] he said that 'Oh your're not getting a degree in shooting'. I had to stand up quite a bit.

Jon also experienced his parents divorcing during his A-Level examination which in itself was a transition as well as a major factor affecting his ability to negotiate academic transitions alongside his sport-related transition of being appointed captain of the squad. In Jon's case, he was able to successfully master his academic and sport transitions not so much as a result of his family sport but rather in spite of it:

> ...I did have a small, well quite a large family issue that came up right through A-Levels...my parents decided to split sort of April time so that was three months before I was due to take my final examinations, so I think I was affected by a mixture of things. But for me I feel really proud because I didn't quite get the grades that I wanted but I still got into university despite my situation.

9.3 Coaching Support: The Athlete-Coach Relationship

Crook and Robertson (1991) reviewed Schlossberg's (1981) model of transition adaptation and its potential application in sport and suggested that the role of coaches and their philosophies regarding preparation of the athlete for transitions such as retirement could be included as an environmental variable. In this study, the biographical data was analysed from a psychological and sociological perspective, focusing on the athlete-coach relationship from the perspective of its impact on the athlete's handling of career transitions. In doing so, the semi-structured interview focused on the athletes' perception of coaches' role behaviour athlete career transitions, suggesting that the athlete-coach relationship is strongly predicated on how the two parties interact during transitional situations.

Analysis of the biographical data suggests that the nature of the athlete-coach relationship is not solely determined by the athlete's perception of the coach's behaviour during transitional situations. Chellaudurai (1980) postulated a model of sport leadership predicated on the dynamic interplay between situational leadership demands and member's preferences in leadership. Little research has been conducted in the application of Chellaudurai's model specifically to career transitions in sport; however, the model suggests that coaching leadership affects athlete outcome in terms of perceived satisfaction and performance. Athlete outcomes may also include the athlete's performance in handling transitional situations and satisfaction with transitional outcomes. Thus, athlete's preference or expectation of coaching role behaviour or leadership style versus the athlete's perception of actual coaching role behaviours may be considered a significant aspect of the athlete-coach interaction in the career transition process.

Analysis of the data regarding the athlete's perception of their coach's role revealed three dominant themes. All reported one or more of the following perceived roles of their coach in their career at the time of the interview: 1) provide motivational support; b) provide technical expertise, and

c) give assurance to the athlete through first-hand experience. The athletes sought more motivational, technical and experienced coaches as they progressed in their sport career and reached later stages of development. In most cases, the technical and experienced coach were required to deal with the increased demand from moving to a higher level of competition and performance with increased pressures and potentially greater conflict with outside issues such as school and developing a sense of identity.

Mark's preference of coaching style firmly reflected a technical, experienced and motivational coach who could prepare you for matches. He explains his understanding of a coach's role:

> ...you know there is identifying faults and there is also the mental side, preparing you for the competition and preparing you for what to expect, that tends to come along you know from the experience they may have gone through. It needn't necessarily be from the archery world, but I think it needs to be of a similar sport because for me archery is very much a mental game. My style is very much the same as it was three years ago...but my mental approach has evolved a lot since I first started.

At this point in his career Mark felt that he required an experienced coach to help with the motivational aspect of his 'game' which he admitted was a major issue or barrier to performing better. His focus on improving to national and international shoots narrowed his perception and expectation of what the coach should be to him at this point in his career:

> For better or worse I don't see a coach as a friend even though they could and should be, but you know, I view a coach as someone very professional. To talk about what I see as the little things in life be it your relationships or social life or what I had for breakfast this morning is not worth bothering the coach about and it's not important.

This perception of the coach's role behaviour may be linked to his level of commitment and aspirations for national and international success. The demand to 'be the best' and negotiate the transition into the national and international sport arena focuses the athlete's preference for a coach who can deliver them their 'dream'. Chloe chose to change coaches because she felt that she was not improving as a sprinter and had suffered the loss of national funding. Her demise was in itself a transition which she addressed with a change in coaches:

> My times over 2 years just stayed the same, that's when I thought I just needed to change coaches, I'm just not improving and I needed someone more knowledgeable. I just stayed at the same level and then when I changed to my new coach I took 2 seconds off my time.

Although her 'old coach' was a career-long mentor and someone she looked up to, she believed that she needed a more experienced and technical coach. She described the change in her expectations and the impact of her new coach:

> He was really good [the 'old coach'] and I really appreciate the work he put in but he just got to a level and I thought I needed another coach to take me where I wanted to go. I enjoyed talking to him but I now saw a coach as someone who is going to get me where I want to go.
>
> Well he's got the knowledge. He's been there and done it. He's been to the Olympics, Commonwealth Games, everything. I really respect him for that and I trust him. What he's given to me to do I trust him, so I do it. I know that if he gives me 6 x 300s to do I know that I'm doing it for a reason and I know that he knows why I'm doing it.

Her relationship with her new coach was far more business-like which has resulted in a marked improvement in her performance. She negotiated her transition back to national rankings and national funding with the help of her coach:

> The best was probably the AAAs [Amateur Athletic Association] in Bedford. I got a massive PB [personal best] which I was really surprised about, and my coach was there as well...He was over the moon, I could tell by the smile on his face...and that put me back on the World Class Potential Plan as well by quite a long way.

Mary's perception of what a coach needs to be at the highest level of competition was well-defined after many years experience of competing at the highest level with a number of coaches:

> You have to remember that they are people and they need feedback as well, they need to be motivated to, so for you to get the best out of them, they need to get the best out of you, and so I could change to any style of coaching. What I think that is important is that they are competent in what they are doing. Nigel [pseudonym] was very competent in what he was doing. And I knew that he had been to the Olympics in 1984 so I believed in him because he had that experience...you know I wouldn't say that there was huge rapport there because he is quite brusque and rough and you know he did get the best out of me and I worked really hard under him.

Mary's expectation of a coach at the elite level of competition had evolved over many years and raises a number of interesting issues regarding the athlete-coach interpersonal relationship. Her focus was on her expectation of what the coach could provide and how she could get the best out of them. There were two coaches that she had at different periods in her career at the national level that possessed the technical knowledge that she expected if she was to be a World and Olympic Champion. However, these two technical and experienced coaches did not meet her expectations in situations relating to non-

sport transitions. In previous quotes she notes the lack of rapport with her coach. Further, when her mother died, Mary believed that her other coach 'did not handle the situation well'.

The expectations of coaching behaviours from the athletes highlight a trend regarding coaching preferences and the nature of the athlete-coach relationship throughout the athlete's career. The athlete-coach relationship changed significantly as the athletes progressed in their career with a shift in expectations of the coach's knowledge and values. The demands associated with later stages of athlete development, such as increased pressures from competitions focused the athletes' attention and lead them to seek out a more technical, experienced and motivating coach who could bridge the gap in the perceived transitional needs related to achieving the next stage of development. This corresponds to the findings of Chelladurai (1980) who suggested that elite athletes seek out more authoritative and technical coaching behaviours to achieve their goals. This coaching behaviour preference was at the expense of a more consultative and delegative style. This study found that the athletes experienced technical and experienced coaching behaviours at the expense of mentoring and holistic coaching behaviours as they progressed in their career. Only Henna reported a strong athlete-coach relationship in which the coach adopted a holistic approach to her career and provided very high technical and motivational support. In some cases, the other athletes enjoyed success in the sporting arena as a result of more technical, motivating and experienced coaches, but suffered outside the sporting arena because of poor transitional sport.

A key factor for Mary was her belief that the athlete-coach relationship was a partnership requiring both parties to work together.

> I tend to think that the world's most perfect coach doesn't exist and every coach you have to get the best out of them to make yourself go faster. So I wouldn't say that there was a style of coaching I would prefer because I have never really had a choice with a coach, but I believe that if you have a coach you need to work together, it is a partnership and you need to get the best out of each other.

Mary's perception of the athlete-coach relationship as a partnership highlights the link between the athlete's perception of the coach's behaviour and the expectations of the coach. Tracking the athletes' careers in the data and comparing the successful relationships between them and their coach, it was identified that the most successful athlete-coach partnership occurred when the athlete's perception of

the coach's behaviour was congruent with their expectations of the coach's behaviour in transitional situations. This supports the findings of Kenow and Williams (1997) who suggest that the athlete-coach compatibility may mediate the athlete's anxiety and self-confidence resulting from the athlete's perception and recall of coaching behaviours. Further, Carron and Bennett (1977) identified that athlete preference for a specific coaching behaviour is a main factor affecting positive athlete-coach compatibility.

Figure 8 The Athlete-Coach Relationship

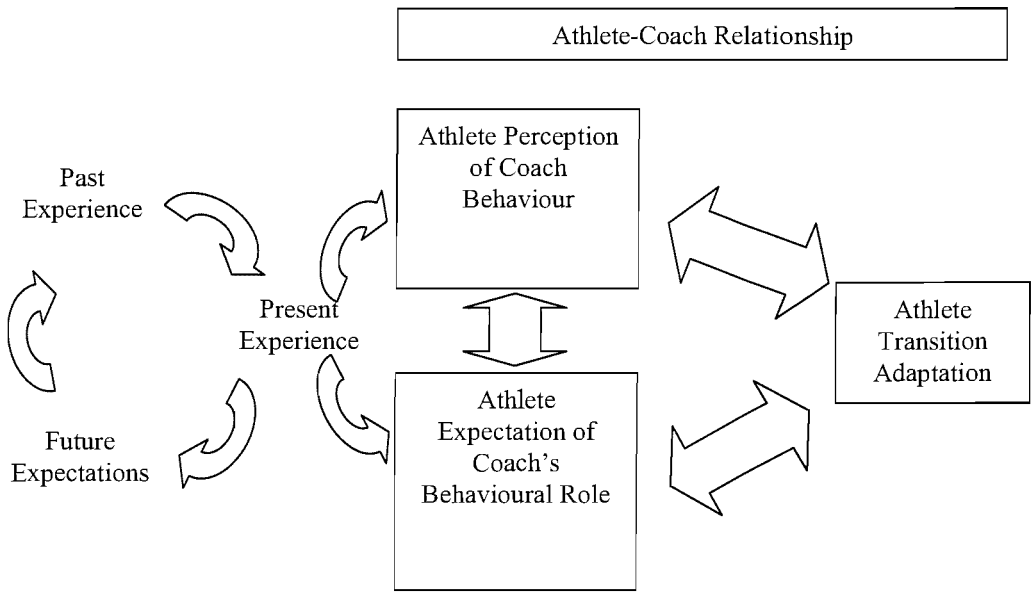


Figure 8 represents the long-term development nature of the athlete-coach relationship in which the athlete's present perceptions of the coach's behaviours and future expectations of coaching role behaviour in transitional situations are hinged on past experiences with the same or other coaches, which in turn, shape the athlete's expectations of the coach in similar and different transitional episodes. Thus, the athlete's career is viewed from a long-term development perspective in which the past, present, and future are inter-linked, providing a basis for perceptions and expectations to be formed regarding coach support during transitional episodes.

Mark's current strong sense of preferred coaching behaviours are rooted in his past experience, which has shaped his perception of what is now required to succeed to the next stage of competitions:

> I started off by saying that I view a coach as someone you know and I just started talking about the physical aspects of the archer and what the coach can do to change them. And that is because that is all I ever knew – you know what a coach is to do. Before, in my first clubs in Edinburgh there wasn't any sort of help for the mental side, but the higher you go up the ladder the bigger and more powerful that part is.

The past experience of coaching behaviours shaped Mark's perception of not only what he now required to progress in his career but also what role he thought the coach should have in his career:

> Away from the sport, certainly when I first started to perform the coach had no input away from sport. It was you know how you performed, how you thought about your sport but what you did outside of your sport was your own to sort out. A coach...its difficult to say because I don't think I would ever let the coaches know much about my private life or anything like that or if I had any problems be it in my social like or relationship wise. A coach wouldn't be the person I would go and speak about it even though it probably would have an effect on my archery.

Despite his admission that a mentoring role from a coach might benefit his archery, Mark resists any notion of this type of coaching role in his career. Despite the recognition of the importance of a coach helping with 'problems' or transitions out of sport, Mark's present need for an experienced, motivational coach precludes him from accepting a coach that would assist with non-sport transitions. Mark tries to explain his perception of what a coach's role should be in his career:

> I don't know what I think it could be...it's going back to my first view of what a coach is just someone who helps you get better and corrects your faults. I never knew any different so I guess that is what I am comfortable with even though I know the coach can now do so much more.

Mark really showed me how stubborn he was. He would not admit that he needed a coach even though he knows that in general he would need one if he wanted to be the best. I guess he thinks he has done alright up until now and that a coach might take that all away. Mark is pretty stubborn. I think that the fact that he is a doctorate student and needs to have all the answers might be affecting him a bit. Had to back off a bit in the interview as we started to debate whether having a coach was worthwhile. He started to see it as a debate – taking away time from him telling his story. I think he saw me as a coach advocate and maybe now he was going to hold back because of what he thought me to be.

Mark's story features sport transitions precipitated by the lack of a coach in his formative period as an archer. His technical coaches (mostly fellow competitors and club mates) provided little support

or skill development in handling his non-sport transitions relating to managing his academic timetable. His identity as an archer deepened with increasing hours training and competing at the expense of his academic progress. The more he shot the greater his sense of identity as an archer and belonging within a team and university setting. His academic transition to a new university with increased academic demands and poorer training facilities required a mentor-coach who could support a more balanced approach to his career. These transitions in Mark's career threatened his identity as an archer since he was no longer able to shoot as many arrows as before. He questions the potential impact of a mentor coach in dealing with transitions:

> I think a coach would have helped me realise that although I was shooting less I am still applying myself. I am probably thinking about archery just as much as I was when I was shooting lots and that is important and I realise it now. You know certainly there are periods I can never carry on shooting more and more as what was happening before when I was at X University and at some point something had to give and I would have to shoot less and less at that point, which happened to me when I started to work, that transition! It would have been nice just to have someone else other than my own voice saying to me, 'It's okay to shoot less, it doesn't make you any less dedicated to your sport and more to other areas of your life because your're now shooting 200 arrows a week rather than 1,000 arrows a week. It doesn't matter.

For Mark, the perception of coaching behaviours in his career, both past and present, were not congruent with his expectations or acknowledged needs from a coach. The absence of any meaningful or positive athlete-coach relationship impacted on his ability to deal with the transitional issues relating to his identity evolvement resulting from changes in his academic career and sport training environment.

Unlike Mark, Henna thrived in her career under one specific coach who was very much a mentor-coach. He was also a highly regarded technical coach who could motivate Henna to achieve her best. She describes her perception of her coach:

> I think the main thing about him was that he had the ability to motivate you, just like that. He was able to say the right things and you would get so motivated and want to do so well and he was just one of those people that, when you play [because he was like the County Development Officer as well] he took us for County and you just wanted to play so well for him and you wanted him to praise you. It just felt like gold when he did because he was just such a great coach and you had just so much respect for him...For the first time I could speak to him about what I felt like on court...

Henna's coach was active in her life outside sport, helping with balancing tennis with academic work and providing generic skills such as time management. Henna's perception of coaching behavious

during this period of her career was shaped by this holistic approach to sport and non-sport transitions. The loss of her long-time mentor coach was a major transition discussed earlier in Chapter 6. In response to this sport, non-predictable transition she undertook another major transition in moving to America to attend a university on a tennis scholarship. Her expectations of the coaches in America were rooted in her past experience with her mentor-coach. Although the coaches in the American college were technically strong, her perception of their coaching behaviours did not match her expectations. The difference in her expectation and perception of the coaches' behaviour became the source of a coaching transition and a factor affecting her other transitions such as her adaptation to life in America. The experience intertwined her past experience with her future expectations and present-day realities.

9.4 Concluding Remarks

The athletes' stories revealed the process-oriented nature of the athlete-coach relationship as a factor affecting career transitions in sport. In adopting a biographical approach to analysing the career transition process, this research has revealed the interplay between the athlete's perceptions of the coach's behaviour and their expectation of the coaching role behaviour. Although the transitions occurred at a defined period in the athlete's career it was found that the perceptions and expectations the athlete held as part of their athlete-coach relationship affecting that transitional situation were rooted in past experiences and affected by the handling of other transitions in the present.

A negative athlete-coach relationship was characterised by a gap between the athlete's perception of coaching behaviours and his or her expectation of the coach's behaviour in a specific transition situation. The athletes' perception of the coaching behaviour in terms of being a positive or negative factor on a transition situation was contextual and influenced by previous experiences (or lack of) and expectations athletes had of themselves or perceived from others such as family, friends and sport organisations.

The athletes' expectations of the coaches in terms of their behaviour during transitions were grouped thematically as being one or more of the following: 1) experienced, 2) technical, and 3) motivational. These coaching role behaviours were identified by the athletes as necessary to negotiate

sport, predictable and non-predictable transitions. At the time of the interviews, the athletes were all elite athletes experiencing or having experienced the final stage of athlete development, namely, Train to Win. This research suggests that athletes entering the elite stage of development (ie. Train to Win) seek experienced, technical and motivational coaches to achieve success at the highest level.

However, the majority of the athletes' coaches were found to lack mentoring and supportive characteristics that the athlete had experienced with earlier coaches at more formative periods in their careers. The difference in athlete perception of the coach's behaviour and their expectations of the coach were found to be the greatest during non-sport transitions, both predictable and non-predictable. During these transitions, athletes expected coaching behaviours similar to the behaviours provided by mentor-coaches in earlier transitions during their career. As a result, the gap between perception and expectation defined their relationship with the coach and subsequent handling of the transition.

Chapter 10

Individual Factors Affecting Career Transitions in Sport

10.1 Introduction

> It was entirely foreign to me to be cut from a team. I was always the first to be selected and I never failed in 'making' a team. My initial reaction was one of intense embarrassment, not realising that this wasn't the end of the world. I was in university at the time so I knew that it wasn't the end in terms of 'being someone', but the problem was that I didn't want to be known as a teacher, doctor or scientist. I just wanted to be an ice hockey player. The fact that I had to work at being someone else scared me – what if I failed at this as well!? I never experienced this type of event before nor did I wish to. Going to university was really something of an excuse while I played ice hockey. It was never really meant to be a means to career planning for life after ice hockey – there was never going to be one!

My experience of transiting out of sport was an experience mediated by individual factors that impacted my perception of the event. Taylor and Ogilvie (1998) identified individual factors such as age, gender and ethnicity as potential influences on a person's perception and adaptation to a transition event. In this research, there were not an insufficient number of athletes to draw quantitative-based conclusions regarding these individual factors, nor did the athletes speak specifically of these factors in terms of shaping their perception of a transition event. This is not to suggest that age, gender, and ethnicity are not relevant to a transition experience but rather to suggest that they may well be captured in other broader individual factors such as education, socio-economic background and social opportunities. In this research, Schlossberg's (1981) characteristics of the individual became a number of themes that were individual in nature such as socio-economic status, education, skills/abilities and knowledge but storied in the social world in which they existed. From the athletes' stories, individual factors were thematically coded into three broad groupings: 1) education/career planning, 2) transition familiarity alongside skill transfer, and 3) burnout.

10.2 Career Planning

Seven of the eight athletes interviewed were attending university and one athlete was presently working in the sport sector but had previously attended university. Being in university could be considered a form of career planning, however, none of the athletes spoke of life after sport in connection with their

academic training at university and the potential career that may follow. Each spoke of their sport life and career and future career as two separate entities with little evidence linking the two or understanding of the process of transiting from one career to the other.

Chloe's story in particularly illustrated the separation of sport career from any future career and the need to plan the transiting process. When asked in the interview about life after sport, Chloe retorted quite adamantly, 'There won't be one'. When pushed to explain why she felt this way, Chloe explained:

> Because I really want to run. When I get to the end of my career I'm not going to stop sport, I will definitely carry on but not at a professional level.

Her response indicated a level of planning and consideration of life after sport, however, I was interested in what preparation and planning she had considered in dealing with this transition. When pressed specifically about what planning she has undertaken to 'carry on in sport', Chloe replied, 'Never really thought about it. Definitely won't give up exercising.' She continued to explain her career aspirations:

> I would like to keep involved with it [sport]. There is no way I would go into TV presenting or something, but sports coverage of some sort would be good.

Despite having an idea about her future career aspirations, Chloe had not planned for her future career nor linked it with her university education. When asked why she had not thought about planning for her next career, Chloe replied, 'Because I've thought about up to the Olympics and not after that'.

The single-mindedness and strong athletic identity expressed by Chloe was also evident in a number of the other interviews where athletes also demonstrated a lack of consideration and planning for the transition out of sport. Aiden reported that he was worried about the future but did not consider it significantly important to think about it presently:

> It does worry me sometimes. It is probably more my sub-conscious than my conscious. But it isn't something I'm worrying about now. I can do it now [perform] and I'm not going to worry about 10 year years down the line when I can no longer make it. That's 2 or 3 Olympics away.

Aiden also believed that planning for life after sport may detract from present performances:

> I think that talking about life after sport is more towards when you are deciding that you want to end it [sport], otherwise you might start thinking about the end now rather than thinking about where you want to be now. I think it could take away from your performances. Psychologically probably in your sub-conscious. You probably think that you're not thinking about it but it could be in your mind thinking I've only got a few years left I can start relaxing now, rather than push it and push it so you can peak and go out on a high.

Research by Crook and Robertson (1991) reflects Aiden's point in that there is a reluctance to discuss retirement while athletes are actively competing and coaches are particularly resistant to post-career preparation, fearing that it will detract from their concentration on sport. For Aiden and Chloe, their strong athletic identity and single-mindedness in reaching their athletic goals is consistent with their apparent fear of career planning detracting from their sport goals and threatening their athletic identity. This reluctance to engage in career planning may also be related to fear. Both Aiden and Chloe reported that they did not need to consider life after sport because they would not leave sport altogether. When asked about making the transition out of sport, Aiden is adamant that it will not be a problem:

> I could probably make the transition out of sport quite easily. I would probably just become a coach. A lot of people ask for my help now which I do not mind giving but it does mean that I can't shoot as much as I would like and I do get distracted. But most of coaching is from experience and there are courses to do as well which I'd have to do but the experience I have had would just add to the qualifications.

Staying in sport appears to be compromise or solution to dealing with the issue of transiting out of sport. Aiden has given some thought to career planning in his sport career, but does not mention or make the link to future career aspirations linked to his academic training. Continuing as a coach within the sport allows Aiden to avoid the issue of losing his athletic identity cultivated through years of competing. Coaching provides the opportunity to perpetuate his identity within the sport.

The career transition from athlete to coach may be a suitable step for an athlete as part of their career development pathway. However, in the case of Aiden and Chloe staying in sport was not a planned career opportunity but rather a means to preserve their identity and avoid dealing with the subject of not performing as an elite athlete or considering the point in their sport career which may trigger the end of their career. The importance of identity in planning for the transition out of sport is also highlighted by Murphy *et al.* (1996) who found an inverse relationship between athletic identity and career maturity, with a tendency for student-athletes high in athletic identity to have minimal career decision skills. This was further corroborated by Grove *et al.* (1997) who found that athletic identity at the time of retirement was positively correlated with anxiety about career exploration and negatively correlated with pre-retirement training for elite athletes. Thus, the athlete with the greater affiliation to

their athletic identity is more likely to suffer maladaptive behaviour in the career decision making process.

Career planning is not only linked with the transition of retirement from sport but can also be linked to other transitions such as injury. Blinde and Stratta (1992) suggest that normal career planning can be ineffective and possibly counterproductive to the athlete's unexpected exit from sport. In their study of 20 American intercollegiate athletes deselected from teams, they found that premature termination minimised the effect of anticipatory socialisation. At the time of writing this research, Ella's story is dominated by a potentially career-ending injury. Her narrative highlights the impact of career planning at the time of unexpected transitions in sport that may lead to retirement from sport. In dealing with her injury Ella has turned to coaching swimming to maintain her involvement in the sport:

> Since the injury I've done a number of different courses. I've done my Assistant Teachers to my Teachers and am now on my Club Coach which I've completed, and then looking to do my Coach. So I've had the experience of coaching on the poolside. I've had a placement year which has taken me to Canada and Australia to develop my coaching interest...so that is an interest that I would like to continue with but I'm not sure I can...I would like it to be the main role in the job that I do. It would definitely be an interest and possibly a major thing that I would like to do. I've got to decide if I want to stay in the UK and if I don't want to stay in the UK then the likelihood of doing a coaching job abroad would be greater. If I want to stay in the UK then it would be probably have to be a secondary role to a full-time job.

Ella appears to have engaged in a very constructive process of career planning as part of her university degree; travelling to other countries for work placements to develop her interest and skill in coaching. Despite what appears to be proactive career planning, it was the unexpected injury that precipitated the taking of coaching courses as a means to stay close to the sport and fill the void of being an elite athlete. Further, the injury itself precipitated a sharp interest in life after sport rather than career planning serving as a tool to prepare for transitions that may lead to alternative career paths. Ella explains her perception of the injury and what motives underpin her shifting interest in coaching:

> I think it [injury] has made me have to think about it because while I was swimming that is all I really focused on, swimming and sometimes university studies and more likely going to the gym, whereas now with that out of the equation I've got to think of how else I'm going to occupy my time and coaching has enabled me to spend 25 hours a week coaching, where otherwise I would have been swimming. Then there is still the free time in the day that I would have normally spent doing my swimming or other related exercises where I have some spare time now.

When asked whether she would have engaged in the career planning that she had done since the injury, Ella replied:

> Probably not. While I was swimming I had done my Assistant Teachers so that I could have helped out, so that I helped out the Junior Programme that just finished after my session. Someone has asked me whether I would mind helping out and I said I would so they supported me through my Assistant Teachers and that was the foundation. I never took that any further until I got back from the Commonwealth Games.

Chloe has mixed emotions regarding the activity of coaching in terms of dealing with her present injury transition and potentially the transition out of sport:

> I think yes and no. Yes because it has occupied my time. Its given me...Its still enabling me to be involved in the sport and to do something that I really love, but then I see I'm starting coach my own squad I would have liked...I should be swimming in. So that is very difficult for me.

For Chloe, anticipatory socialisation or engaging in coaching as a means to prepare for a potential transition out of sport has been stressful to her handling the injury transition. Although she has mapped out a logical coaching progression and achieved many of the stages of development, it has occurred at a time when she is dealing with her identity as an athlete being under threat from the injury.

In this manner career planning may only be effective when undertaken for the right reasons and not used as a buffer against other career-threatening transitions. For Chloe, Aiden and Ella, strong athletic identities has led to identity foreclosure (Petitpas, 1978) in which they are unwilling to engage in career planning to anticipate and prepare for a life after sport because of the threat such considerations and actions would have on their perceived athletic identity. In the case of Ella, career planning has affected her perception and handling of another transition in her career, an injury. This highlights the point that career planning is not just specific to the transition of retirement from sport. The athlete should be prepared mentally to accept that transitions within sport and out of sport may occur at any time and recognize that career planning is a means to deal with these situations proactively and lead a balanced life during and post-sport career.

The reaction from Chloe and Ella to questions regarding their planning for life outside sport is very interesting. Chloe really resented any notion that I was suggesting that she had not prepared for life outside of sport. Very defensive and short responses suggesting that this was a no-go area in their story. Part of the challenge understanding their responses will be to look at their whole story and figure out why!

Being familiar with a transition and having the ability to transfer skills from one transition to another influenced the athletes' perceptions and handling of the transition situation. The manner in which the athletes exercised this ability to transfer skill and knowledge between transitions varied, but in general the process involved recognition of transition similarity and identifying appropriate skills and knowledge that could be transferred. Mary was one of the most experienced athletes interviewed and she reported occasions when she used previous experiences to manage a transition. Towards the end of her career Mary contemplated retiring from sport or to continue to attempt to row in the Sydney Olympics. In that situation she drew upon her knowledge and skills from previous transitions to plan for this transition:

> I wrote down all the possible things that could wrong and what I would do in that situation so that I was mentally prepared for things going wrong, and then I also wrote down all the things that could go well, and you know how it could be because I did it before, and I decided yes I will carry on and go for it. And the first time we got together the quad sat down and I said that I think we can win the bronze medal at the Olympics. And I basically took on the mantle of not leader but you know, the person that had the vision, the experience in the boat, and we discussed ...I mean from my lessons in Atlanta that I learnt, that everybody in the boat whether it was the weakest person in the boat or the strongest in the boat had a role and focusing on the actual making the boat go fast. And it did work. We had a lot of problems but it did work very well.

The ability of Mary to utilise skills and knowledge from past experiences and transitions is closely related to anticipatory socialisation and the concept of role aptitude. Blinde and Stratta (1985) identified the construct of role aptitude, which encompasses the skills, knowledge and disposition that an individual possesses as an important factor in determining the athlete's ability to move into other roles during or following a transition. In Mary's case, she took on the role of leader to deal with the transition of coming back from retirement and taking the decision to go for the Sydney Olympics, utilising and developing a wide range of skills. Nevertheless, Blinde and Stratta (1985) suggested that some athletes do not develop their potential for alternative roles in a social context and therefore, may possess a lower role aptitude. As a result, their acquisition of transitory skills, knowledge or predispositions to undertake subsequent roles and adapt to new roles and situations may have been impaired and could be responsible for difficulties encountered following career transitions

Mary's ability to identify good and bad transition experiences and bring them to manage present transition situations reflects what Danish *et al.* (1980:115) refer to as intra-individual similarity. 'Intra-individual similarity', is defined as the recognition that a past event or situation is comparable to a

present event or situation being experienced. At the cognitive level, the individual is confident that they can cope with a particular issue or difficulty; at a behavioural level, the individual calls upon past sequences of behaviour; and at a psychological level, the event is no longer unique and the individual utilises previous constructs of experiences to deal with an event or transitional issue. Danish *et al.* (1997) believe that the better an athlete or team can identify and accept similarities between disengagement from sport with past experiences, the less stressful the transition period will be.

Mark's story also highlights the importance of transition familiarity and 'intra-individual' similarity, but unlike Mary's story Mark transfers his knowledge and skills between sport and non-sport transitions:

> When I was up in Edinburgh I had little or no time management which caused big problems. I would essentially do what I wanted to do when I wanted to do it and as a result I ended up with a 2-2 degree. Nothing wrong with that but I could have done better, you know otherwise I could have managed better and still been just as good at archery I think but also I would have made the balance. When I came down to this university I was determined to make a better balance of that...and it's succeeded. I still manage to shoot you know to the same or similar standard as I was shooting before and I came away with a Distinction in my Master's Degree so it was obviously working much better. So that was one thing but then I transferred to my PhD, the PhD being much more free form than my Master's degree which still had a lot of set lectures and labs. Now it is much more a case of seeing the wood through the trees I suppose. I think nowadays, you know, I say to myself that I have learnt from before, you know and I've said to myself 'On this week, I have to fit my training in and I have to fit my teaching , I also this and that' and that sometimes scares me. When I think about it, I have learnt to break stuff down as well as just the simple time management of things, just breaking stuff down into tasks, is another skill that I've had to adopt. I have learned these skills from archery and maybe subconsciously applied it to other aspects you know breaking down my PhD into writing up, my research and my reading papers.

Mark's story demonstrates his ability to develop and grow as an athlete and a person (in this case a student) as a result of transferring skills and knowledge between the transitions of moving from university, undertaking a Master's degree and then a PhD and the transition involving his training environment and performance expectations. His approach reflects the point made by Danish *et al.* (1992) that transitions must be placed within the context of the 'life' of the athlete or team and further demonstrates the potential interdependibility of sport and non-sport transitions. Mark's approach also supports the assumption that the skills, attitudes, and knowledge gained from a sporting environment can extent beyond the sport setting into other areas of life (Smith, 1999).

Mary and Mark's story highlight the role that transition familiarity may play in the athlete's perception of a transition and subsequent adaptation. However, the fact that the transition was familiar to the athlete does not always guarantee that the athlete will make the behavioural or psychological connection with either past or future transition, or that the transition familiarity results in a positive transfer of skill and knowledge. In the case of Ella, the experience of a serious injury at an earlier age initially had little impact in her dealing with a career-ending injury at the time of telling her story for this research. The shoulder injury at an early stage in her career was the first transition that challenged her identity as an athlete. Ella describes how that first injury transition challenged her:

> The fact that I was unable to do what I wished. I wasn't able to train as I wanted...I had to do a lot of kicking work which was very strong anyway because of my cross-country which I had done in the past. And the listening to others or making me believe that was what they were telling me was right.

Ella was affected by the transition in terms of her identity and skills and knowledge regarding the cause and prevention of a future injury transition:

> I suppose I came back more determined to prove that I can still do it. I was frustrated that I had been out of the water for so long and not being able to do swimming...but then again it probably made me stronger. I realised that things can happen to you if you are not careful and you know push the boundaries but know when to back off and know when to stop.

Through this injury Ella recognises the fragility of her career as an athlete but equally the value of determination in dealing with the transition. Ella acknowledges the link between the two injury transitions yet admits that initially the first injury transition had little impact on her present transition:

> I think now looking back on it, it has probably helped me in the last couple of years especially with this injury having an experience like that earlier in my life, but initially when it was happening, probably didn't have any value at all, I was very frustrated at the time.

Ella's story demonstrates the difficulty in identifying transition experiences and the potential long-term nature of the transition process. A transition may not always lead to an immediate change in perception of oneself or the social world in which a person exists. In the case of Ella, the first injury experience did not cause a change in her perception of herself until she sustained her second injury years later at which time the impact of the first injury was realised and became relevant to her self-awareness and handling of the second injury transition. In this manner, a transition cannot be considered a

transition until the athlete acknowledges that it has changed their perception of themselves or the social world in which they exists. Danish *et al.* (1997) considered these events to be critical life events or epiphanies in which the event has the potential to change the athlete's perception of themselves or not lead to no change in perception at all (see Denzin, 1989). Ella's story highlights the difficulty in determining whether an event such as an injury is a transition with a changed perception of oneself or a critical life event with the potential to lead to a change in self-perception. Her story regarding the injury transition demonstrates that an event may not be transitional until an event or another transition triggers the athlete to find meaning in its occurrence and relevancy to the other event or transition.

Ella perceived her first injury transition as a very negative transition that threatened her identity as an emerging athlete. It coincided with her early swimming successes that she acknowledged as the start to her perceiving herself as a serious and aspiring swimmer. She perceived the first injury transition as having a negative impact on her career which potentially deprived her of the successes she craved:

> I think if I look back at it [injury] and think if I didn't have that time out of the water I might have reached successes earlier and been able to...I don't know, yeah possibly go top the Olympics.

The familiarity of the two injury transitions left Ella with a mix of skills and knowledge that she gained from the first injury and potentially applicable to the latest injury. She recognises that it made her stronger mentally and was potentially a help to enable her to cope with the existing injury. Conversely, she blames the skills and attitude she learned from the first injury for causing her second injury:

> It [first injury] didn't make me stronger at the time. It probably made me keener to get back in the water and to prove myself again. I think that was a good thing but also a bad thing. I wanted to control how to get back into the water and I think because I was so keen, and although I spent a whole year and a half recovering from that injury I didn't let the injury heal. And that determination was negative at that time, but looking back on it now that's got me into this problem recently, with my last injury as well. That determination hindered me because I guess I'm a very strong character, very determined and sometimes I don't listen to others and take their values and their opinions even though that are probably very valid. I think my way is the best....sometimes!

Ella's story of her two injury transitions is a complex account of two transitions that are linked in terms of potential transfer of skills but equally perceived by the athlete as conflicting and negative

experiences rooted in the athlete's perception of both events as a threat to her identity and achievement of athletic goals. Like Mary and Mark's story, Ella's story also demonstrates that transitions are process-oriented and developmental in nature in which past and present transitions may potentially interact to impact on the athlete at a cognitive, behavioural and psychological level. The impact of the transition is mediated by the athlete's familiarity with the transition and specific coping skills and subsequent perception of the transition in terms affirming or challenging athletic identity.

10.3 Burnout

The term burnout was used to denote a process in which the athlete determines the social benefits or costs of a transitions experience. Adopting Coakley's (1983, 1992) sociological perspective of burnout, several of the athletes' stories illustrate a distinct cost/benefit analysis in which sport and non-sport transitions are considered in the context of their social world and given individual meaning in terms of their potential cost and/or benefit to dealing with the event. The cost/benefit analysis involved weighing up the pros and cons of a transition with the potential of leading to a changed perception of oneself and the social world in which the athlete exists. The data from the athletes revealed two main areas in which a costs/benefit analysis occurred and contributed to a 'burnout' factor affecting the athletes' perception of a transition: 1) financial and 2) social.

10.3.1 Financial

Financial cost was not a prominent theme from the stories of the athletes since all eight were not 'professional' athletes in terms of earning a salary from a club. Seven were still in university with only one receiving funding from the UK government through the World Class Performance Programme. The other athlete (Mary) was retired from sport but at the time of her competitive sport career she competed as an amateur in terms of not receiving funding from the government or a club. Mary's story demonstrates a cost/benefit analysis relating to financial factors during the transition of retirement from rowing. Although it was not the only transition being experienced at the time, the frustration of poor funding and performances as well as not 'settling down' and earning a salary weighed heavy in her decision to retire from rowing. Financial issues may be argued to have caused Mary's decision to retire

as well as having an impact on her perception of the transition in terms of viewing it positively or negatively. Mary's narrative suggests that her decision to retire was not considered thoroughly, however a closer examination of her account of how she felt at the time of the transition reveals a deliberate process of determining the costs and benefits of remaining in the sport:

> I hadn't really thought about it [retiring] but I guess I figured I have been doing this for what seven years, haven't done it [won gold medal], never going to do it, time to get on. You know mum was obviously worried about my career and work and pensions and sort of sensible things like that, plus the frustration of living on virtually no money because there was no Lottery at that time...you know the fact that you felt really coming from Atlanta was horrible because everyone said we were shit. Well of course we were shit we didn't get any support from this country at all...

Financial cost played an important role in her decision to retire from sport and affected her perception of other transitions such as her poor Olympic performance and her mother's cancer. However, financial cost was also an important factor in Mary's decision to come out of retirement and return to rowing. The introduction of Lottery funding changed her perception of retirement and her performance and training opportunities as she determined a financial benefit to re-entering competitive rowing despite the other reasons for leaving the sport remaining:

> I just needed a break. I was so disappointed with my performance and just thought I'm not going to get in a boat. I'm not going to have anything to do with any rowers. I'm just going to chill out and enjoy myself and then of course when I heard that I could get Lottery I thought I would give it one last shot. The Lottery was going on line and we so we were going to have decent money to live on and to be able to train properly.

The importance of finances as a factor affecting an athlete's perception of retirement and adaptation to the event was also highlighted by Aiden when he was asked about being able to retire from his sport:

> For my sport no problem to retire. Just because I am not as dedicated as most other Olympic athletes because there is no funding. If I could shoot everyday I would shoot everyday, but I am not going to get paid to shoot so I have to come to university so I probably don't give as much dedication/devotion as gymnasts who might get paid or getting their living expenses paid for.

For Aiden, financial costs are an important factor in weighing future opportunities and performance expectations against the time and effort he is able and willing to commit to his sport. Jon also

complained that the state of funding in his sport of rifle shooting may force him to quit the sport or restrict his achievements:

> Money is the biggest problem. It costs a lot of money for the equipment and travel. It is something I have raised with the Chairman that I may have to drop out of some events because I can't afford to pay for it. I want to go to a number of competitions because they will be good for me but really I just can't afford it.

Aiden and Jon's perspective on funding corroborates the earlier findings of Lerch (1981) and Lavelle and Wyllemann (2000) that financial status may affect an athlete's adaptation to transitions such as retirement. In the case of Aiden and Jon, the lack of finances in their sport may be a causal factor in their decision to leave the sport as well as affecting other factors such as making the transition to the next stage of performance and life development.

10.3.2 Social Cost

A number of the athletes provided a rich description of how they determined the social costs of a transition. The transition signalled a moment in their career in which they re-evaluated their social priorities and subsequently adjusted the perception of themselves as an athlete and/or person within their social context. Mary's earlier account of retiring from sport and then re-entering sport also featured a number of social factors that influenced her decision to retire. Some of these social costs and benefits associated with retiring were again replayed in her second and final retirement from rowing in which she weighed the costs and benefits of retiring:

> Well 1999 obviously doing badly, awful and the uncertainty like was wearing on me. It was up and down and up and down. Life is never like that and I just wanted something normal. I had had eleven years of going up and down on these sort of emotional coasters...you know I wanted....I wanted to spend some more time with my husband. We had been married for two years and I was away for six weeks at a stretch here and there. I wanted to start having a family...

Mary's decision to retire involved a re-priortorisation of her values and interests as a result of considering the social costs to be too high compared to the benefits of remaining in rowing. The change of values and interests may have precipitated the retirement transition but it also affected her perception of the event. She commented that it was a 'relief to finally retire but not so much a relief in deciding'.

Henna's narrative was in some respect similar to Mary in terms of her reflecting on the social costs of remaining in sport. However, Henna's story involves a performance transition rather than retirement and her perception of the traumatic event led to a changed perception of her athletic and personal goals:

> Basically at the end of my second year in the Fall I played the best tennis of my life and that will always be the way it is. But because I did I got to that point where I got to the final the Regional Singles and Doubles which meant I then qualified for the Indoor Championships which is like top 32 in the nation and I got there and I had to play against the number 2 seed and I should have beaten her. I just...both sets 5:4 up I should have won and my coach said to me. You know you should have just beaten the number 2 in the nation', and I was like, 'I know' and I thought then, I know I can do it but then I thought that I don't actually want to. I don't want to push myself that far and I just didn't want to do it because I knew I didn't have the motivation and I didn't have the discipline because I felt I was sacrificing another part of my life and it was the first time I had thought that. That I wanted to enjoy myself and I wanted to have fun. I was fed up playing every single day. I got completely and utterly burnt out and after that Fall, in the Spring I was just like...I lost all motivation to play and he says like, 'You can make NCAA [National Collegiate Athletic Association], you're in a completely brilliant position all you have to do is stick with your wins, beat the people from our regions and you're there'. I was just like, 'I'm not interested'. I had to get to the point I now know that I can do it if I want to but I don't want to do it.

Henna determined that the cost of playing tennis at the next level of competition was too high. Making the transition to the highest level of tennis competition in the American college sports programme was perceived as a negative event as a result of the social costs. Unlike Mary, Henna did not contemplate retiring or disengaging from tennis as a result of the high cost ascribed to remaining in sport at an elite level but rather re-set her athletic and personal goals. Henna's story also differs from Mary in that she engaged in a social cost/benefit analysis when she was at the very top of her 'game' rather than at a low point in her sport career. This contradicts the suggestion from Greendorfer and Blinde (1985) that one reason for the reprioritising of athletic and personal values and interests may be that the athlete was an outstanding performer earlier in their sport career but when compared against a wider selection of athletes they reassessed their opportunities for success in sport. Henna's and Mary's experience support the Social Exchange Theory (Lavellee and Wyllemann, 2000) and the general notion that athletes may leave sport or change their role in their life and identity if they feel that the benefits of participating in sport can no longer meet their needs, goals and identity values.

Henna used the word burnout in her account to describe her perception of the social costs of remaining in tennis at her competitive level. Gould (1993) describes burnout as a variety of instances when the athlete becomes 'fed up' with sport participation and stops competing at what should have been the top of their career. Henna being 'fed-up' with the costs of competing at the highest level of competition was crystallized in her account of the decision-making process at the time of the transition event:

> I could go and make it but I know that I'm not going to be happy doing it. I'm not going to push myself hard enough to do it like with fitness side of things and I don't want to do that every week of the year. At that moment [playing against the number 2 player] I was thinking you know a lot of my friends were at Uni at home in England and saying how great it was and I was like ...I was thinking that I really want to experience that and you know I taken tennis as far as I want to go.

Henna's perception of the social costs of making the transition to the next stage of competitive and training development also supports Coakley's (1983) perspective of burnout, in which an athlete's decision to quit or change their participation in sport is influenced by factors such as family background, race, gender, and socio-economic status. Coakley singled out the attractiveness of alternative interests as a major cause of burnout. Accordingly, although athletes sense the value of sport they question whether sport success is worth the costs and sacrifices in terms of missing out on the opportunities their peers are experiencing.

Henna was relieved to make the decision that she no longer wanted to commit the time and energy to achieve the highest level of competition in tennis; however, her re-priotorisation of interests and values hinged on achieving an identity where people feared and respected her for her tennis ability:

> No, I felt quite relieved. I was like now I know what everyone was going on about, that I could go on court and I could be great. I could beat anyone I wanted to. I could go and make it but I know that I'm not going to be happy doing it. I know that now I've got to that ability where I've just felt amazing on court and I've loved every minute of it. Of the challenge to...you know win singles matches which I never had before just felt just amazing on court and I just loved that, loved the feeling of knowing that I could...that people were scared to play me because I was on form and it was great but I was just like I know that its not what I wanted for the rest of my life or what I really want to push for being constantly scared of losing my form and others not respecting me.

Henna's athletic identity is rooted in approval from others in what Ewing (1981) described as a social approval orientation. Having achieved the social recognition that underpinned her athletic identity, Henna chose to disengage from competitive tennis realising the social cost to maintain such an identity. Henna was satisfied with achieving the level of play where she knew she could beat the number two player even though she did not do so at that specific indoor championship. This specific incident is at odds with Linder *et al.* (1991) position that disengagement from sport results from an athlete not satisfying their achievement needs. However, recognising her inability or desire to constantly meet her achievement needs (i.e. social approval) Henna disengaged from accepting the next stage of competitive standard, beginning the process of transiting out of her American college tennis scholarship and returning to England.

10.4 Summary of Key Findings

This chapter has revealed a number of individual factors that impacted the career transition process. Although career transition literature (Schlossberg, 1981; Taylor and Ogilvie, 1998) identifies personal information such as age, gender and ethnicity as individual factors that may affect the career transition experience, the small number of athletes involved in this research precluded generalisation regarding such factors. Although none of the athletes spoke specifically about their age, gender or ethnicity in terms of affecting their transition experience, key information can be inferred from themes relating to specific athlete characteristics that were rooted in their social context, but specific to their background and experiences. These individual factors were categorised into three areas: 1) education/career planning, 2) transition familiarity and skill transfer; and 3) burnout.

A number of the athletes' narratives demonstrated a lack of career planning to prepare for life after sport or to mediate the impact of career transition such as an injury. Although seven of the eight athletes were in university at the time of the interview, their accounts did not suggest that attending university was a proactive post-sport career preparation but rather a separate experience in life with little evidence of linking with their sport career. Several of the athletes refused to contemplate life after sport, what Petitpas (1978) referred to as identity foreclosure in which their adaptation to career-ending

transitions was poor because they did not consider career planning for life after sport as necessary or relevant to maintain their athletic identity. Subsequently, transitions such as career-ending injuries were traumatic and career planning activities were initiated alongside the experience to lessen its impact rather than proactively planned prior to the event in the realisation that planning for an identity and life outside of sport is not a threat to their sport career but a balanced approach to managing sport and non-sport transitions. Thus an athlete's career may lead to an evolved identity that may be open to personal and professional opportunities arising from transitions.

Several of the athletes identified similarities with another transition that helped them to cope with the impact of a transition. In some of athletes' stories, transition familiarity involved the recognition of skills and knowledge that could be taken from one transition and used to positively deal with another transition. This process of transferring skill and recognising similarities between transition experiences was a complex one often involving the blocking of transfer of skill and knowledge because the transition experiences were perceived as a threat to their athletic identity. Further, transitions in sport such as a career-ending injuries may not be acknowledged by the athlete or considered a transitional event in which self-perception is altered until it is linked with another transition at a cognitive, behavioural or psychological level. The transfer of skills between transitions was also evident between sport and non-sport transitions suggesting that balancing sport and non-sport spheres of life is facilitated through transfer of skill between similar transitions. Linking past and present sport and non-sport transitions, the athletes' accounts demonstrate the developmental nature of the transition process. Thus, transitions, such as retirement, cannot be considered as a single event without a link to past or future transitions. The perception of one transition impacts on the athlete's identity and subsequent reaction and adaptation to future similar transitions. In this manner, the transition experience provides an opportunity for intervention to proactively utilise the experience to develop transitional skills that may be used to deal with other sport and non-sport transitions.

The athletes' perception of transitions was also affected by the perceived cost of the transition in terms of adaptation and management. The data suggests that the athlete engages in a cost/benefit analysis as part of the transition process resulting in a perception of the transition that shapes their

adaptation and management of the event. Not all of the athletes demonstrated a cost/benefit analysis at the time of a transitional experience, suggesting that for some is a transferable skill that athletes acquire from external sources or other life experiences.

Several of the athletes' accounts revealed that financial and social costs were critical factors in shaping the athlete's perception of the transition and subsequent adaptation. Mary reported that her decision to retire from sport was influenced by the loss of money as a result of staying in sport. In other situations, a financial cost was ascribed to achieving a high level of performance. In some cases, the interviewed athletes reported that lack of money in their sport influenced their decision regarding the level of commitment they would put into their sport since development pathways were not established and support not available. Social costs were closely associated with the concept of burnout in which the athlete re-priotorised their interests and values as a result of the athlete questioning whether sport success is worth the costs and sacrifices in terms of missing out on the opportunities their peers are experiencing.

Chapter 11

Perception of Career Transitions: Identity Engulfment and Identity Evolvement

11.1 Introduction

> As I research the topic of career transitions, it becomes obvious that the interviews with the athletes are as much about identity management for me as it is for them. Perhaps completing my Doctorate is a way of making up for my identity loss from being de-selected and achieving less than I wanted in sport. I get asked constantly, 'Why are you doing a Doctorate'? I try to fool myself by saying that it will help me get a better job but really I know that I just want to be accepted as being smart in an academic workplace where having a Doctorate means something. I failed in the world of sport and I just can't stand being less than 'the best' in other areas of my life. The need to be the best is a leftover of a sport career in which my identity was so wrapped up in my sport-related achievements that I don't think I have ever really escaped my athletic

Taylor and Ogilvie (1998) identified athletic identity as a development factor affecting the athlete's adaptation to retirement from sport. Athletic identity has been identified in athlete transition literature to affect the athlete's ability to plan alternative career paths (Petitpas, 1978; Murphy *et al,* 1996; Grove *et al.* 1997) as well as their adjustment to career-ending transitions such as injury (Elkin, 1981; Rotella and Heyman, 1984; Kleiber and Brock, 1992). In this research, athlete identity is a recurrent theme in the athletes' narratives in relation to the environmental and individual factors affecting career transition experiences. The importance and prevalence of identity issues is not surprising given that transitions involve a change in self-perception and also a perception of the world in which a person exists.

From the athletes' stories it emerged that an evolving process of change and effect occurs in which the transition experience creates a change in the athletes' identity which affects the athletes' perception of other concurrent and future transitions. From the athletes' stories, two themes emerged in relation to change in the athletes' identity formation and development namely: 1) identity engulfment, and 2) identity evolvement. In this study, the term identity engulfment is used from Sparkes (1998) in which the athlete's identity is a barrier to accepting the development of the self. The term identity evolvement refers to the process in which the athlete's identity is evolved in response to transitions in which positive adaptation enhances the perception of self.

This chapter further analyses the athletes' narratives and in doing so reveals the process of identity engulfment and evolvement. Although the athletes' stories are attributed to either identity

engulfment or evolvement, it is not to suggest that the athlete experiences each of these identity processes in isolation. Indeed, the athletes often experienced a number sport and non-sport transitions concurrently, with different effects on the formation of their identity. However, the athlete's perception of one or more transitions may illicit a more powerful effect on their identity construction; thus tilting the balance towards engulfment or evolvement depending on the point in time of their life and career.

11.2 Identity Engulfment

11.2.1 Doug's Story

Doug's identity as a volleyball player was developed from an early age and consolidated through immediate success. Doug's narrative revealed that volleyball served as an identity anchor during a time in his life when he was looking for confidence:

Andy: And when you first started playing volleyball did you quickly start playing for an outside team?

Doug: Yeah really quick. I just started enjoying the competition ...I was far quicker than expected. My learning curve went through the roof so I learned more, I enjoyed it more. I realised I could play.

Andy: Did that make a difference that you were successful right away?

Doug: Yeah it did. It made me think, 'Oh maybe I can be good at something'.

Andy: Why was that important to you?

Doug: Don't know...just gave me a feeling of confidence and self-belief.

Andy: Did you feel that you needed confidence at that time in your life?
Doug: Not too sure because I was at an age where I was like thinking that I didn't really care about anything, but yeah as a person I was thinking, 'I can be somebody'.

The transition into sport for Doug is unremarkable and similar to other interviewed athletes' accounts of a significant person or programme that triggered a deepening commitment to sport and subsequent development of an athletic identity. However, Doug's story progresses as a tale of identity engulfment as he moved through the volleyball ranks and overcame challenging stages in his career as an emerging elite athlete. Building on a very successful club and school experience, Doug was challenged with the transition to the next stage of development, the England Junior Team. In meeting this challenge Doug reveals a deepening sense of his athletic identity:

> ....when I moved into the England Junior Team it was just like National Service-that's what I call it – and I think all of us would say that. It was like National Service because you had to live, like every time you were away we slept on floors all the time, you had to look after everyone else; it was like a living hell experience. That is what really made me the person that I am now. Just going through the two year cycle of having to look out for myself really.

Doug admits that the two year experience brought out the best in him as a player, or so he believed, despite conceding that he found it very difficult mentally:

> I think I was always nervous that I didn't want to do anything wrong, didn't want to put a foot wrong because the coach was tough and would give you a rollicking and would send you away, so I never wanted to like get involved in case I did something wrong. I use to hide really to be honest within the team.

Throughout Doug's story a consistent theme relating to his identity formation is the 'fear of failure'. His athletic identity became a strong social anchor in dealing with social relationships and adjusting to school-related transitions. Failure in the sport world where he has established a social identity from an early age threatened his ability to cope with other issues in his life. In an emotional account, Doug reveals the interplay between his athletic identity and social problems:

> I use to be scared of going out with my friends because I was afraid of getting into trouble in the evenings. I was really, really scared of being beaten up or something like that. Even though it never happened I was always scared of it so my friends used to every night say, 'Oh come on out and you have got to this'. So I really turned to sport and said, 'No, I have to train tonight' and stuff like that. I focused all my attention into sport. Hearing all the stories about people getting into fights and things like that, I turned to sport to help me get over that.

Doug admits that he used volleyball to cope with his problems at school. Volleyball as an antidote to his social problems at school is even more pointed given his frank and chilling admission of the scale of his social and mental problems:

> I didn't realise it but I was depressed and stressed until I left school because I was always told that I wasn't and that there was nothing wrong. I would just get on with it. My mum used to say to me, 'Oh yeah when I was young this used to happen to me'. It's the same old story. It's like nobody realised that I might be different and maybe have a different tale to tell. Yeah I don't think teachers really took any notice because they saw me as a good character but the other side to my life they really didn't see. So when I was struggling at school because I didn't want to go to school. I went through a period of time of not wanting to go to school because I didn't want to face the teachers or pupils. It started off that I didn't want to go because I got behind in work and I did not want face the students and I use to fear being told off by the teachers. And when I really did get told off from the teachers they never wanted to know why I'd be absent and other things going on in my life.

Doug's lack of self-confidence started at the age of seven or eight resulting from the divorce of his parents. For Doug, volleyball success provided the identity he needed to deal with the array of social

and personal transitions he was facing. Getting through the two year 'National Service' of the England Junior Team was a source of accomplishment that further consolidated his athletic identity as well as providing a coping measure to non-sporting transitions. Paradoxically, his athletic identity proved to be his own 'achilles heel' (Sparkes, 1998) in that he feared being de-selected thereby restricting his mental preparedness to take risks and strive for excellence.

This is not to belie the importance and benefit of volleyball to help Doug deal with social and mental problems; however, Doug's story reflects a constant battle of maintaining and reaffirming his athletic identity through proving himself to coaches and team mates at different stages of his development in volleyball. For Doug, meeting the demands of elite volleyball programmes became a matter of survival rather than an opportunity for growth as a player and a person. His intense fear of failure lead to him engaging in self-admitting extreme training practices in response to perceived poor performances or his fear of being de-selected from a squad:

> ...when I got cut from Greece that was it. It just changed me. I trained so much harder, and eventually by the end of it [training camps] when we had to train like once a day I use to train twice a day. I always had it in my head that like Daley Thompson used to train, if other people were training once a day, he would train twice a day. If other people were training twice a day then he would train three times a day. So I used to train twice if people were training once. And then we went to training twice a day I used to train three times a day and I trained so hard that I got my spot in the European Championship. I was first six but at a cost because I had a shoulder injury from overtraining...but yeah I did get to being a first six player.

Doug's athletic identity was further consolidated with each transitional event in which he overcame the threat to his identity as a volleyball player through 'punishing' himself. He reported that he would often go straight into the weight room after a poor performance in a match to punish himself for making mistakes. The need to demonstrate and reaffirm his athletic identity through such extreme training practices increased his level of emotional and physical investment in his sport and dependency on his athletic identity to survive other sport and non-sport transitions. In the case of the transition from the England Junior Team to the Senior Team Doug viewed it as a very difficult transition despite his achieving a high standard in the Junior Team

> ...at the start of Juniors it was almost like I was told that I couldn't really be the good person or whatever, or a top player and I gradually was showing success and stuff. Like in the last tournament the coach said, 'that's amazing stuff'. He really like congratulated me and that was a lot. We actually won a big tournament and it was quite satisfying to be a major player. But

> after that the transition to the Seniors just went out the window. All of a sudden we're chucked into senior team training and I couldn't handle it mentally because again it was fear of failure but it was on such a big scale because I was watching these people that I was training which were like my role models. The minimum standard was so high that I was always so scared of putting a foot wrong instead of playing like I could.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Doug quit the England Senior Team and made the transition to beach volleyball. In Doug's case, he was engulfed by his identity in a similar manner to what Sparkes (1998) referred to as identity engulfment, in which a strong athletic identity restricts growth as a person in response to transitional events such as injury and de-selection. In a seemingly contradictory process, overcoming transitions may lead to further development or consolidation of an athletic identity void of enhanced transitional skills and awareness and increased level of investment and dependency on athletic identity to cope with sport and non-sport transitions. The athlete clings to a strong athletic identity to deal with threats to their social world and self, believing that a strong identity leads to enhanced athletic performance and a rebuff to transitional events that threaten their self-perception. In the case of Doug, identity engulfment denotes a process of identity formation and affirmation from surviving transitions using a sub-cultural ethos of 'that which does not kill us makes us stronger'. Stronger means an enhanced athletic identity that increasingly shuts off the opportunity to lead a balanced life with a range of life and sport-related skills that are learned from transitional experiences and applied to similar concurrent or future transitions. Therefore, in a similar nature to identity foreclosure (Petitpas, 1978), a strong and continual deepening sense of athletic identity potentially restricts the athlete from embracing the event as a learning opportunity to develop alternate skills or plan for alternative career paths and interests.

11.2.2 Jon's Story

In a similar manner to Doug, Jon used sport to rebuff non-sport transitions such as his parents' divorce. His athletic identity became a single identity assuming an ascendancy over other identities, most notably that of a student. The transition from school (GCSE) to university was a major transition that threatened the continuity of his athletic identity and acceptance amongst his peers. He had also built an identity amongst his peers that provided the social stability to deal with other non-sport transitions

such as his parents' divorce. In moving to university, it was securing a sport scholarship that allowed Jon to deal with the threat that moving away to university posed to his strong athletic identity:

> ...I think it [scholarship] was something different. You know it's not everyday someone says I've got a scholarship at university for shooting. I think perhaps that was you know something slightly different. I'm not sure as I say I was going to apply for it and see what would happen. I couldn't really tell what was going to happen, but I don't know really...as I say I felt that I would have something unique, different from everyone else, which was my main inspiration for applying for it.

Greendorfer and Blinde (1997) identified seeking prestige and the attaining of a sport scholarship as the dominant reasons for male American college athletes continuing with a sport career during college. In this manner, achieving success was defined by the status that came with having a sport scholarship and this provided a powerful incentive for athletes to maintain their participation in sport. Jon's motives for seeking the scholarship seem to be rooted in his need to affirm his athletic identity in his new social world (a continuation of pushing alternate identities to a secondary status level) rather than securing support for his shooting. He admits that he knew very little about the scholarship programme and was 'not fussed' if he was not successful in his application, believing that his shooting would not suffer from the transition to university.

Jon's story provides further evidence of the potential for transitions to engulf the athlete's identity and become an 'achilles' to the development of self. His story captures the engulfment process from early on in his career with his athletic identity seemingly strengthened through enduring transition. However, his deepening sense of athletic self is paired with a need to engage in activities that sustain his athletic identity at the expense of alternate identity development.

11.2.3 Ella's Story

For Ella the high level of commitment and success in swimming served to deepen her athletic identity and resolve to achieve her ultimate goal of competing in the Olympics. This 'dream' was first challenged at the age of fourteen or fifteen when she sustained a serious shoulder injury that kept her out of swimming for eighteen months. Her frustrations during this time were associated with the loss of a social world that confirmed her status as an elite swimmer:

> Since the age of nine or ten I'd be getting up in the morning at 5 o'clock every day. That is my routine and it is very strange when someone takes that away from you. It hasn't been your choice to stop. I think that is quite hard to accept.

In response to the injury and potential loss of identity Ella refused advice from coaches and physiotherapists. Ella explains:

> I spent a year and a half recovering from that injury because I didn't let it heal. And so that was determination negative at that the time, but looking back at it now that [determination] got me back into this problem recently, my last injury as well.
>
> That experience hindered me because I'm a strong character, very determined and sometimes I don't listen to others and take their values and their opinions even though they are probably valid. I think my way is best sometimes.

Ella admits that her strong character emanating from her athletic identity differs from her identity outside the swimming environment:

> I'm probably quite quiet...quite relaxed within a group but wouldn't want to stand out. Whereas in the pool I'm quite confident...don't mind the attention. Quite happy in that environment.

Ella's account demonstrates that she considered her athletic identity to be separate from her non-sporting life and she protected her athletic identity from external factors that would threaten or dilute her identity. In response to her recent career-ending injury, Ella restricted her parents' involvement in dealing with surgeons and decisions relating to surgery:

> I think I have kept my parents in the dark quite a bit. Done it on my own and done it my way and dealt with it nearly on my own with little help from others. I think that was more because I was scared my parents would pamper too much and mollycoddle me and I don't know, just pamper me too much.

Following on from this comment, Ella explains the impact of her strong athletic identity in dealing with the management of her potentially career-ending injury:

Andy: What did you want them to do about your injury?

Ella: Take a stand back and just let me do it my way.

Andy: Why?

Ella: Because that's how I do my swimming. I don't want to break the routine.

Andy: Is that routine your comfort zone?

Ella: I think it is. I think it was my little protection of who I was and that could have gotten trodden on if I'd open my doors a bit.

For Ella, her athletic identity provided her with the 'protection' from unpredictable and undesirable sport and non-sport transitions. She believed that overcoming transition such as her first

major injury was driven by what she described as the need 'to get back in the water and prove myself again'. Ella's athletic identity became her strength in dealing with potentially career-ending transitions but it also drew her deeper into a psychological dependency on a set of behaviours that she readily used in her second, potentially career-ending experience to affirm and perpetuate her athletic identity. Ella swam at the Commonwealth Games while seriously injured, withholding this information from her team:

> I went into the Commonwealth Games without my team knowing the full extent of my injury. I had a lot of fire fighting treatment up to the Games which had enabled me to continue with my training.

Her behaviour reflects a psychological dependency on her athletic identity which was predicated on success at the Commonwealth Games. Success at the Games validated the level of investment she made in her swimming career and affirmed her identity as a swimmer:

> It was all for personal reasons for doing it. I think I had put in so much time and effort into training twenty odd hours a week in the pool and five times a week. It wasn't what people thought of me it was what I thought of myself.

Despite the seriousness of her injury and the fact that it ended her career as an elite swimmer, Ella confessed that she would not have changed her decision to compete injured at the Commonwealth Games and that despite being injured, the event was a transitional experience in her competitive swimming career, one that re-affirmed her athletic identity:

> If I didn't compete in the Games I don't know if I would have continued to swim or had the determination to get back in the pool. I think it would have been harder to accept that I worked that hard and not achieved instead of working that hard and still reached that level, and got the recognition.

Ella's high dependency on her strong athletic identity reflects an engulfment process that was ultimately broken when confronted with the prospect that she may have to retire from sport. The engulfment process was continuous even past the injury event and initial stages of treatment. She explains her one-year plan for the injury:

> If the operation goes well, I'll be back swimming and if I go back swimming then I will continue with my coaching part-time and swim, which that would be all that I would need to fund in terms of what I call 'day-to-day' and just where it takes me.

Ella believed that she would achieve a restored physical self and took for granted that full recovery would be the sequel to overcoming the injury. Over time, Ella realised that her plan was unrealistic as

she began to accept the seriousness of the injury. Subsequent interviews with her revealed a change in emphasis and outlook regarding her swimming career, reflecting a break in the identity entrapment process and a realisation of her vulnerability to life after sport:

> I think it [the injury] has caught me short. I think I've got an idea what I would like to do in the future, but no real vision of the ifs and wherefors of what I might do to achieve that. Possibly if I had that in the back of my mind slightly earlier that vision might be more set as a path to achieve that.

The injury transition was characterised by a growing acknowledgement that she needed to expand her identity and re-negotiate her priorities and workload in anticipation of the feared day that she would be told that she could not swim again competitively. The need to plan for a life after sport was not a sudden revelation but an evolving process forced by a gradual acceptance of the potential for her injury to be career-ending:

> I think it [the injury] has made me think about it [retirement] because while I was swimming that is all I really focused on swimming and sometimes university studies and more likely going up to the gym, whereas now with that out of the equation I've got to think of how I am going to occupy my time. Coaching has enabled me to spend 25 hours coaching a week where otherwise I would have been swimming.

For Ella, the process of 'letting go' has been difficult, she believes that her athletic identity has been taken away from her because she was injured. She said:

> I hadn't planned to stop so its totally different to if I had decided that it was the correct time to stop and because I hadn't planned to stop, I didn't see a reason to plan for the future and I continued to see myself in the sport for many years to come.

Her grudging acceptance of her injury and diminishing athletic identity represents a strong retention of the mind-body unity in an injured athlete. This finding supports the Sparke's (2004) point that the disciplined body and self remain at the apex of an athlete's hierarchy of identities despite the obvious fragmentation or disruption between the disciplined self and associated gloried self. As such, Sparkes (1997) suggests that these phantom selves restrict the athlete's thinking with regard to 'the future, altered and or novel senses of self' (p.35).

11.2.4 Chloe's Story

In Ella and Doug's story the presence of a strong athletic identity and associated psychological dependency on that identity was linked to a third-order theme of poor perception or no acknowledgement of retirement. Alder and Alder (1989) noted that the first consequence of the emergence of a strong athletic identity or ascent of the gloried self is the loss of a future orientation and long-term planning for life after sport resulting from a career-ending transition. This theme was also evident in Chloe's story which in addition featured a severe injury transition. In Chloe's case, her response to the line of questioning regarding the prospect of retirement was brisque and unequivocal:

Andy: Let's talk about life after sport.

Chloe: There won't be one.

Andy: Why do you say that?

Chloe: Because I already want to run. When I get to the end of my career I'm not going to stop sport, I will definitely carry on but just not at a professional level.

Chloe repeatedly pointed out that she would never quit athletics but rather 'graduate' to some sort of job in athletics even though she had not considered what that position might be or the additional skills that might be required. The high level of dependency on her athletic identity obscured the notion of an alternative identity to her present one. In response to questions as to why she wanted to possibly be a television presenter for athletics, Chloe replied:

> I enjoy the sport. I mean ever since I was a little girl I have always watched it on TV and thought that I really waned to that. I mean I will still be involved in the sport and it looks good.

Chloe's strong athletic identity overrode any discussion regarding the type of skills she would need or the need to plan now for life after sport. In response to questions regarding the skills she might need to develop to enter this career path Chloe referred to a famous British Olympian who had made the transition to TV presenting as a second career: 'Look, I don't think Sally Gunnell has the skills but she is doing it'.

In the case of Doug, Ella, and Chloe the denial of the retirement transition may be a product of an 'off-time' (Blinde and Stratta, 1992) injury transition. At the time of the interview, each of these

three athletes were experiencing or had just experienced a severe injury or in the case of Ella, a potentially career-ending injury. These injury transitions represented 'off-time' transitions that impacted on their ability to consider alternative career skills during an intense period in their career in which the injury threatened their athletic identity. For each of them, telling the story of their injury was difficult and emotional. Discussing life after sport during this period only added to the psychological pain of their injury. Their instinct was to draw mental strength from their athletic identity, increasing their psychological dependency on behaviours that re-affirmed their strong athletic identity rather than undermined it. This point reflects the findings of Kleiber and Brock (1992:74):

> The injury experience, conceived as a disruptive life narrative, may be considered an existential crisis. The injured person confronts the inability to tell the story, the imagined future toward which the past and present time is made problematic by the illness. While each of us is always the narrator of our own life-tales, we may tell stories of ourselves as either authoring life events or responding to them. The extent to which we see ourselves as 'authors' may influence our experience of the existential trauma of illness.

From the athletes' life narrative, the injury represented a crisis of identity that impacted on their ability to control life events. In a life of highly planned training and competition cycles, the athletes' lost, at the time of their injuries, the ability to author life events. Chloe's response to her injury highlights the difficulty she has in controlling the transition:

> Definitely a big challenge. This is the worst injury that I have ever had so definitely feel a bit lost at the moment. I don't really know where to go but obviously the physio will help me.

11.3 Identity Evolvement

11.3.1 Mark's Story

Mark's story did not feature an injury transition but he did demonstrate early in his archery career an entrapped athletic identity. His achievements in archery were a source of pride and he developed a strong athletic identity or gloried self based on national and international achievements:

> It used to be...you know people would say, when I said to people that I do archery they use to say, 'I used to do it as well at such and such a level and then ask if I compete?'. I used to take a lot of pride that I had competed at you know National Events, International...you know, went out to the Malta International, quite a few years ago now and did exceptionally well there. Had a great time, we won the team and I came eight individual and when ever anyone spoke to me about archery I'd always try and slip that in there.

His success early in his career and associated strong athletic identity led to a psychological dependency on archery to cope with attending university and moving away from home for the first time. For Mark his psychological dependency was manifested in relentless training to the detriment of his university coursework and physical health. Alternative identities became secondary to that of being an archer. Engaging with physical tasks relating to archery training and preparation became a tool for consolidating and cultivating his primary immediacy (Charmaz, 1994) which was to be a successful archer.

The commitment to training was validated with impressive achievements very quickly which deepened his association of achievement and strong athletic identity with the long hours of training. However, the psychological dependency as a result of engaging with athletic tasks such as long hours of training became problematic when he made the non-sport transition of entering the workforce:

> Thinking back now I would certainly say that I had a long honeymoon period when I started shooting. I shot so much just that I just carried on getting better and better and better! And then when I started to take or at certainly when I started work or looking for work and took a break from university I started to shoot less. I started to get down on myself because I wasn't shooting as much as I liked...and repairing...and that caused damage to my equipment and repairing that damage wasn't something I wasn't equipped to cope with. And certainly you know whenever you start...I start to talk down on myself or you know, I start to have negative thoughts and flipping that around was something that I found to do and still find hard to do today.

Mark needed the tinkering with equipment and excessive training regime to reaffirm his athletic identity in a similar fashion to how Doug punished himself with weight training for poor performances and Chloe needing to keep running and Ella to continue swimming in the face of injuries threatening their athletic identity. However, when confronted with a threat to the physical tasks associated with his gloried self Mark was able to reconstruct his athletic identity to accommodate new and emerging identities in his life. His experience differed from Doug, Ella and Chloe because unlike with an injury transition, Mark did not lose the mind-body unity but rather re-negotiated its existence in a new social context brought on by new life transitions.

Making the transition into the workforce and after six months re-locating to a new university to start his PhD were significant non-sporting transitions that impacted on his self-perception. Mark was able to enact a process of identity evolvement involving renegotiating his shooting regimentation that redefined his disciplined body and sense of self:

> It still does occasionally bother me but I tend to reflect on the amount I shoot. When I do train I tend to reflect on it better and be more pragmatic and say, 'You know, I did actually shoot well then and I'm still getting the good scores'. In a way that makes me stronger because it goes well you know that I'm keeping fit even though I am not shooting as much but I'm still good. I must you know for the time spent training or doing cardio work or something like that, I'm getting more umph per buck I suppose. For the amount of time that I spend training it is quite comforting to know that that it's a good thing for me. I take feedback from my training and then putting that into my mental side rather than what was happening before which was taking what I was thinking mentally and then shoving that into training and of course my training would go down and it was hard. So reversing the flow is much, much more useful. You know it is much, much better.

Mark removed his psychological dependency on training to define his strong athletic identity. The turning points or transitions in his life were used as triggers to change and grow as a person and as an athlete. His sense of self was no longer attached to one overriding identity but rather encompassed a range of identities that affected his perception of training and competition goals:

> It's been tricky over the last three or four years because I haven't had the time to train like I used to. Its funny but I see myself as having improved but without the scores having come. I still go to National Outdoors and I'll finish in the top ten, possibly the top five the same as I did five years ago. But that said I feel so much better about my shooting...Its just that I used to let the scores- again you know out of detriment to the way I thought about archery. You know if I wasn't getting the scores then I'm not enjoying myself. This is not the case now. I certainly feel at the time that it is only a matter of time for me before I start shooting well.

Despite restricting the physical act of shooting Mark emerged with an evolved athletic identity that was not weaker but stronger in his eyes. He renegotiated his body-self relationship and achieved a new primary immediacy (Sparkes, 1997) in which he began to perform without conscious effort. Whereas before, poor scores led to increased training volume to re-affirm the body-self unity but subsequently led to a deepening of association and reliance on the performer self. Mark began to identify with the 'flow' of shooting and the aspect of good scores became secondary and was believed to be an inevitable outcome in time. In this re-defined state of self Mark's body disappears from the consciousness when shooting and his sense of fulfilment is no longer solely attached to maintaining his athletic identity at the apex of his hierarchy of identities. Without this closed identity he is able to discuss retirement from sport and alternative identities because he can see the continuation of the new re-defined self into the future:

> I still think that at the core of it if I forget about everything else, if I never compete again, if I never shoot even with other people for the social aspect and to get the recognition, I will always

> enjoy the idea of shooting an arrow and hitting the middle and making a nice shot. It's funny...and I found this out...I mean when I went home to my parents for a couple of weeks that's all I did. I go out into the field, no-one else around, blank boss up and I would shoot. I wasn't even shooting at a target so I wouldn't know what score I was getting. I just shot an arrow and it was great. So no I don't ever stop myself and worry about quitting or retirement. It means so much more to me now.

This expanded sense of the body-self contrasts with his earlier approach to archery in which he slavishly trained and attended to the preparation of his equipment. Mark speaks of the pride in being a 'techy nerd' and going to the gallery to 'tweak and tune' his equipment for hours on end. In this manner, he developed a cyborgification (Sparkes, 2004; Butryn and Masucci, 2003) of his athletic identity in which he relates to his own physiological identity through technological means:

> Now being a sort of maths, geeky, computer type person I love gadgets, and a lot of the eight, nine hours a day that I spent shooting would be to shoot thirty arrows, take down my bow, you know change a few settings, borrow someone's stabilisers, or have a look at someone else's limbs. I would shoot with that and chase the best set up that made me feel like part of the equipment. That you know...and that idea...it sounds I don't know, rather silly to say, but the idea of just playing with my setup was like an addiction I suppose.

11.3.2 Henna's Story

Henna's athletic identity was formalised in her athlete scholarship status at an American university. The commitment demanded from her coaches deepened her sense of athletic identity. The culmination of her hard work was almost beating the number two ranked player in the American college tennis programme. Although she lost the match she achieved a state of primary immediacy. Sparkes (1997) describes primary immediacy as a state in which the body functions and performs without conscious effort. In this regard, Henna spoke of the heightened awareness of her abilities and potential following her performance against the number two ranked player:

> I was like now I know what everyone was going on about, that I could go on court and I could be great. I could beat anyone I wanted to. I could go and make it, but I know that I'm not going to be happy doing it.

In the case of Doug, Ella, and Chloe, injuries forced a disruption to their primary immediacy leading to a fragmentation of self. As regards Mark and Henna, the disruption to their primary immediacy and perceived body-self relationship was the realisation of the cost to maintain such a state. The disruptions were not unpredictable as with an injury, but rather an evolving process of weighing up the costs versus the benefits of maintaining their athletic identity. In both Mark and Henna's stories, the

change in their sense of self was not so much a fragmentation of self but a conscious decision to re-define their self or athletic identity within their social context. Although their decision may have been triggered by a transitional event or series of events it was based on the collective experience of past and present transitional experiences.

The conscious decision to lose the cultivated immediacy in their sport carried risks for Mark and Henna. Neither wished to lose their strong athletic identity, their social anchor for many years; but both realised the cost of a high state of dependency on a single identity construct. With regards to Henna, she realised that maintaining the body and self unity necessary to underpin her primary immediacy was not something she was prepared to undertake:

> I'm not going to push myself hard enough to do it like with the fitness side of things and I don't want to do that every week of the year.

This realisation came after she achieved her state of primary immediacy in terms of achieving an unrivalled 'flow' against the number two ranked tennis player.

> I now know that I've got the ability where I've just felt amazing on court and I've loved every minute of it. Of the challenge to you know, to win singles which I've never had before and that was great, loved the feeling knowing that I could...that people were scared of me because I was on form and it was great but I was just like I know that its not what I want for the rest of my life or what I really want to push for in the future...

The ability to consider alternative sense of identities was clouded before this point in her career as she continuously strove to match her capabilities with the high-level challenges that she had demanded of herself throughout her career. Although Henna was not considering retiring from tennis, the sense of achieving her goal facilitated an awareness of alternative paths and identities in her life. This relates to the findings of Webb *et al.* (1995) and Crooks and Robertson (1991) which suggest that athletes who have achieved their goals before finishing their careers adapt better to life after sport because they have higher life satisfaction and therefore are more willing to engage in alternative careers.

For Henna, she chose that turning point (losing to the number two ranked player) in her career to re-negotiate her body-self relationship to accommodate a number of emerging identities that up to that point in her life had been suppressed to a secondary status level. This transitional process of evolving the self underpinned her decision to move back to the United Kingdom and attend university in

conjunction with playing less competitive tennis. However, the processing of evolving her identities in terms of re-forming her sense of self to accommodate new identities was not an easy transformation. Part of her past athletic identity was the identity affirmation she received from fans, team mates and fellow competitors. An inevitable outcome of her decision to lead a more balanced life with equal, multiple identities was the loss of what Sparkes (1997) refers to as the gloried self. Sparkes (1997) suggests that the demise of the disciplined body and loss of public recognition that comes with the inability to perform at the highest level of competition leads to another loss of another sense of self, the gloried self. Although Henna chose to give less commitment to tennis in order to accommodate other interests and identities in her life, she resented the public assumption that she was no longer a gifted tennis player:

> I still think that when it comes to it I'll like go and play in the County Cup in the next couple of weeks and I will still feel all that pressure because its something around the people that I've been around for years and what they think I should have become and what I have become and I don't want all that because I haven't played for a while and I don't want to let them down and think, 'Oh she's lost it now, she's never going to be good as she was going to be' ...so I still put loads of pressure on myself and I still think that I'm mentally weak because I haven't addressed it properly...

Henna struggled with retaining the gloried self and managing public perception of her newly defined sense of self. Her struggles reflected the difficulty in managing public and private athletic identity. Webb *et al.* (1995) define private athletic identity as those elements of an athlete's identity that are potentially unavailable to public knowledge whereas, public athletic identity refers to that which is derived from public performances and manifested in the athlete's public reputation in the social role of athlete. For Henna, the transition in her sense of self related more to her private athletic identity than public athletic identity. The ability to let go of the gloried self associated with her past public athletic identity provided a challenge for Henna:

> I think with my tennis now it is more frustration that I want people to know that I could have been good if I wanted to do it and that I can still be good. I think that is what is the most conflicting with you know with my side of my life now with like my university and stuff because it does take up more time and I don't have as much time for tennis which is frustrating because that never happened in America because tennis came first. So that is the only frustrating thing to it is that it is going to take a long time for me to get back to where I was.

Henna acknowledges that the route she has taken in terms of having multiple identities will be difficult if she is to achieve her former gloried self. Charmaz (1994) suggests that attempts to achieve the former gloried self following a re-defined sense of self and body may lead to further identity dilemmas. Sparkes (1997) characterises this process using Athen's five stage model of dramatic self-change. In this model, a person must subject their new unified selves to the 'test of experience'. Subject to surviving this 'test', the person must wait for the social repercussions of their transition in order to gain the psychological momentum to consolidate their new unified selves. In Henna's case, the challenge is to reconcile her public and private athletic identity in order to develop a realistic set of goals that underpin her new athletic identity and allow her peers to accept her new, evolved identities. In the final stage of dramatic self-change Sparkes (1997) refers to a social segregation in which the person gravitates to social groupings that allow for affirmation and acceptance of the person's new selves. In this respect, Henna reports an acceptance of her new selves:

> There is no doubt that with my course and everything that it is all going well and just like with the whole Sports Department as well. It's great because I feel like they are trying to like help me organise myself and just being part of the tennis team and also being with the guys team it is really great now.

11.3.3 Aiden's Story

Aiden possessed a strong athletic identity that was nurtured through 10 years of involvement in archery. His strong athletic identity is central to his sense of self and evident through his conviction in attaining a medal in the Olympics. Aiden demonstrated that a strong athletic identity and conviction to attain the highest standard is not incompatible with multiple, balanced identities. His sense of self did not preclude planning for life after sport or future but his present sense of self and body was focused on achieving his athletic goals:

> I never think about leaving elite sport just because I know I can do it [win a medal at the Olympics]. I've done it as a Junior and I know I can do it as a Senior.
>
> ...I know I can do it now and I'm not going to worry about 10 years down the line. That's 2 or 3 Olympics away.

It is indicative of Aiden's strong athletic identity that he measures the timing of potential retirement in Olympic cycles. Despite a seemingly closed or entrapped identity he is able to maintain his strong

athletic identity alongside other novel and alternative senses of self. Because of this balanced approach to self development, Aiden is able to connect present and future sense of self:

> I haven't been so devoted to archery that I haven't been able to have a separate life. I suppose it would probably mean taking four years out of my life but it's an Olympic dream and I am willing to give that up. I think I will be ready for life when all that finishes. I've still got a life while this happens in the next 10 years and I will probably have a family and I'll be 29 by then so I will probably be married. If I think about it properly then 10/15 years down the line I'm probably going to have kids so I'm not going to be able to shoot as much as I'd like to, but that is just life and I will have to live with that. Maybe when they are a bit older I could start up again and maybe they will join me. But that is a long way away though.

His acceptance of multiple identities in the present and future is evident in his social world:

> To archers I was happy to be known as the archer that I am, but I did like them to see the side of me that was me, not just the archer and everything that made the athlete that I am...For my friends at school I was happy for them to know me as an archer and at what standards I was, but I never used to go on about it. It just used to be a Monday morning thing after a competition or maybe on the way home from school they would ask, 'Are you going out shooting tonight, or are you going to come out'. But apart from that I was always myself with my friends and an archer with my archery friends. So it was a bit like a split personality because of the way I acted with different people. But as I've got older I suppose I have been able to merge more into just one me because I've become more socially experienced, so that I've been able to ...I can be me with my friends but my archers are also my friends as well.

In the case of Mark it was noted that the specific transition of moving away to a new university occurring in conjunction with less time and training opportunities triggered the re-construction of self and body with less dependency on physical tasks to assert a single, dominant athletic identity. With Aiden there seemed to be less of a specific sport or non-sport transition in his life that triggered an expansion of his athletic identity but rather an intuitive realisation of the limits of his commitment to his sport. In part, he understood that because of the poor status of his sport and limited associated athlete support structures, it was not difficult to conceive of a separate life to that of his archery one:

> For my sport I can make a distinction between my outside life and the sport. Just because I am not probably as dedicated as most other Olympic athletes basically because there is no funding. If I could shoot every day I would shoot everyday, but I am not going to get paid to shoot so I have to come to University so I do not give as much dedication/devotion as gymnasts who might get paid or get living expenses.
> The absence of a defined athlete development pathway with corresponding athlete support

structures has resulted in an evolved identity status almost by default. Aiden's sense of multiple selves gives him the confidence to view life after sport in a positive and non-threatening manner supporting

other research findings that suggest that athletes with an expanded sense of self adapt better to transiting out of sport (Grove *et al.*1997; Webb *et al.*1995; Petitpas, 1978):

> Personally I don't [need to prepare for retirement]. Others might. I know when I go to the National Sports Centre and seeing the gymnasts there and they live there and train there every day. For them I could see that they would have maybe to go through counselling or stuff like that because that is their whole life and they would have to live a totally different life without all that training.

Aiden recognises that the level of investment he is able to give to his sport is different from other athletes because of the nature of his sport. He is able to compartmentalise his sport career and associated identity from other interests and identities that provide a future beyond his athletic present self. Threats to his alternate non-athletic identities, even from sport-related opportunities, are rebutted and the balance between multiple, interconnected identities maintained:

> The coaches at the National level weren't supportive of me going to University. They thought the college was wrong anyway, just doing my A-levels. They said that I should be out just getting a job and getting straight into a pattern. But there is no way I would do that with the potential I had at college and now at University. I wasn't willing to give that up just for shooting.
>
> I don't think I was just following the rest of the flock it was something I had always wanted to do. I always saw myself going to University even before I started shooting. I also like the idea of shooting at University, which was another reason I carried on the way I did.

The extent of his expanded self is evident in his response to the question, 'Do you believe going to University is making you a better athlete'? Aiden replied:

> Probably not a better athlete but hopefully a better person. Just maturing as a person through everything I have to do myself as well as all the training and competitions.

11.3.4 Mary's Story

> Well obviously 1999 I was doing very badly, awful and the uncertainty was wearing...it was up and down and up and down. Life is not supposed to be like that and I just wanted a bit of normality. I had eleven years of going up and down on these emotional roller coasters...you know I wanted...I wanted to have some time with my husband...

Mary was the only interviewed athlete who has retired (twice). Her perspective as a retired athlete allows her to view her career in a holistic manner and offer the evaluation that it has been a career of 'ups and downs'. Where many of the other athletes offered their story while experiencing sport and non-sport transitions, Mary's perspective is shaped by her ability to recall events and ascribe meaning to them; potentially missing the raw emotions of the transition in an attempt to glorify the past

or remembering the good and forgetting the bad. Having said that, her career narrative was rich in sport and non-sport transitions, reflecting a challenging and long career culminating in winning an Olympic medal.

Mary's identity construction throughout her many years of rowing as she said, a roller coaster, specifically battling against 'silly politics' and poor organisational support. Like many of the other athletes, she battled against retaining and nurturing her athletic identity in the face of challenging sport and non-sport transitions. These transitions included: de-selection, poor performances at Olympics and World Championships, coach changes, major injuries, marriage and death. Mary's story, as a narrative map, therefore provides one way of interpreting, experiencing and responding to multiple sport and non-sport transitions. It highlights the point that the athlete's career is a story of interrelated transitions that neither start nor stop in isolation of each other.

> I found Mary's interview exhausting. I spent a whole day with her for the first interview. In between lunches, cups of teas and meeting her father and his partner I tried to make sense of her life in terms of a narrative flow. The vast range of experiences she was telling me left me with a feeling of being on her life's 'roller coaster'. But being in her family house for the interview, seeing the family pictures, watching her relax on her family couch, gave me a sense of intimacy with her story, as if I was being let in to her story through being part of her life for a day...

Although this chapter selectively categories the athletes' stories into those who have demonstrated identity entrapment or identity expansion, Mary's story provides a longitudinal perspective that suggests that identities construct are in a constant state of formation and re-formation. It is evident in Mary's story that a number of selves and narratives can co-exist. Sparkes (2004) uses a number of narratives and body types to characterise the autobiographical account of Lance Armstrong, a cancer survivor and six-time winner of the Tour de France. Sparkes suggests that the complex interplay and layering of each of these within the text highlight the ways in which Armstrong's body is both a site of autobiographical knowledge and also a textual surface on which his life is inscribed. Although Mary did not suffer from a life-threatening illness, her story reflects multiple bodies and selves in response to sport and non-sport transitions.

I think Mary really enjoyed the day talking about her career. Jokingly, she even said that she might get me to write her autobiography. Half of me thinks she wasn't joking. It was amazing how she could retell her story of close to twenty years of being in rowing with such detail and recall of names and statistics. I was exhausted but she seemed to enjoy the visit down memory lane; almost a liberating exercise to remind her of past glory and what makes her who she is today. I certainly felt inadequate in comparison.

takes the reader through her self-proclaimed 'roller coaster ride' of 'ups and downs'; a tale punctuated by transitory victories and defeats in her sporting career and crises in her personal life. Through a quest narrative in which she speaks of her commitment to achieving the highest level in women's rowing, Mary confirms the ascendancy of her athletic identity and disciplined body (Sparkes, 2004). Her disciplined body and sense of athletic self was nurtured through succeeding in the face of adversity and less than ideal training circumstances:

> They [Olympic selectors] decided not to send an eight, they decided that it [the boat team] was too close to a club crew and it wasn't good enough to go to so they didn't send an eight to the Olympics in Seoul. Which disappointed me but there were a few girls in my crew that knew the structure needed to go to trials and Norman [pseudonym] agreed to coach us for the next year and the idea was basically to put an eight together and go to the World Championships. And I was just over the moon about that, which was great. This was you know a dream come true. I could see the pathway of how to get there. Because at that stage there was no pathway for women. There was even the National Coach that we changed every year, which was very, very disorganised. All the funding went into the men's side of the sport. But I didn't know that at the time, I just believed that if I was good enough and trained hard enough that I would get there. And I also believed in my ability because people told me that I was really good. And so we did train really hard that winter with Norman. We did a lot of weights...so we were all very big, musclely girls but weren't fit. And then I got tonsillitis or maybe glandular fever and I was out for about 6 weeks to 2 months and that hit me a bit. But I was confident because that summer I came back really strong and I got the top ergo score in the crew even though I missed the training. Some of that was by accident because I hate the tube and living in London and going to work everyday, I used to cycle.

Mary's account is textured with a naivety of the issues regarding access to elite sport funding for women. The purity of her athletic identity is nurtured in her held assumption that because people said she was good it mattered little that women's rowing had no athlete development pathway. Over time, Mary came to realise the impact a lack of funding and sporting infrastructure on her medal aspirations, but initially her disciplined body was based on the simple principle that hard training would give her the result she wanted.

The process of becoming an elite athlete as described by Mary confirms the presence of a disciplined body-self that seeks its performance to be predictable by following intense training regimes.

The construction and confirmation of her athletic identity through adhering to strict and punishing training regimes gave her the resolve to deal with 'silly politics' regarding selection for boats and adapting to numerous coaching changes and subsequent coaching personalities and philosophies. In a process of entanglement and deepening commitment to her disciplined body-self she took great pleasure in defying coaches and beating other competitors with a disciplined body:

> He [coach] had his favourite crew and they were like big and blonde so I really enjoyed being...because I am quite small for a rower...I actually enjoyed being the small dark one that beats all the big blonde ones who were his favourites. I enjoyed that. I mean we did a lot of competitive training which every weekend we'd get in a small boat and I'd never rowed in a pair and the first few times I like beat all the big girls. It was great. I enjoyed that.

In this manner her disciplined sense of body-self is entangled with the emergence of a parallel sense of a gloried self (Alder and Alder, 1999). However, her disciplined body-self and emerging gloried self became a barrier to dealing with difficult situations in competitions and from her own narrative, was a significant reason for an extremely poor performance at the Olympic Games in Atlanta despite breaking a world record to qualify for the Games:

> I really struggled to row in the eight. I suppose in a way I was quite arrogant. I didn't feel that a lot of the other girls trained as hard as I did or got as high an ergo score as I did...you know I struggled, I felt they needed to aspire to be as good as I was and perhaps I didn't nurture them quite as I should.

Like many of the other athletes, the strong athletic identity and disciplined body helped Mary through sport and non-sport transitions which in turn, cultivated the dominant athletic identity at the expense of other identities. However, a behavioural manifestation of the meaning she attached to her sense of athletic body and self was extreme nervousness at major competitions:

> ...the big test Regatta before the World Championships is Lucerne and we all got selected for Lucerne and I was put in the four. So they had the lightweight women's four and us and then there was the women's pair with some of the better girls in it. Our women's four totally bombed and I know that I was nervous before the race, I was shit scared, really, really scared and just sick with nerves and I think the coach realised that I had a problem with nerves at this stage.

Mary explains her reasons for getting nervous:

> ...we addressed it probably a year later but you know...because it matters so much...and a lot of high performers because it matters so much to them they really, really get nervous to the point of feeling sick and dreaming constantly about the race...and being with totally obsessed with the opposition.

Mary's narrative shifts to her objectively analysing her reasons for nervousness as something elite performers suffer from. Her attempts to normalise her nervous disposition in competitions reflects a defensive measure to protect her disciplined body-self and rationalise her gloried self.

The disappointment of the Atlanta Games was a 'down' in Mary's sport career. In telling her story Mary's narrative switched from a quest narrative in which she described the 'highs' of her career and the transformation such achievements have had in her career to a restitution narrative where she described the process of restoring her disciplined body-self through adaptation and learning from her past. Sparkes (2004) uses the term restitution narrative in reference to Lance Armstrong's recovery from cancer and return to professional cycling to win the Tour de France six times. Although this type of narrative was used by Sparkes for an autobiographical account of a return from illness, I have used it here to denote Mary's narrative that describes her return to the medal rostrum from poor performances and de-selection. The use of a restitution narrative was also evident with many of the other athletes especially those suffering from a career-threatening injury. Part of the restitution narrative was to maintain the belief that a return to competition was inevitable and predictable. This corroborates Charmaz (1995) point that an injured athlete's use of the restitution narrative reflects the belief that recovery or return to disciplined body-self is inevitable and part of the course in being an elite athlete. Mary's restitution narrative reflected an angry and disappointed athlete committed to learning from her mistakes and reuniting with her disciplined body-self:

> Right, if you row, basically you need all eight people functioning together. Everyone needs to know what their responsibilities are...and need to be recognised for the jobs that they do well as well as the jobs that they do badly. People have to understand that when you are functioning in a big group like that, people do need their independence and they should be allowed to have that. The important thing is to focus on the goal...not on the short term problems but to focus on what the hell are we really here for so some people can put things aside. I just want to get better and leave all the other crap behind. As far as I am concerned the Atlanta Games were finished.

Part of Mary's restitution narrative is acknowledging the physical and tactical changes that must be routinized in order to return to a disciplined body-self. One of the issues for Mary is that she had to achieve her disciplined body-self within a team of rowers. Therefore the physical and technical changes must be accomplished within the dynamics of a team which are governed by cultural norms:

> I don't think we as a group...you know an eight needs to be eight people firing together on all cylinders when you will go eight times faster than one person. If you've got one or two not pulling their weight in the boat then eight minus two is six but if they're going backwards its actually only four times as fast, so do you see what I mean- you need all eight people, plus the cox nine, plus you need two spares because there is always someone injured or ill, so you are really functioning as a group of eleven, twelve with the coach, and you know there are a lot of group dynamics that need to work in the environment and I must admit that girls are very different to boys and there are a lot more issues. Boys will have a good ol' punch up and go for a beer afterwards; girls carry it around on their backs for years afterwards and there was a lot of things that didn't work terribly well in that boat [Atlanta Games] and I can put my hand on my heart and say I did not contribute very well to that boat and I had a lot to learn about being a member of a team. And I would say over the next few years I did learn and I learnt from how difficult I can be as well.

Mary's restitution narrative reclaims control of a threatening situation and promises a return to a controlled and predictable performance through an awareness of intra-team issues and clarification of responsibilities. Mary's ability to learn from the crisis of the Atlanta Olympic Games led to her restitution story giving way to a return to a disciplined body-self narrative as well as glimpses of a new dominating body-self narrative. Sparkes (2004) suggests that the dominating body-self is similar to the disciplined body-self in that it dissociates from itself to absorb pain and endure excessive training regimes. Unlike the disciplined body, the dominating body is set against others rather than for others and seeks to dominate others. This kind of body is aware of its own contingency and is threatened by new situations and the unknown. In Mary's story of 'ups and downs' she developed a version of Sparkes' dominating body-self in which she relied on her own sense of self to get through the difficult times and shielded herself against other identities or multiple selves or bodies to navigate the unknown and deal with adversity. When asked about dealing with the lack of quality coaches and little support, her response reflects a sense of a dominant self:

> You know people talk about having the natural abilities but one of the other things that is important is being totally driven and being pretty self-sufficient and some of the people who raced to the top only got there because they had those skills not because they had the natural ability. Obviously I did have some natural ability but a lot of it was because I was able to do things for myself. I didn't have somebody holding my hand to get there.
>
> ...I just remember... because there is always politics and some of the girls who had been around before were thinking that Bill [pseudonym] wasn't doing the right job and we weren't being given enough support and I just remember thinking, 'Oh let's just shut up and get on with it'. And I remember saying to other athletes who were internationals and telling them to 'Shut up and get on with it' and saying, 'I don't care who coaches us but it is important that we get the best out of them'.

For Mary the relationship between the disciplined and dominating body-self was symbiotic and provide a formidable defence against subsequent crises in performances and her personal life. Yet 'surviving' each transition denied the evolvement of alternate bodies, selves and narratives to cope with multiple, sport and non-sport transitions. Maintaining and defending a single, dominant body-self unity was as much a physical challenge for Mary as it was a mental challenge:

> 98 we won the Worlds then 99 I must admit that I struggled being the World Champion. Everybody wants to beat you don't they. It was like having won that bronze medal. Everyone just wants to knock you down and it's...its one thing harder than winning and that is to keep on winning and it's awful and...I had back injuries and I just didn't feel motivated to train. Joan [pseudonym] and I sort of fell out...I felt that her heart wasn't in it and that she had some personal problems that I didn't think she was coping particularly well with or making the right decisions...The girls that got the silver [at the World Championship] were really pissed off that we'd got the gold and they really had it in for us. They were quite unpleasant and demanded more and more time of the coach, he spent less and less time with us and...it was a horrible year and we ended up coming seventh at the Worlds – very disappointing. Fell out with Joan a bit. Felt that Martin [pseudonym] our coach wasn't in proper control of the situation, but also I don't think that I handled it very well. I don't think I trained as hard for a start...I didn't feel as motivated, felt that I was always on the back foot rather than you know...attacking, just felt I was in defensive situation which I shouldn't have been and I think we should have been more candid with each other and I don't think we were.

It was during this time that Mary determined that the she could not sustain the level of investment to maintain the disciplined and dominating body-self. Like Henna, she weighed the costs versus the benefits of remaining in sport and determined that the level of investment required managing multiple, sport and non-sport transitions was too much. Unlike Henna, Mary did not invoke an alternative identity but rather 'just gave up':

> I needed a break I was so disappointed with my performance and just thought I'm not going to get in a boat. I'm not going to have anything to do with any rowers.
>
> ...been doing this for what seven years, haven't done it [Olympic medal], never going to do it, time to get on.

The decision to disengage from rowing in such a dramatic fashion without any contact with rowers demonstrates the 'all or nothing' investment in her athletic identity. The disciplined and dominating body-self occupied the sole position at the top of her identities hierarchy which only added to the severity of response towards those bodies and selves that had not shielded her from difficult transitions. As much as her athletic ability and identity accounted for her 'ups' in athletic performance and life in

general, it was equally blamed when things went bad and therefore their removal instant. However, removing the disciplined and dominating body-self was more difficult than Mary expected and in many ways was an ill-thought reaction to a troubled period in her career and life. Once she realised that her old coach Martin was returning to coach the women's rowing team, the level of investment was re-assessed as something that she could afford to give 'one last shot'.

Mary's return to rowing from a brief retirement just prior to the Sydney Olympic Games also signalled a change in her approach to rowing and her self. The discipline and dominating body-self gave way to a restitution narrative characterised by a communicative body. Sparkes (2004) identifies a communicative body as one of the four main body types (the others being mirroring, disciplined and dominating) and made the connection of this body type with a restitution narrative in analysing Lance Armstrong's story of his return to cycling from being ill with cancer. The key characteristic of the communicative body is the process of creating the self through the interaction with others. The communicative body is producing, and this is expressed in terms of relating to others in a dyadic relationship. In returning to rowing, Mary accepted the challenge of rowing the quad boat, something she rarely had done before. However, her decision was only made once she had spoken to other rowers:

> Went to talk to three people that I had rowed with in the past and who'd retired and I said, 'What do you think I should do? And all of them said, 'No, you can't stop now, you're so close and you've got the best chance you've ever, ever had'. And I said, 'Yeah but I'm going to be in the quad and we've never done anything in the quad' and they said, 'Well that's never stopped you before'. And then I went to to meet...it was Martin's second coach and I talked to her about some of the issues...and I discussed about how these personality problems could be solved and what we could do to facilitate it.

Her communicative body-self involved taking the lead in the team to discuss potential issues and share with them her experience from previous Olympics:

> The first time we got together in the quad I sat down with them and I said that I believe we can win a bronze medal at the Olympics. Don't think we will win the gold medal because the Germans are...we just have enough time and the Russians are up there too and I don't think we'll get silver or the gold but I think we can win a bronze medal and that needs to be our goal. And basically I took on the mantle of leader, not the person with the vision but the experience in the boat, and we discussed ...I mean from my lessons that I learnt from Atlanta, that everyone in the boat whether it was the weakest person in the boat or the strongest person in the boat had a role and it was important that they did their role to the very, very best. And so that would keep us focused away from personal differences, and focusing on the actual making the boat go fast. And it did work. We had a lot of problems but it did work very well. Really, it doesn't matter who is in the boat, we've just got to keep the boat going. We have just got to keep the miles up.

Mary's focus on the boat and the interpersonal dynamics of working as a team is a shift from previous positions of resenting other team members for not being as committed or as technically capable as she was. She adopted a leading role in sharing information and past experiences, an evolvement of her dominating body-self to a more communicative body-self.

Mary's change in athletic identity building up to the 2000 Olympic Games was influenced by the realisation that this was to be her last chance at winning an Olympic medal. In telling her story, Mary explains how the plan to retire after the Olympics crystallized her motivation and approach to the Games:

> I mean going back to the decision to actually row and go for it in the first place when I left university and you know when I basically took a side step from my career to row and then in 1997 when I retired and again in 2000...I never wanted to look back on my career and say I was a failure. I wanted to make sure I had given it every opportunity. I didn't want to be one of those sad people that sits in their armchair looking at their telly going if I'd only done this, I could have won that. I mean maybe I could say that if only we'd aim for the gold we might have got the gold, but I knew after 1999 that 2000 was my last year. I had made the decision that I was retiring whatever. I wanted to have a family and if I carried on I couldn't and you know to go out at the top was fantastic. I don't think I would have made the transition quite as easily if we hadn't won a medal at the Olympics.

Mary's narrative of a communicative body-self captures the rich experiences of past transitions such as the decision to enter rowing full-time and brief retirements. She connects past transitions with the present quest and thinks about the future life after sport. The communicative body-self released her ability to wish for and accept an alternative identity (ie. mother) and seek closure on her athletic identity through giving herself every opportunity to achieve a medal. Having said that, achieving a medal brought ultimate closure to her sport career and ensured the legacy of her athletic identity, her gloried self, beyond her competitive days of rowing. For Mary, her decision to retire signalled an 'on-time' transition (Baillie and Danish, 1992) that she controlled and allowed her to plan for alternative social identities. Further, achieving a medal validated her years of investment and affirmed her athletic selves and bodies.

11.4 Summary

This chapter has presented the athletes' stories as representative of either identity engulfment or evolvement. Their narratives suggest that an athlete's identity affects the transition adaptation process. Conversely, athletic identity is shaped by the athlete's handling of the transition situation, resulting in an entrapped athletic identity or expanded identity.

The process of athletic identity entrapment was highlighted through the specific transition experience of career-ending injuries. The narrative of several of the athletes highlighted the fragmented sense of body-self felt during an injury transition. Defensive behaviours and actions are captured in a restitution narrative in which the athlete expresses their strategy and intent to return to their former physical self. During this period of restitution, the athletes denied contemplating life after sport or alternative identities since it posed a direct challenge to their gloried self which was derived from states of primary immediacy. In one story, a delay in the expected return to sport resulted in further identity dilemmas. Although, severe injury was a common story plot to highlight athletic identity entrapment, some athletes demonstrated multiples selves and bodies in a restitutive narrative involving burnout and de-selection.

The athlete stories selected to illustrate identity expansion shared similar characteristics and patterns to the stories of the athletes experiencing identity entrapment. The major difference identified is the breaking of the entrapment process in which the athlete re-negotiates their body-self unity at the time of a transition. In one case, an athlete maintained an expanded sense of self because of the limitation of support from his sport and the realisation that he could not rely on a single, dominant athletic identity to become the best in his sport. The lack of support and sport infrastructure (ie. equipment, coaches) necessitated a balanced approach to athletic goals. Identity expansion was characterised by a communicative body-self in which the athlete was open to a more dyadic relationship with team mates and coaches. Alternative social identities were cultivated and valued, although for some athletes, the transition to multiple identities with equal status was not always easily accomplished because of the held perceptions of the athlete's former athletic identity.

The role of the coach in the identity formation process was a dominant theme in each of the athlete's stories. An issue for all athletes was the presence of a mentor coach in their storied lives as the person they turned to during transitional moments in their careers and personal lives. These mentor coaches played a significant role in nurturing the athlete through transitions even when, as in the case of a few of the athletes, they were no longer their coaches. In some cases, the coach imposed strict regimes on the athlete as part of a culture of 'survival of the fittest' and a weeding out of the weakest. This approach served to deepen the sense of athletic identity for those who 'survived' while causing further identity dilemmas for those who did not. In other stories, athletes chose not to share their transitions, such as injuries, with their coaches fearing a change in their athletic status with the coach. The important role of the coach in supporting the athlete during transition situations highlights the need for coaches to consider transitions as opportunities for growth and identity expansion, developing the athlete as a person as well as a performer.

Chapter 12

Conclusion

12.1 Introduction

I look back on my career as an athlete and all the careers I have had since then and I realize that I am the sum of the parts in my life. I can see with increasing clarity the effects of those definable moments in my athletic career on my present life and to some extent the future. In my mid-30s I resurrected my hockey career on a part-time professional basis in Great Britain, an opportunity made that much easier because of the lower standard of competition. The experience was physically painful as well as emotionally enlightening as I was able to re-live the reasons why I did not play professionally at the highest level in Canada. The process was augmented by the fact that I was now a father and husband and my identity had evolved to a point in which I was able to dig up my athletic identity from a buried past and properly manage my role exit from hockey, once and for all! That process has led to the personal need to not only understand my personal transitions within and out of sport but to also research and hear the stories of other athletes. I feel privileged to have heard and been part of their story and hope that my own story alongside theirs will bring a greater sense of awareness of the lives of elite athletes!

This research focused on the question: what do we mean by career transitions in sport from a long-term development perspective? In response to the research question, this chapter presents a system-based approach adapted from Stambulova's (1998) concept of sport career and modified to reflect a long-term development perspective of career transitions in sport. This approach presents an alternative perspective of career transitions in sport, one that accepts the dynamic interplay of a number of factors affecting the athlete's perception of the transition experience and subsequent adaptation. The system-based approach provides the flexibility to analyze career transitions in sport from the athlete's perspective rather than through a rigid model based on the generalisations of a number of athletic experiences. It accepts that an athlete attaches meaning to each transition experience which may differ from another athlete depending on their past and present transition experiences and transitions planned for the future.

As part of the system-based approach, this chapter identifies and discusses five factors affecting career transitions in sport: 1) athlete-coach relationship, 2) family support, 3) transition duration, timing and multiplicity, 4) skill transfer and transition familiarity, and 5) athlete burnout. Although more factors were identified from the data analysis, these five factors significantly impacted the athletes' perception of transition experiences and were primary drivers of the other factors identified in the

transition process. These factors are presented within the context of affecting the athletes' identities and subsequent adaptation response of athletic identity entrapment and/or identity evolvement. Before addressing the system-based representation of career transition in sport, the first part of this chapter discusses the use of a biographical methodology to study the social phenomenon of career transition in sport. Finally, this chapter also considers the limitations of this research and implications of the research findings for future studies in the area of career transitions in sport.

12.2 Biographical Methodology and Career Transitions in Sport

The biographical method was chosen as a means to capture the diversity of causal and developmental factors in the career transition process and the potential interrelatedness between these factors to affect performance adaptation within sport and out of sport. As a methodological approach, it accepts the messiness of drawing conclusions from diverse storied experiences that are continually being told and re-told in changing environments. Further, the biographical approach afforded the collection of rich data that to gain insights into the complex, structured and non-structured, predictable and non-predictable transition experiences of elite athletes that cannot be measured or captured through quantitative, relational paradigms that seek to capture the phenomenon with a 'one size fits all' model.

Biographical research also acknowledges and is able to account accounts for the fact that meanings attached to the experiences will also vary over time as the athlete re-works his or her perception of the transition event. This research focused on career transitions from a long-term development perspective, addressing the over-emphasis on the career transition of career retirement in sport career and transition research. The stories of career retirement are powerful accounts captured in career sport transition models but fail to adequately represent other transitions in the athletes' lives. Setting the research question was an important first step in choosing the methodology that would best answer the research question. A biographical methodology provided an appropriate research tool to give voice to the athlete's life story and provide the opportunity to present their stories with the social context in which they exist.

12.3 A Long-term Athlete Development Perspective of Career Transitions in Sport

Because of the emergence of long-term athlete development models, specifically the model by Bayli (2004), it is necessary to view transitions as formal periods between planned stages of development as well as unpredictable events such as injury and de-selection that may occur during a stage of development. The recognition of an athlete development pathway suggests that stages are interrelated and each stage is dependent on the stages that precedes and follows it. Therefore, career transitions such as retirement is not an isolated event, but involves an array of sport and non-sport transitions that may occur in temporal isolation yet may be linked through athlete perception of similar past and present transitions.

A long-term development perspective of career transitions in sport not only maps onto the existence of long-term athlete development models that underpin sport development, but also provides the contextual reality regarding the absence of structured sport as a cause of transition in sport. In this research, it was evident that sport-related transitions resulting from the absence of sport structures inhibited the athletes' development in terms of transiting from one stage of development to another as part of a planned process. As much as a planned athlete pathway may illicit transition experiences for athletes, the absence of a long-term athlete development pathway proved to impose undue hardship on the athlete that threatened their existence in the sport. Bayli (2004) suggests that athletes being forced to experience stages of development not at the appropriate physical, cognitive and maturation age may lead to inappropriate training, competitions, and recovery strategies. Career transition is an important marker in the athlete's career that may denote readiness to move to the next stage. Conversely, unsuccessful adaptation to specific transition events may also indicate a lack of readiness to transit to the next stage of development. The experiences of the athletes in this research suggest that career transition provides a form of monitoring and evaluation athlete readiness for specific stage development as well as an opportunity to teach specific skills that may lead to eventual movement to the next stage.

12.4 A System-based Approach to Career Transitions in Sport

The research literature regarding career transitions in sport has struggled to provide a model to capture the dynamic and complex process of career transitions in sport. The pre-occupation with career retirement has generated a number of specific models adopted from career theory, but has failed to capture career transition from a life development perspective. The notion of careership (in which a career is non-linear and interspersed with predictable and non-predictable turning points) suggests that a model does not provide the flexibility to account for the array of transitions and factors in an athlete's life, nor the potential relationships that may exist between transitions and factors affecting the athlete's perception and subsequent adaptation of the event.

The purpose of this research, at first, was not to intentionally present an alternative 'model' of career transitions in sport. Having said that, this research was predicated on my view that career transition was too narrowly defined through career retirement models and therefore required an alternative perspective that captures other transitions experienced by elite athletes. Developing a 'model' of career transitions perhaps was inevitable given the research question, but it was a secondary consideration to the understanding of the interplay of factors and meanings attached to career transition experiences of elite athletes. In this research, Stambulova's system-based approach (Figure 9 see overleaf) to sport career was adapted to represent career transition in sport from a life development perspective. I chose to use this 'model' because it best represented the sport career over time and the changing nature of factors affecting the career transition process. It provided a flexible framework that accommodated the Schlossberg's environmental and individual factors that were used to categorize questions and present the analysis of the raw data. As such, the system-based approach to career transitions in sport is as much a flexible tool to capture the outcome of data analysis as it is as a new framework to further represent and analyse career transitions in sport.

Figure 9 **Stambulova's (1998) System-based Approach to Sport Career**

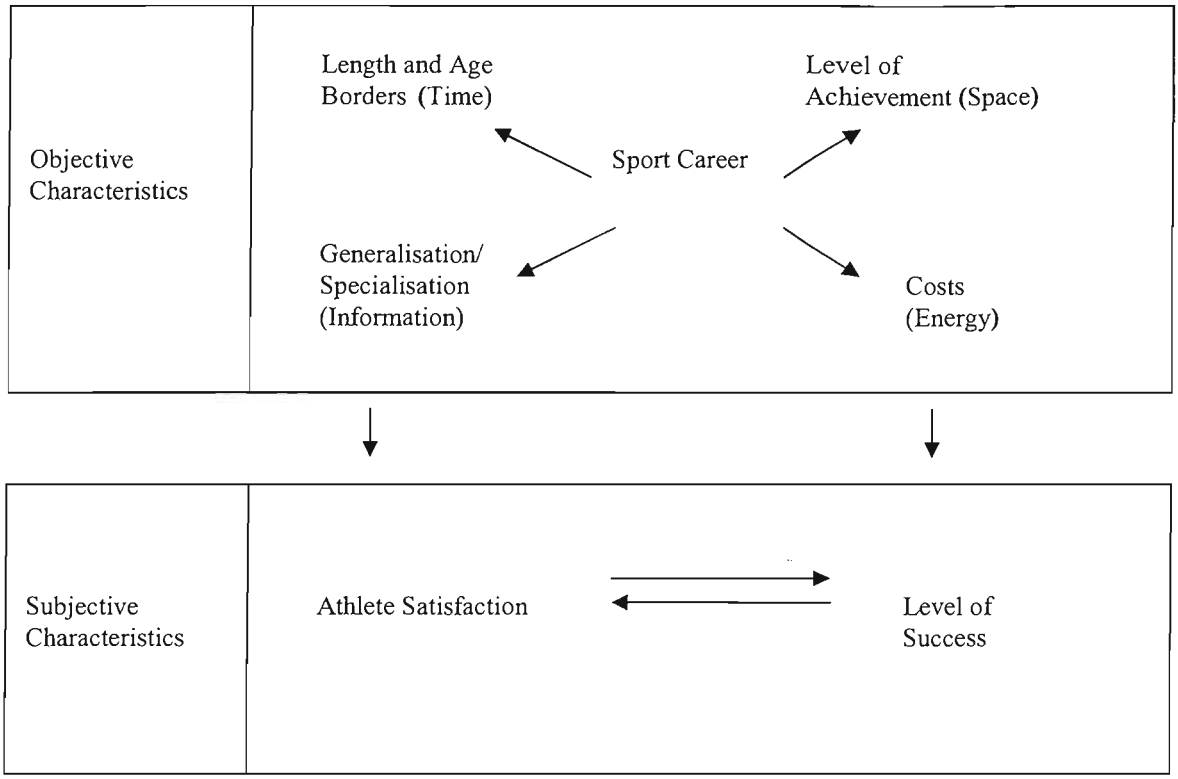


Figure 10 **A System-based Approach to Career Transitions in Sport**

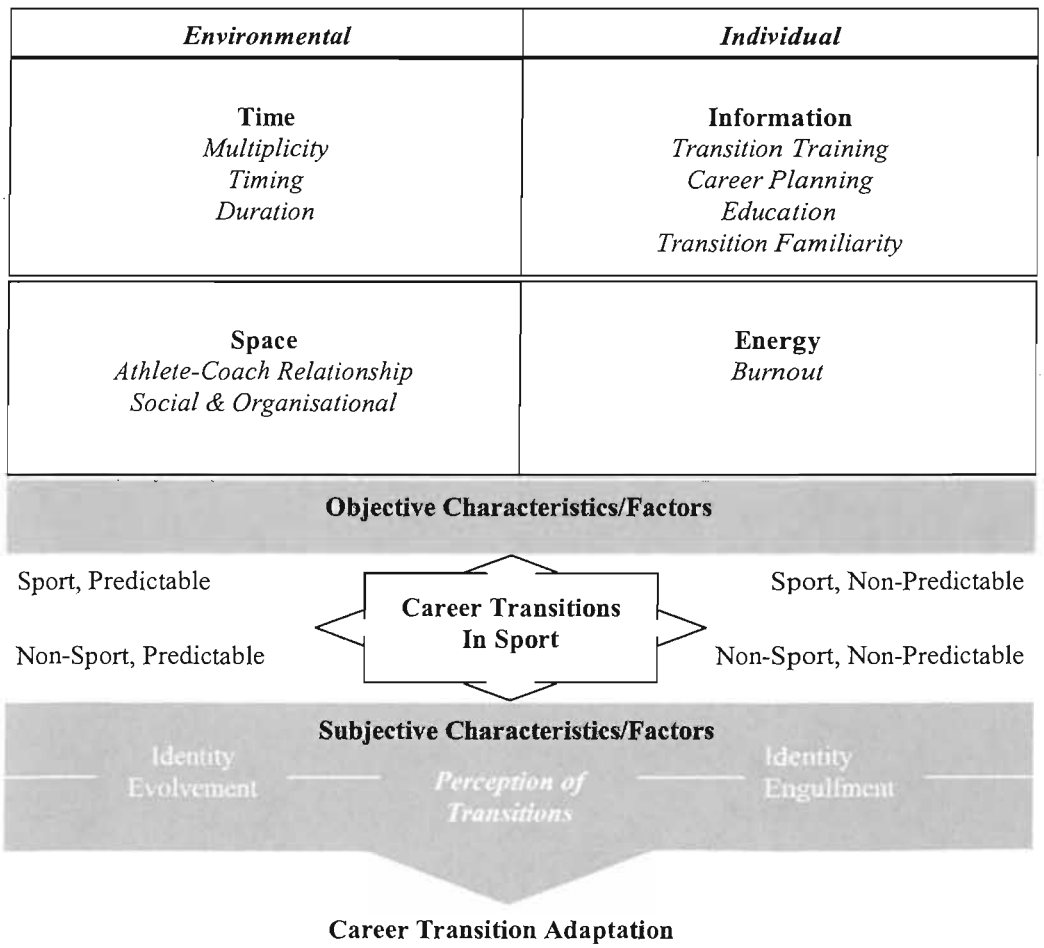


Figure 10 represents the adaptation of Stambulova's system-based approach to sport career to career transition in sport. Environmental and individual factors were aligned with Stambulova's Objective Characteristics. The objective characteristic of 'time' was related to the environmental characteristics involving timing, multiplicity and duration of the transition experience. 'Space' was conceptually linked to social conditions and relationships affecting the transition experience. The 'space' concept was interpreted as having three aspects: a) athlete-coach relationship, b) social support and c) organisational support. 'Information' was related to the individual factors of transferability of skills between transition experiences and the athlete's awareness and use of career planning for long-term athlete development. Energy was linked with the cost of the transition experience in terms of social and financial loss and benefits. Stambulova's (1994) subjective characteristics of athlete satisfaction and perception of success were related to the transition concepts of: 1) identity evolvement, and 2) identity engulfment.

Stambulova's (1998) system-based approach to a sport career also involved an analytic description model which focused on stages of development. Although her stage-related description of a sport career lacks the detail and sophistication of the model offered by Bayli (2004) who identified seven stages of development in the athlete's career, it highlighted the prevalence of transitional phases associated with defined difficulties, the overcoming of which has great importance. Stambulova referred to transitions between stages or resulting from performance structures or models as 'systems crises'. Stambulova (1994) stressed that an athlete must successfully overcome transitions within the sport career in order to achieve enhanced performance in subsequent stages of development. One of the weaknesses of Stambulova's analytic description model is that it identifies transition between stages but fails to identify transition within stages and transitions in other spheres of life. In this research, four categories or types of transitions emerged from the data: sport, predictable transition; sport, non-predictable; non-sport, predictable; non-sport, non-predictable. The athletes' experiences suggests that transition is evident between stages of athlete development often leading to mal-adaptation but also that transition is evident within stages of development and may be of a sport and non-sport nature. The

identification of non-sport transitions supports a holistic approach to coaching the athlete and teaching life skills in the sporting context (Goudas *et al.* 2005).

The adaptation of Stambulova's system-based approach (synthetic and analytic description models) to sport career to represent career transition in sport presents an alternative approach to this social phenomenon that embraces a long-term perspective of athlete development. It allows for an evolving process in which the athlete's perception of factors affecting the adaptation process to career transitions continually changes in response to new and existing factors that take on different meanings and levels of importance depending on the social environment in which they exist.

12.5 Factors Affecting Career Transitions in Sport

12.5.1 Athlete-Coach Relationship

The athlete-coach relationship was identified as the most significant factor affecting the athletes' perception of transition events and shaping their response to crises. Poor athlete-coach relationships were found to exist when the athlete's perception of coaching behaviour did not match their expectation of their coaches in terms of performance behaviour and mentoring support. The athlete-coaching relationship was found to be most strained in the high performance environment in which the coach placed undue performance expectations without supporting the athlete in terms of developing personal excellence. In this manner, some coaches contributed the development of the athletic and gloried self and engendered the notion of sacrificing other life domains in order to pursue excellence in sport.

This study found that the mentor coach had a significant effect on athletes' handling of transitions throughout their athletic career even after the coach stopped directly coaching the athlete. The mentor coach was highly valued by the athlete and often overshadowed the work of the professional, technically superior coach through continual support of the elite athlete during transitional situations. In such instances, the transition from one coaching style to another was magnified during times of crisis in which the athlete looked to past mentor-coaches for guidance in support. This supports the notion that transition situations may be dealt with more successfully by the coach and the athlete working together to implement athlete-centred strategies that maximise personal self-confidence and

performance outcomes. Conversely, negative coach-athlete compatibility and poor perception by the athlete of the coach's behavioural response towards transitional crises may precipitate a further deterioration of a working relationship which may affect performance outcomes as well a heightened state of anxiety resulting from an unresolved career transition episode.

12.5.2 Family Support

The importance of the athlete-coach relationship in the adaptation process is linked to the athlete-family support structures. In this study, it was found that the role of the parents' support changes as the athlete moved from 'beginner' to 'advanced' stages of athletic participation and excellence. A key concern and potential area for further research is the role of parental support during the sport-related, non-predictable transition of injury. The lack of parental support during serious injury may become a stressful situation for the athlete and parent(s) and potentially signal a change or transition in the athlete-parent relationship. Parents may obstruct effective management of injuries as a result of exerting their parental 'control' in a situation that threatens their child. Parents who have always had indirect involvement in the athletic setting naturally seek to protect their child, often calling for their son or daughter to quit their sport at the time of a serious injury. However, the athlete perceives such a request as unreasonable and indicative of a parent who does not understand their athletic identity. In this situation, the athlete perceived family as a negative influence in the handling of serious injuries.

12.5.3 Transition Duration, Timing and Multiplicity

The presence of the environmental characteristics of duration, timing and multiplicity identified in the career transition process raises questions regarding the balance between sport and life transitions. Achieving success in a sport career is not solely contingent on the intention to win an Olympic medal or become a world champion. Nor is it merely the product of a natural ability or having specific types of parents, belonging to the right sex or having a certain nationality. Rather, it is a complex process of balancing internal and external demands in a number of life and career-related spheres. The ability to juggle a number of transitions concurrently, especially when they occur during 'off-time' periods and extend over a period of time may significantly affect the athlete's perception of their sport career and adaptation to existing transitions and future decisions regarding transitions such as retirement from sport

In this research, the athletes did not actively engage in career planning nor indicated that their university studies were part of a planning for life after sport. Their education and sport performance were treated as two separate entities with often conflicting impact on perception of self and maintaining a positive sport-life balance. What little career planning was undertaken or implemented was directed at maintaining their strong sense of athletic self and portraying their athletic involvement to family, friends and coaches rather than graduating to an active life stage in which they engage in alternative careers that built on their athletic experiences and skills.

This process of 'hanging on' to their sport through secondary roles was most evident in the case of career-ending injuries in which retirement from sport was a potential outcome. As time passed and the injury prolonged, the athlete's sense of urgency regarding career planning became more important and directed at plotting a plan that eased the pain of losing their athletic self identity. From the perspective of anticipatory socialisation, the process of career planning at the time of an injury was reactive and a buffer against the psychological realisation that their career may come to an end sooner than expected. In this manner, career planning did not reduce the tension associated with the injury transition but rather contributed to a maladaptive process to an untimely and ill-planned role exit.

Career planning can provide the athlete with a broad-based perspective of life and sport which may serve to ease the transition of retirement, de-selection or injury. However, career planning needs to be accepted by sport organisations and coaches as opportunities for a balanced approach to life and sport rather than a signal of the athlete not being determined to achieve the highest performance goals.

12.5.4 Skill Transfer and Transition Familiarity

The athlete's ability to adapt to transitional situations as well as engage in the career planning process may be affected by their willingness and ability to identify similarities between transition experiences and transfer skills and knowledge from one transition to another. This process of transferring skill and recognising similarities between transition experiences was found to be a complex process often involving blocking of transfer of skill and knowledge because the transition experiences were perceived as a threat to their athletic identity. Thus, intervention programmes from coaches and sport organisations may not necessarily affect the athlete's adaptation to transitional events if the athlete

is not prepared to recognise the intra-similarity of one transition to another at a cognitive, behavioural and psychological level. In this manner, transition events such as injury, de-selection and retirement become very personal events to the athlete in which the altering of one's perception of self as a result of the experience may only occur once the athlete accepts the event as a period of change. From an outsider's perspective, the event may be a significant event in the athlete's development, positive or negative; however, the athlete resists recognising the impact of the transitional event until it can be related to their sense of athletic self. This different perception of transition existence can be a source of tension between the athlete and significant others such as coaches, peers and parents.

The ability of an athlete to recognise transitional experiences and potentially relate them to previous experiences requires a holistic approach to long-term athlete development. The coach can play a specific role in placing the sport-related transition within the context of the athlete's life and therefore affirming the inter-dependability between sport and non-sport spheres of life. The coach can utilise predictable and non-predictable transitions as moments of learning to develop the athlete's sense of self. In doing so, the coach demonstrates to the athlete that skills, attitudes, and knowledge gained from a sporting environment can extend beyond the sport setting into other areas of life. In terms of retiring from sport at an elite level, it may become less of a stressful event if the athlete can relate it to past transition experiences and transfer skills and knowledge gained from it. This approach as a life development intervention has also been advocated by Lavalle (2005) and Papacharisis *et al.* (2005).

12.5.5 Athlete Burnout

Transferring skills and knowledge to a transition from a previous, similar transition may also lessen the perceived 'cost' of the transition which, in turn affects the athlete's choice of coping strategies. The cost associated with a transition is determined by an analytical process in which the athlete weighs up the pros and cons of a traumatic event with the potential of leading to a athlete burnout. Burnout was described as the process in which the social cost associated with the transition outweighed the benefits derived from the sport leading to a changed perception of athletic self within the athlete's social context.

This research found that a significant factor affecting the cost/benefits analysis is the athlete's ability to identify similar experiences in the past that may affect the perceived cost of the situation in terms of financial and social costs. Where the transference of skills and knowledge from a previous transition to a current situation is strong, the perceived cost of the situation may be low and the adaptation minimal. Conversely, the inability of an athlete to draw upon a range of transitional experiences and transfer skills and knowledge to a current, similar situation may lead to an altered perception of the situation in which the costs are perceived to be high and adaptive behaviours more pronounced. In this situation, the event becomes more transitional in which the athlete's sense of self is significantly altered and adaptive behaviours and attitudes to the event more pronounced.

Athletes determine the value of sport and question whether sport success is worth the costs and sacrifices in terms of missing out on the opportunities their peers are experiencing. Increased investment in the sport as a result of a transition such as injury and de-selection may lead to the athlete questioning the nature of their involvement in sport. In some cases, such questioning may lead to retiring from sport because there is too high a perceived social and identity cost and not a middle ground for continual involvement. In other situations, the athlete attempts to mediate their involvement in sport through re-priortorising their values and expectations associated with elite sport. However, re-priotorizing achievements in sports may be difficult for athletes with high achievement orientation because of an athletic self rooted in a single-minded pursuit of performance excellence. Consequently, the transition becomes less of an opportunity for growth and change and more of a barrier to the developing of the self.

12.6 Issues of Identity

The athlete's identity was identified as the key determinant of athlete adaptation to transitions and directly related to the influence of environmental and individual factors. From a subjective, long-term development perspective, the athlete's identity either evolved in the adaptation processes or became further engulfed in a single, dominant sense of self that overshadowed and impeded the emergence of alternative senses of self. As such, the athlete's identity is in a constant state of affirmation or re-

formation depending on the impact of a number of environmental and individual factors affecting the sport and/or non-sport transitions.

12.6.1 Identity Engulfment and Injuries

The work of Adler and Adler (1989) describes the process of identity engulfment as when a 'specific identity emerges and ascends to a position of psychological centrality in a person's constellation of identities' (p.303). Although Alder and Alder (1989) did not suggest a point in time when this process begins, this study found that some athletes developed a sense of primary identity from the ability to perform required high-level tasks associated with the athletic self. A number of athletes lost the ability to engage in these physical tasks as a result of injury and de-selection which triggered a fragmentation of the body-self relationship. In the case of Doug, Ella, and Chloe their sense of self became defined in opposition to the body they inhabited during the injury. The athletes fought to restore the physical self and the same sense of self to the state it was before the injury. They assumed that full recovery of their self would be the sequel to the injury. This only added to the potential for further identity dilemmas since it precludes the development of alternative sense of selves and the accepting of a changed body. In relation to Adler and Adler's (1989) view of identity engulfment, the three athletes' athletic identities became more defined as they battled against the emergence of an 'injured athlete' identity. The process of specific identities emerging, ascending and remaining in a position of 'psychological centrality' was characterised by tension as the athletes attempted to preserve their hierarchy of identities.

Of interest, with regard to long-term exposure to an injury, non-recovery deepened the fragmentation of self and body and led to further dependency and preoccupation with holding on to an athletic identity. Charmaz (1994) emphasised that failed attempts to recapture the past self can lead to invalidism and despondency as the valued social and personal identities remain in the irretrievable past. Not surprisingly, the injured or de-selected athletes strongly rebutted the notion of retirement since their perception of the future is a direct continuation of the present gloried self. As the gloried self was perpetuated through athletic tasks and achievements the athletes demonstrated a diminishing awareness of their former selves and relegated non-athletic activities and transitions such as retirement to a lesser

status. In an attempt to retain the gloried self the athlete engaged in tasks such as coaching or denied the existence or seriousness of an injury in order to maintain the disciplined body and self at the apex of their hierarchy of identities.

The direct nature of an injury in terms of attacking both the mind and physical self creates a very distressing transition for athletes. The injured athletes in this study chose to work through the transition in relative isolation, wishing to have the injury acknowledged by their coach, family, team mates and fellow competitors yet refusing to consult their coach regarding the injury management because of a perceived admission of failure and threat to maintaining their cultivated reputation and relationship with coaches and team mates.

The tension between managing the injury in isolation and sharing its management with coaches, team mates and parents demands a significant amount of time and emotional investment to determine appropriate adaptive behaviours to the transitional situation. Identity work should be an intervention strategy during athlete injury transition in order to maintain the athlete's connection with the sport and continue their relationship with team mates and coaches. Coaches are arguably best placed to facilitate identity work during injuries, supporting the athlete's development of the self through sport-related tasks and functions which maintain the link between past, present and future identities.

12.6.2 Identity Evolvement: The 'Hardship Factor'

An emerging theme from the athletes' narratives is the power of transition events to trigger growth and development. Douglas and Carless (2006) suggest that hardship provides a performance benefit to elite athletes as they seek solutions to crises and use their success in overcoming the transition as a motivational tool in gaining the 'competitive edge' over their rivals. The fact that the injured athletes solved the situation on their own provides a sense of achievement and strengthening of athletic identity that justifies their belief that they have earned the right to achieve victory over their competitors. In a negative application of hardship survival, the sense of achievement for the athletes in this study was found to be a source of engulfment since it did not release the potential for growth outside of sport, but rather a deepening of psychological dependency on existing athletic identities. In the case of Mark, Mary, Aiden and Henna, the engulfment process was broken during the handling of a transition or series

of transitions in which their sense of selves and bodies evolved in reaction to event(s). In doing so, the athletes acknowledged alternative identities and re-ordered their hierarchy of identities to accommodate an evolved way of seeing and dealing with transition events.

This process of change and identity evolvement was reflected in a restitution narrative that embraced a communicative body-self (see Sparkes, 1997). The athletes' story demonstrated the existence of a disciplined body-self and in the case of Mary, a dominating body-self, followed by a communicative body. However, it is not a linear relationship in which disciplined body-self develops into a dominating body-self until finally embracing a communicative body-self that reflects an identity evolvement. Rather, their narratives demonstrated the shifting terrain of body-self relationships over time and the ways in which these specific sport and non-sport transitions affected the evolvement of the athletic self. There was not a sequential mapping of the body-self relationship but rather a fluid state of movement between narratives, bodies and selves. The seemingly important transition that signalled change and identity evolvement triggered the recall of past transition experiences, good and bad, in a summative evaluation of the situation and subsequent choice of corrective action that involved an expansion of identity constructs.

A critical question is what led the athlete to break the chain of identity engulfment and choose an adaptation response involving an evolvement of identity construction? In the case of Aiden, it was his experience of support from the sport and influence of family expectation that led to an early realisation that a single, dominant athletic identity was not sustainable or desired given his social context. Free choice played a role in Henna's decision to re-negotiate her body-self relationship and identity hierarchy, following a process of weighing up the level of investment (costs) versus the benefits of her maintaining and retaining her disciplined body-self. For Mary, the factors of chronological age and inability to maintain her athletic ability led to an evolved identity that embraced a communicative body-self that involved nurturing and leading the rest of her team mates in the quest for a medal. She prepared for her retirement through engaging in selfless acts of support for the collective goal of the team; thereby easing her retirement into transition through the knowledge that she has put something back into the sport and ensuring a legacy through others.

In each story, the athletes perceived the transitions from a unique perspective, being influenced by past and present environmental and individual factors. The ability to utilise these transitions to develop and evolve their identity was most notably influenced by the coach. The athletes' narratives suggested that they perceived the coaches' attitudes towards transitions to be part of the 'survival of the fittest' process which was allegedly a necessary aspect of elite sport. This perception was especially prevalent in high level coaches. The athletes' stories suggest that such an approach by the coach leads the athlete to developing an increasing psychological dependency on their athletic identity to the exclusion of other identities. The process of identity engulfment is accelerated when the athlete successfully overcomes transitions in their sport career and personal life; thus validating their athletic identity and giving credence to the coaching approach. Thus while Douglas and Carless (2006) identified hardship as a necessary aspect of athlete performance it is only when presented in a developmental and constructive fashion that it nurtures growth and learning and is supported with good communication. This finding is supported by the earlier work of Rosenberg *et al.* (1989) who suggested that coaches provided support for athletes during transition episodes in the form of providing reality confirmation support, listening support, and emotional support. Athletes may develop positive strategies to deal with transitional events and respond to the situation in a controlled manner if they perceive their coach's behaviour to be consistent with their own attitudes and perception of the event. Transition situations may be dealt with by the coach and the athlete working together to implement athlete-centred strategies that maximise personal self-confidence and performance outcomes.

12.7 Limitations of the Research

In reflecting upon the research process, a number of limitations were identified relating to the methods and use of a biographical approach. The research focused on eight athletes with British nationality and experience of the UK sport system. Only one athlete trained and performed outside of the UK. The individual and environmental factors affecting the career transition process highlighted in this research may be specific to the UK social and cultural context. The factor of cultural differences between countries in managing career transitions in sport was not fully accounted for as a factor impacting on the

athlete's adaptation to sport and non-sport transitions. Nonetheless, this study provides a platform to investigate career transition in sport in a variety of social and cultural contexts.

Following on from this, the data was analysed from my perspective not only as a researcher but also as a former Canadian athlete living and working in the United Kingdom. In the research text while I offer personal vignettes of my own transition experiences within and out of sport. They are presented in the context of the athlete's stories rather than as it happened and within the context of my own life. There is considerable more information I could have provided but at the risk of being seen as self-indulgent and also detracting from their stories, I provided personal information pertinent to the athletes' narrative and the themes emerging from the raw data. The dilemma for me at the outset was whether to acknowledge the researcher's autobiographical 'I' in reporting and interpreting the raw data or remain anonymous in the text. Acknowledging my presence in the athletes' narratives was an important factor in authenticating and adding to a biographical methodology.

Finally, the process of interviewing the athletes was laden with overtures relating to perceived power associated with my position as researcher and administrator of programmes that related to their performance and training environment. Some athletes at the time were reluctant to expose their weaknesses given my position of influence and control of their athletic funding and performance-related provisions. However, in some situations the athletes broke through that perception of power as a potential negative factor and turned to me for continued support beyond my role as researcher. This created multiple roles and identities in relation to the interviewed athletes which carried the mixed messages of my having the power to analyse and sponsor change in their personal and athletic lives. As a result, they shared with me stories were crafted in a way that likely reflected their perception of my roles and identities in receiving their story.

12.8 Implications for Further Research

Career retirement from sport has traditionally been viewed from a single-event perspective using primarily quantitative methodologies. The use of a qualitative methodology such as narrative analysis to examine retirement from sport has been limited and has tended to focus on specific transitions in sport

such as injury (Sparkes, 1998; 2005). The use of biographical narratives to examine athlete retirement from a life-development perspective requires further investigation to not only establish the interrelatedness between past, present, and future transitions but also to establish a methodological protocol supporting the biographical approach. Specific attention should be given to ways in which the researcher's voice can be heard in a structured manner that does not detract from the athlete's narrative but acknowledges the researcher's interpretive lens in the analytical process.

This biographical approach is well suited to understanding the long-term development perspective of career transitions in sport. A key premise to the long-term development perspective advocated in this research is the interrelatedness between past, present and future transitions at a cognitive, psychological and behavioural level. In future, a research focus could be on the career planning and transferability of skills and knowledge from one transition to another over the course of a career. Specific attention should also be given to long-term coach development models and their inter-relation with long-term athlete development models and moreover, whether coaches' own career planning better prepares the coach to support athlete development pathway. A further issue for future research is whether the coaching courses offered to athletes as part of their development pathway can provide them with an understanding of retirement that not only nurtures their athletic identity but also fosters an awareness of athlete transition issues amongst the coaching fraternity.

12.9 Closing Thoughts

My doctoral research was meant to help me bring closure to a lost athletic career. I am not sure what answers I was looking for regarding my career retirement but listening to and telling the stories of the athletes rekindled my own athletic memories and brought to the surface my own stories of transitions. I think I was looking for a way to say, 'It was not my fault', and therefore my career as an athlete was not a failure. Instead, my career retirement has served as a moment of growth and learning some twenty years after being told by my coach, 'You are not good enough'!

This research offers an alternative perspective of career transitions in sport that highlights the dynamic interplay of a number of factors affecting the athlete's sense of athletic self and subsequent adaptation to transitions in sport. It seeks to move beyond rigid models of transition that fail to consider transitions as

part of an athlete's long-term development pathway. An athlete's career is defined from a life development perspective in which sport and non-sport transitions connect to form a web of interrelated experiences that shape the athlete's perception of themselves within his or her social context. The life stories of the eight elite athletes suggest that it was the handling of transition moments and not the mere participation in sport that determined the impact of sport as a negative or positive experience. The athletes' stories read of constant transition resulting from predictable and unpredictable events in which they re-affirm or re-construct social and athletic identities. The use of biography as a method to study career transitions in sport brings to the fore the unique nature of transitions in sport. Their stories, like mine, are continuously evolving because of emerging and changing perceptions of the social world in which we exist. Although I initiated this research in part, as a means to understand my own retirement from sport, the athletes' stories challenged my attempts to isolate the painful experience of career retirement. In telling our stories, the past became a connection to the present and an insight to the future and the act of re-telling our stories provided a powerful tool in answering the question, 'Who am I? Thus, career transitions in sports are opportunities for identity growth and development but may also pose challenges to athletes understanding their position in the social world in which they exist.

Sport organisations and coaches must recognize the transition process in long-term athlete development models and adopt a system-based approach to transitions that acknowledges the interconnection between past, present and future transitions as part of the stage-related development pathway. A system-based approach recognizes that each athlete will perceive transitions differently depending on the factors affecting their interpretive lens of the situation. It does not seek to compartmentalize transitions as one-off experiences with a distinct beginning start and end that can be managed or avoided in isolation from other sport and non-sport experiences. As such, the coach education should not be restricted to technical knowledge but extend to transition awareness and coaching transition skills so that athlete development is holistic and prepares the athlete for life on and off the playing field as well during after their competitive career. In doing so, coaches of elite athletes become mentors through using transitions to develop transferable skills between multiple spheres of life within and outside of sport.

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Appendix A
Athlete Profile

Athlete Name (pseudonym)	**Age**	**Sport Profile**
Mary	26	Rower. Retired. Three-time Olympian. Silver medallist. World Champion.
Jon	18	Small-bore rifle shooting. National team-member.
Ella	22	Swimming. Sprinter. National swimmer. Commonwealth Games.
Chloe	19	Athletics. 400m sprinter. National team. World University Games
Doug	21	Volleyball. Senior National Team. Beach Volleyball National team member.
Henna	22	Tennis. National-ranked. Scholarship to American University.
Aiden	19	Archery. National-team member.
Mark	22	Archery. National Competitor.

Appendix B
Letter to Respondents

Name

Date

Dear XXXXX

Thank you for agreeing to take part in a research interview(s) regarding your experiences as an elite athlete. The purpose of my doctoral research is to investigate:

1. career transition experiences or critical turning points in developing the career of an elite athlete;
2. the importance of career transition management within an athlete's career and its impact on identity foreclosure and career exit; and
3. the athlete's perception of the coach's role and impact on career transition experiences..

In investigating these areas, the findings from my research may have implications for coach education and training as well as management of career transition issues within the career of an athlete.

I shall be conducting in-depth interviews with a small number of elite athletes from a range of sports with each athlete being at different stages in their career. If you are in agreement our discussion will be 1-2 hours long with the provision for subsequent meetings to clarify points and an opportunity for further discussions. The interview, although formally constructed, will be informal in delivery and will ask you to provide an autobiographical account of your career as an athlete. Questions will be asked throughout your telling of your 'story' as a means to draw out salient points related to the research questions. Transcripts of our conversations will be prepared and offered to you for the purpose of clarifying points as well as identifying any gaps in your 'story'.

The transcripts will later be subjected to critical analysis with the intent of developing theories relating to the aforementioned research areas. You will be given the opportunity to read preliminary research findings and invited to comment if you wish on their appropriateness from your perspective of career transitions in sport. I also will give you a copy of the transcript to keep.

You may at any time throughout the interview process decide to stop your involvement in the research and retain all copies of transcripts. In the writing of the research document, you will be assured anonymity through the use of name pseudonyms and any leading reference to your identity will be omitted from the final text.

Please feel free to call me on the number above should you have any queries or concerns. I look forward to meeting with you in due course.

Yours sincerely,

Andy Van Neutegem

Appendix C

Interview Structure and Questions

Interview/Research Topic Discussion

A brief explanation of:

- Purpose of research
- Data collection techniques and respondent's role
- Clarification of terms (e.g. transition)
- Respondent anonymity
- Respondent 'rights'
- Researcher's role and background

Demographic Details

1. What is your full name?
2. Where did you 'grow-up?
3. What is your sport?
4. What position do/did you play?
5. Where are you currently in your career? Retired, preparing for championships...

Transitions in the Respondent's Sport Career

The beginning

1. Provide some detail of how you got started in your sport?
2. How old were you?
3. What was your initial attraction to playing sport or your favorite sport?
4. What kind of support did you receive from your parents or guardian?
5. What, if any, were some of your major accomplishments in your first years of competitive sport?
6. Were there any personal accomplishments or invaluable learning moments that have remained with you from those early days of competitive sport?
7. Who was the most significant in those learning moments?
8. Were there any difficult times, either personally or in playing your sport that you remember?
9. Again, who were the significant people in those instances?
10. How were they involved in those critical moments?
11. Again, are there any valuable lessons you have taken away from those moment(s)?

The middle

12. At what age did you feel that your chosen sport was now one of the most important aspects of your life?

13. What were some of your accomplishments or critical moments that made you feel this way towards your sport?

14. What were some of the sacrifices that you perceived that you had to give up in order to play your sport?

15. Were you happy to make those sacrifices? Why or why not?

16. Who were the significant people in your lives at that time that pointed out to you the sacrifices you had to make?

17. Describe your relationship with any or all of these significant people at this time in your personal and sporting life?

18. Describe, if any some of the perceived pressures placed on you at the time by important people in your lives?

19. How did you deal with these pressures and who did you turn to for help if you needed it in certain situations?

20. Describe your best performances in terms of when and where?

21. Why do you think they were the best results/performances?

22. Describe the role any significant person played in those performances?

The end

The following questions are orientated towards respondents who have retired from their career as an elite performer.

23. Describe events or instances in which you first thought that your life as an athlete was not going to last?

24. What did you feel about the prospect of no longer being an athlete?

    a. Were there more than one instances of feeling that the end is near?

25. In what way did you or had you been prepared for the possibility of your career ending?

26. In those moments of facing possible career ending, who did you turn to for support and advice regarding the potential transition out of sport?

27. What were the circumstances surrounding your decision to retire?

28. What was the trigger to finally make the decision?

29. Was the decision made by yourself or with the help of someone else?

30. What activities or second career have you taken up since retiring from sport?

31. How do you think your career as an athlete has helped you in preparing for this new life?

The following questions are orientated towards athletes who have achieved a high standard of performance in sport.

23. Do you often feel that your best performances may never be reached again?

24. What do you perceive as the major issues facing you regarding repeating your best performances and regaining or holding your top form?

25. Who is significant in preparing you for maintaining or reaching that high performance again? What kind of plans have been drawn up?

26. Has anyone talked to you about what you may do if you do not reach your best again?

27. Have you given any thought to what you are going to do once you finish your sport career?

28. Do you have an idea of the trigger moments that will help you make that decision?

29. Are you or have you experienced any of them already?

30. How did you or are you dealing with them?

31. Who were the significant people, if any, in your dealing with these critical moments?

32. Did you ever receive any training or formal advice regarding planning for life after sport? If so, did you feel it was useful in coping with retirement and making the decision to retire?

The Coach

33. Going back to your beginning moments of playing sport, who was the first coach that had an impact on you in terms of decision to play a sport or not, or the way in which you engaged sport?

34. What was it about the coach that made such an impact-good or bad?

35. As you became a better athlete and moved into more serious competitions and you began to perceive sport as a critical aspect of your life, did you remain with the same coach or did you have other coaches?

36. Did you notice a difference in the coaching not only in terms of technical knowledge but the way they treated you as a person and as an athlete? Explain.

37. Can you describe examples of particular crises moments in your playing career or personal life in which your coach played an important role or not, in dealing with the critical moment?

38. Has your coach ever 'coached' you in transitional skills or pointed out the benefits of dealing with a crisis in a certain way because it will help you in the future? Please provide examples.

39. Do you think any of your coaches fully understood what is meant by transitions into, within, and out of sport? Or the differences between each of the three transitional strands?

40. What do you feel are the barriers, if any, to coaches becoming aware of transitional episodes and using them as coachable moments

Appendix D
Category Card

Membership Categories	Codes/Sub-codes	Abbreviation	Reference
Type of Transition		NT	
	Voluntary	NT/V	
	Involuntary	NT/INV	
Athlete Perception of Coach's Role		APCR	
	Technical	APRC/T	
	Holistic	APRC/H	
Effect of Transition		ET	
	Positive	ET/PO	
	Positive – learning	ET/PO/L	
	Negative	ET/NE	
	Negative – Identity	ET/NE/ID	
Coach's Behaviour to Transition		CBT	
	Aware	CBT/A	
	Negative	CBT/NE	
	Positive	CBT/PO	
	Developmental	CBT/DEV	
Athlete' Behaviour to Transition		ABT	
	Anxiety	ABT/A	
	Indifferent	ABT/IND	
	Resigned	ABT/RES	
	Welcoming	ABT/WEL	
Athlete-Coach Relationship		ACR	
	Technical	ACR/TEC	
	Friends	ACR/FR	
	Friends – Life Mentor	ACR/FR/LM	
	Sporadic	ACR/SP	
	Non-Existent	ACR/NON	
Family Support		FS	
	None	FS/N	
	Positive	FS/P	
	Negative	FS/Ne	
Institutional Support		IS	
	None	IS/	
	Positive	IS/P	
	Negative	IS/N	
Athlete Response to Story-telling		AST	
	Relieved	AST/REL	
	Surprised	AST/SUP	
	Non-Committal	AST/NONCOM	
Athlete Career Planning		ACP	
	Formal	ACP/F	
	Formal – NGB	ACP/F/NGB	
	Formal – Family	ACP/F/FAM	
	Formal – School	ACP/F/SCH	
	Informal	ACP/INF	