

Positive Transitions From High-Performance Sport

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The purpose of this study was to explore the transition experiences of high-performance athletes. More specifically, this study investigated reasons for retirement from sport, individual coping strategies, support networks used by transitional athletes, and other variables that may have impacted on the athlete's adjustment process. Retired high-performance athletes ($N = 199$) with international competitive experience completed the Athlete Retirement Questionnaire, a 34-item instrument developed for this study. Analysis showed that those athletes who adjusted smoothly tended to retire after they achieved their sport related goals or because they had achieved their goals in sport. In addition, athletes who had a more difficult transition tended to feel incompetent outside of sport and to also feel that keeping busy was not an effective coping strategy. Practical implications are presented.

Transitions are inevitable and often unpredictable. Human life is characterized by these various life changes, discontinuities, or turning points (George, 1980; Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989). Transitional events include career changes, the death of a spouse, having children, moving to another city, or getting married. Every transition has the potential to be a crisis, a relief, or a combination of both, depending on the individual's perception of the situation.

One particular type of transition which has the potential to illuminate these complex patterns of change and stability is retirement from high-performance sport. The event of retirement, or change, is a normal consequence of elite participation. A career in sport is much shorter than most other careers or occupations, as most athletes retire, voluntarily or involuntarily, during their mid to late 20s. All athletes, whether they compete internationally or professionally, must eventually move from elite participation in sport into another major focus area. This "second" career often requires entirely different skills than those learned and perfected as an athlete and is one in which the individual rarely has the same

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competencies. Consequently, this transition, at a relatively young age, is often said to engender identity crises and coping difficulties (Ogilvie & Howe, 1986; Orlick & Werthner, 1987; Sinclair, 1990).

Any transition, whether smooth or rough, necessitates a degree of adjustment (Coakley, 1983). What becomes of athletes upon their exit from high-performance sport? Do they leave sport satisfied with their memories of participation and enthusiastic about the new challenges that await them? Is retirement an event which allows the pursuit of other opportunities, or does it lead to negative outcomes such as unhappiness, addictions, and identity crises? What internal and external resources do athletes bring to the transition process, and how do these resources or characteristics relate to adaptive success and adaptive failure? In short, how do individuals experience sport retirement?

In recent years, interest and concern regarding the athletic transition process has grown considerably, yet much of the documented information is anecdotal, limited in scope, and journalistic in nature (Werthner & Orlick, 1986). Some researchers, however, have begun to systematically examine the effects of withdrawal from a sport role, and the subsequent resocialization into alternative roles (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985; Coakley, 1983; McPherson, 1984; Werthner & Orlick, 1986).

Much of the empirical research examining the dynamics of athletic transition is grounded in a "crisis" orientation. That is, the postactive days of athletes have been portrayed as traumatic and negative (Harris & Eitzen, 1971; Ogilvie & Howe, 1986), as well as dysfunctional in terms of emotional or psychological disorders which can become manifest in behaviors like alcohol or drug addiction (Hill & Lowe, 1974; McPherson, 1977, 1980; Mihovilovic, 1968). Werthner and Orlick (1986), in their study of high-performance amateur athletes, found that the majority of these athletes (66%) encountered some degree of difficulty in leaving their sport careers.

In contrast to this crisis orientation, several studies have taken an alternative view of the retirement process (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985; Coakley, 1983; Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985). These studies imply that there is little evidence to suggest that former athletes face adjustment difficulties, and that athletes may actually experience relief from the pressures and heavy time commitment of sport as a result of their withdrawal. That is, leaving sport may be a pleasantly anticipated event because it allows new opportunities for personal growth and development.

McPherson (1984) states that this problem-oriented perspective must be replaced by a process-oriented approach. Too frequently athletic transition has been looked at as an event that automatically causes trauma or relief rather than as initiating a transitional process that each individual perceives differently and therefore adjusts to differently. A multitude of behavioral patterns are associated with athletic transition (Werthner & Orlick, 1986) simply because individuals bring their own perceptions of stress, personal resources, coping strategies, and socialization experiences to their particular transition (George, 1980; Schlossberg, 1981). It is a combination of the individual, the resources available to and used by that individual, and the type of transition encountered, that mediates adaptive success or failure. Research is needed to identify the conditions and characteristics associated with these individual patterns and perceptions (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985; Coakley, 1983; McPherson, 1984; Rosenberg, 1980) in order to discover

why some athletes fail to negotiate the challenges of change successfully, while others take them in stride.

The purpose of this study was to explore the transition experiences of high-performance athletes. More specifically, this study investigated the reasons for retirement, the individual coping strategies, the support networks used by transitional athletes, and other variables that may impact on an athlete's adjustment process.

Method

Subjects and Procedures

Retired high-performance athletes ($N = 199$) with international competitive experience served as the subjects for this study. These athletes represented Canada at various international events (e.g., Olympic Games, World Championships, World Cups, team tours) as members of Canadian national teams. Athletes ranged in age from 15 to 59 years ($M = 28.9$, $SD = 5.6$) and included 99 males and 100 females. The mean age at retirement was 25.9 years and 41% of the sample had been retired for 2 years. The subjects had a mean of 6.4 years of national team experience, and they represented 31 different sports.

The names and addresses of all national team athletes who had formally retired from international competition since 1980 were obtained from the Athlete Information Bureau (AIB). The AIB is a federally funded agency responsible for the compilation of demographic and public relations information pertaining to every Canadian high-performance athlete. To ensure that the AIB list of athlete names and addresses was current and accurate, each National Sport Organization was also contacted. Each of the 340 retired athletes were mailed a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study, an anonymous questionnaire that took approximately 20 minutes to complete, and a self-addressed stamped envelope. The return rate was 59%. This study was limited to the sample of retired athletes who returned the questionnaire.

Instrument

Athlete Retirement Questionnaire. The Athlete Retirement Questionnaire (ARQ) was a 34-item instrument developed to address the transitional experiences of high-performance athletes. The ARQ consisted of self-assessment items designed to obtain information about subjects' national team career, their retirement transition, and the practicality of providing transitional services to athletes. The content of ARQ was based on a review of the sport science and transition literature, as well as pilot interviews with high-performance athletes. Responses were indicated on a 5-point Likert scale, as well as a forced-choice and open-ended format.

An initial version of the ARQ was pilot tested with 12 retired high-performance athletes. Feedback from these individuals was used to clarify phrasing and to ensure context-specific relevance.

Results

The results are reported in several sections. First, descriptive statistics outlining the characteristics of transition are presented; second, the relationships influencing

an individual's adjustment to transition are considered; and finally, the types of retirement services athletes view as most interesting and helpful are reported.

Characteristics of the Transitional Athlete

The mean age of the sample was 28.9 years. These individuals had competed in sport in general for an average of 13.2 years, had been members of a national team for an average of 6.5 years, and had spent an average of 5.6 years of full-time commitment to their national team sport. The mean age at retirement was 25.9 years and the athletes had been retired for an average of 4 years.

A total of 31 sports were represented with field hockey, canoeing, and rowing accounting for 36% of the total sample. Forty-six percent of the sample felt they had achieved their sport-related goals, whereas 43% felt they had not. The majority of athletes (64%) had competed in the Olympic Games.

The vast majority of athletes (88%) had not retired previously and 82% felt their retirement was permanent. In addition, the majority of the retired athletes (73%) indicated that retirement had changed their lives a fair amount or immensely ($M = 4.0$), and generally in a positive manner (63%; $M = 3.8$). During the first few months of transition, 86% of the subjects rated their general outlook on life as fairly positive or positive ($M = 4.4$).

The average amount of stress athletes felt in their lives while a member of the national team was mid-range ($M = 3.3$), however 47% reported experiencing a fair amount to a great deal of stress as athletes. Similarly, the average amount of stress encountered during the first 6 or 8 months following retirement was also mid-range ($M = 3.1$), and 46% of the transitional athletes reported experiencing a fair amount to a great deal of stress at this time.

Reasons for Retirement. The three most important reasons (Table 1) athletes selected for deciding to retire were the following: (a) They were tired of the circuit or lifestyle/time to move on ($M = 3.4$, $SD = 1.5$); (b) they had

Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations for Retirement Decisions

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Tired of the circuit or lifestyle/time to move on	3.4	1.5
Achieved goals	3.1	1.4
Difficulties with coaching staff	2.8	1.7
Wanted more time for a personal relationship	2.6	1.4
Lack of finances	2.5	1.5
Difficulties with National Sport Organization	2.4	1.5
Injury	2.1	1.5
Declining performance	2.0	1.3
Not selected to the team	1.9	1.5
Found a job	1.9	1.4
Lack of support from family and/or friends	1.4	0.9

Note. Based on ratings on a 5-point scale: 1 = *not important at all*, 5 = *extremely important*.

achieved their goals ($M = 3.1$, $SD = 1.4$); and (c) they had difficulties with coaching staff ($M = 2.8$, $SD = 1.7$). Those reasons thought to be of least importance in influencing the decision to retire were (a) lack of support from family and/or friends ($M = 1.4$, $SD = .89$), (b) found a job ($M = 1.9$, $SD = 1.4$), and (c) not selected to the team ($M = 1.9$, $SD = 1.5$).

Time Taken to Adjust to Retirement. At the time of the study, 41% of the sample had been retired for 2 years. Another 14% had been retired for 1 year, while 12% had been retired for 6 years. In terms of the temporal aspect of adaptation, 23% of the sample reported, at the time of the study, that they had not yet totally adapted to their new situation out of high-performance sport. Interestingly, another 23% said that they had adapted almost immediately (within 1 or 2 months) to life beyond competitive sport, and 32% took 6 months to 1 year to feel totally adapted. The remaining 22% took more than 2 years to adjust.

Difficulties Encountered During Transition. During these early months of transition, the athletes faced various personal concerns (Table 2). In general, athletes found missing the social aspect of sport ($M = 2.8$, $SD = 1.3$), job/school pressures ($M = 2.7$, $SD = 1.3$), and finances ($M = 2.7$, $SD = 1.4$) to have caused moderate problems at this time in their transition. However, 37% of the athletes reported fair to serious problems with missing the social aspect of their sport, 32% reported fair to serious problems with job/school pressures, and 34% reported fair to serious problems with finances. Those issues that appeared not to be a problem for most athletes at this time were (a) personal illness ($M = 1.3$, $SD = .87$), (b) illness in family ($M = 1.3$, $SD = .92$), and (c) relationship difficulties with family/friends ($M = 1.5$, $SD = .96$).

Coping Strategies. Some coping strategies were found to be very helpful during the first few months of transition while others were deemed not helpful. Athletes found the following strategies most beneficial during the transition phase

Table 2
Means and Standard Deviations for Transition Characteristics
(Difficulties)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Missing social aspect of sport	2.8	1.3
Job/school pressures	2.7	1.3
Finances	2.7	1.4
Relationship difficulties with coach/association	2.5	1.6
Loss of status	2.3	1.2
Feeling incompetent in activities other than sport	2.1	1.2
Lack of self-confidence	2.0	1.3
Injury	1.9	1.3
Relationship difficulties with family/friends	1.5	1.0
Illness in family	1.3	0.9
Personal illness	1.3	0.9

Note. Based on ratings on 5-point scale: 1 = no problem, 5 = big problem.

Table 3
Means and Standard Deviations for Individual Characteristics
(Coping Strategies)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Finding another focus of interest	4.2	1.0
Keeping busy	4.0	1.1
Training/exercising	3.8	1.3
Talking with someone who listens	3.5	1.4
Staying in touch with sport and/or friends in sport	3.3	1.4
Laughing about it	2.7	1.5
Keeping feelings to self	1.9	1.1
Crying	1.9	1.3
Readings on athlete retirement	1.7	1.2
Career counseling	1.6	1.1
Ignoring difficulties	1.5	0.9
Personal counseling	1.3	1.0
Drinking alcohol/drugs	1.2	0.6

Note. Based on ratings on a 5-point scale: 1 = *not helpful*, 5 = *very helpful*.

of retirement (Table 3): (a) finding another focus of interest ($M = 4.2$, $SD = 1.0$), (b) keeping busy ($M = 4.0$, $SD = 1.1$), and (c) training/exercising ($M = 3.8$, $SD = 1.3$). The potential methods for dealing with any stress encountered during retirement that were either not used or viewed as not helpful included (a) drinking alcohol/drugs ($M = 1.2$, $SD = .64$), (b) counseling for personal difficulties ($M = 1.3$, $SD = .95$), and (c) ignoring difficulties ($M = 1.5$, $SD = .94$).

Support Networks. Athletes rated the support they received (e.g., emotional, financial, job contacts) from interpersonal and/or institutional sources during retirement (Table 4). The most supportive groups were (a) spouse/mate ($M = 3.7$, $SD = 1.5$), (b) other family members ($M = 3.5$, $SD = 1.5$), and (c) other friends ($M = 3.1$, $SD = 1.3$). Institutional groups provided the least support: (a) National Sport Organization ($M = 1.4$, $SD = .87$), (b) Sport Canada ($M = 1.4$, $SD = .99$), and (c) Olympic Athlete Career Center ($M = 1.5$, $SD = 1.1$). It is also interesting to note that coaches provided little if any support to most retiring athletes ($M = 1.9$, $SD = 1.3$).

Options and Interests. Upon retirement from high performance sport, 91% of the athletes reported having had something of interest (e.g., a job, school, a relationship, hobbies) to get involved or absorbed in immediately. Of those who did have another interest, 69% had been involved in this activity while competing on the national team.

Perceptions of Adjustment. In terms of the athletes' perception of their adjustment to transition from sport, 74% felt generally satisfied about their lives since retirement, 11% felt generally dissatisfied, while 15% had neutral feelings about life since leaving high performance sport ($M = 4.0$). The majority of athletes (60%) felt, in general, that they handled their transition well, 27% felt neutral, where as 15% felt they had handled the transition poorly ($M = 3.7$).

Table 4
Means and Standard Deviations for Environment Characteristics
(Support Networks)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Spouse/mate	3.7	1.5
Other family members	3.5	1.5
Other friends	3.1	1.3
Teammates	2.4	1.4
Coach	1.9	1.3
Olympic Athlete Career Center	1.5	1.1
Sport Canada	1.4	1.0
National Sport Organization	1.4	0.9

Note. Based on ratings on a 5-point scale: 1 = *very little*, 5 = *very much*.

Importance of Competitive Career and Current Focus. When asked to compare their current situation with their national team experience in terms of importance, 43% of the athletes responded that their current focus was more important, 37% responded that their current situation and their national team experience were of equal importance, and 20% felt that being on the national team was more important to them than their current activities ($M = 3.4$). When asked to list the most significant factors or activities present in their lives today, it was found that the most significant focuses were (a) developing/maintaining an important relationship (84%), (b) training/working out (69%), (c) full-time employment (64%), and (d) furthering their education (55%).

Use of Mental Preparation After Retirement. In terms of mental preparation, while involved in high performance sport 41% of the athletes spent up to 5 hours per week on mental preparation (e.g., setting short- and long-term goals, imaging successful performances, preparing training and competition plans, or watching videos of their performances), whereas another 33% spent 6–10 hours a week on the same mental training. After retiring, 49% of the individuals stated that they spent 1–3 hours per week mentally preparing for their new focus or interest (e.g., setting short- and long-term goals, preparing plans to achieve their goals, or imaging successful performance). Another 18% spent 4–6 hours a week on mental preparation once they had left elite sport.

Relationships Influencing Adjustment to Transition

Chi-square tests of independence were conducted to assess specific relationships thought to influence transitional adjustment. The procedure of collapsing item categories due to low cell frequencies was performed prior to conducting the analyses. For example, Likert scale items were collapsed into a 3-point scale (e.g., Categories 1 and 2 = 1; Category 3 = 2; Categories 4 and 5 = 3). Only specific results of interest are reported.

Athletes who had achieved their sport-related goals tended to feel more satisfied about life, $\chi^2 (4, n = 109) = 11.6, p < .05$, versus those who had not accomplished their goals or achieved only some of them.

Athletes retiring largely due to declining personal performance tended to experience the most problems with loss of status, $\chi^2 (4, n = 114) = 11.8, p < .05$, and a lack of self confidence, $\chi^2 (4, n = 114) = 10.5, p < .05$, in the months following retirement versus those who did not experience or attach much if any importance to that particular retirement reason.

Males tended to report finding a job, $\chi^2 (2, n = 109) = 11, p < .05$, and lack of finances, $\chi^2 (2, n = 109) = 14.4, p < .05$, as more important reasons for retiring than did females. Those athletes who had retired at least once before, tended to feel more dissatisfied about their lives since retirement $\chi^2 (4, n = 114) = 6.3, p < .05$, than those who had not retired previously.

Those athletes who were satisfied with their lives since retirement, $\chi^2 (2, n = 110) = 18.4, p < .05$, and who handled the transition well, $\chi^2 (2, n = 110) = 10.3, p < .05$, tended to have had other interests or activities to move into upon retirement versus those who were either dissatisfied or moderately satisfied with their lives after high performance sport.

Retirement Services

Limited retirement services are available to retired national team members, and 27% of the athletes used these services. The reason cited most often (31% of responses) for not utilizing such assistance was that the athletes did not require or desire the services offered because they had their own career plans formulated or already underway. Other frequently cited reasons for not using the Olympic Athlete Career Center (OACC) more extensively were that athletes simply were not aware of such services (16% of responses), they did not find the services helpful (9%), they knew of the OACC but were not aware of the specific services available (9%), or they viewed the OACC only for instruction in creating a résumé or obtaining business cards (7%).

The types of services athletes would be most interested in both during a high-performance sport career and during the transition to a new focus included the following: (a) financial assistance (89%), (b) information on job and educational opportunities (82%), (c) readings on how other athletes have dealt with retirement (76%), (d) opportunities to learn to transfer one's mental skills to a new career or interest (74%), (e) opportunities to help focus on finding a new career or interest (74%), (f) a physiological and dietary detraining program (63%), (g) seminars with other retired athletes (62%), and (h) suggestions to help the athlete feel more confident or competent in new surroundings (62%).

When asked whether they would feel comfortable consulting with a professional for assistance if they were having difficulty with retirement, 35% said they would seek out a sport psychologist. Only 8% would consider consulting with any other type of "psychologist."

If the option of a seminar or a series of seminars or workshops dealing with retirement issues were available, 74% of the sample indicated an interest in attending. However, 53% stated that the seminars would have to take place in or near their city for them to attend.

When asked to provide suggestions for other high-performance athletes moving through the transition process, the most prevalent recommendation offered by the subjects was to plan for retirement (35% of responses). They felt that preretirement planning should begin while still competing. Athletes felt that

maintaining a balance in one's life was important, and thus career or educational goals as well as social contacts should be pursued to some extent while still competing. Other suggestions for effective adaptation to transition included finding an alternate focus, continuing to train or exercise, maintaining contact with other transitional athletes, and learning to transfer mental skills used in sport to one's new career or focus.

The most frequent suggestions retired athletes had for coaches and the institutional network of elite amateur sport (e.g., Sport Canada, National Sport Organizations, and the Olympic Athlete Career Center) were to treat the retiring/retired athletes with respect rather than as a disposable commodity and to offer financial support in retirement.

Many athletes felt ignored, used, forgotten, and discarded in retirement. Athletes believed that these feelings of isolation could have been minimized by being informed that their contributions were appreciated and worthwhile and by continuing contact with the national organizations through such simple means as remaining on the mailing list for newsletters and other updates regarding the organizations' functioning. In terms of finances, athletes felt that financial assistance was justified not only for national team athletes going back to school within a specific time frame following retirement, but for all retiring national team athletes.

Other recommendations offered by the athletes for the various sport institutions regarding athlete retirement included allowing or encouraging athletes to pursue other interests while on the national team rather than discouraging a balance of activities, keeping athletes involved in the national organization as a coaching or administrative resource, and offering retirement education programs to athletes while they have national team status or during their transition from sport.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the implications of transition in the sport context. These implications and suggestions for future directions are discussed.

Results indicated that positive adjustment to retirement from high-performance sport was related either to achieving one's sport-related goals or to having achieved one's goals in sport. That is, athletes who accomplished what they had set out to do in sport (i.e., achieved a specific performance time or goal) and who retired both with satisfaction and on their own terms, tended to adjust with ease. These findings are supported by Werthner and Orlick (1986) who found that feeling a sense of accomplishment (i.e., satisfying one's personal goals) contributed to a smooth transition out of sport.

Athletes who felt their retirement was largely due to declining performance experienced more subsequent difficulties with lack of self-confidence and feelings of loss of status than those who did not retire for this reason. When athletes no longer performed to their "normal" capabilities, they tended to attribute the lesser performance to personal failure. Not being able to compete with the same intensity or skill level may have been perceived as a breakdown in overall ability and, thus, may have impacted upon the sense of self. Thus, athletes who feel that they are no longer capable of maintaining their elite status may also feel that they are not capable of doing anything well.

Males, as compared to females, tended to report both finding a job and a lack of finances as important reasons for retiring. These two differences are likely due to gender-role socialization rather than a characteristic inherent in retirement. Therefore, the most striking result regarding sex differences was that very few were found.

Findings indicated that athletes who had retired before tended to feel more dissatisfied about their lives since retirement versus those who had not made a previous transition. Schlossberg (1984) supports this result by stating that failing to adapt well to a situation may negatively influence one's ability to cope with a similar situation in the future because a self-fulfilling prophecy may interfere. That is, if an athlete retires but subsequently returns to international competition, he or she likely encountered difficulties with the transition, otherwise he or she would not have rejoined the national team. Consequently, the athlete may become less able to cope with retirement in the future. Therefore, retiring from sport more than once is considered a liability rather than an asset.

Athletes who have options to focus on after retirement, such as employment, interests, or relationships, are better equipped to negotiate a smooth transition than athletes who have no options at all (Charner & Schlossberg, 1986; Schlossberg, 1984; Werthner & Orlick, 1986). This issue of options being a positive factor in adjustment is reflected in this study in that high-performance athletes who were satisfied with their lives since retiring had other interests or activities to move into upon retirement. It would therefore seem most important that athletes maintain some balance in their lives while active members of the national team.

The choice of counselor athletes would consult for assistance if they were having a difficult time with stress in retirement provided timely results. Many athletes felt that if they were going to consult a professional, that professional would be a sport psychologist or a mental training consultant rather than a clinical psychologist, psychiatrist, or university counselor. This finding sends an important message to the profession of applied sport psychology with regard to the growing debate on certification procedures and who possesses the credibility and expertise to develop and refine mental training and transition skills with athletes. Knowledge of the subdisciplines of applied sport psychology, sport sciences, and the sport structure in general are criteria perceived to be important by many high-performance athletes (and coaches) as indicators of competence.

Previous research (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1984; Coakley, 1983; Ogilvie & Howe, 1986; Werthner & Orlick, 1986) has indicated that retirement from high-performance sport is an experience engendering either crisis or relief in the lives of former athletes. While virtually all individuals experience adjustment to some degree following any transition (Coakley, 1983; George, 1980; Schlossberg, 1984), this study reveals that adjustment to retirement from high-performance sport may not be as distressing or as liberating as previously suggested.

The majority of athletes in this study felt that retirement had changed their lives in a positive direction, felt positive about life in general, felt satisfied about their lives since retirement, and felt in control of their adjustment process. It would thus appear that a larger portion of the athlete population than previously thought had progressed through the transition process smoothly without specialized assistance.

These findings are a departure from previous studies on retirement from high-performance sport, possibly because this study represents a comparatively

larger, broader base of national team members. Previous studies (Baillie, 1990; Swain, 1989; Werthner and Orlick, 1986) dealt only with a select group of world ranked, internationally elite athletes or with anecdotes from a small number of professional athletes. That is, athletes who are at the top of their profession tend to have dedicated a very large portion of their lives to training and competing. This commitment in terms of time and personal energies often contributes to an imbalance of other activities in their lives. Unfortunately, this sport-only identity may leave some athletes with few skills other than those perfected as an athlete and the resulting lack of options can lead to adjustment difficulty.

It is interesting to note that half of the individuals in this study (100 athletes) stated that after retiring they spent 1–3 hours per week mentally preparing for their new focus or interest, much as they had done in sport (e.g., setting short- and long-term goals, preparing plans to achieve their goals, or imaging successful performance). An additional 36 athletes indicated that they spent 4–6 hours a week on similar types of mental preparation for their new focus, once they had left sport.

This successful transfer of mental-training skills may have been a factor influencing the relative smoothness of transfer for athletes in this study versus previous studies. This is something that should be looked at more closely in future studies because, if it were a significant factor, it would represent an important life advantage for athletes who are involved in quality mental training programs during their sport-competition years.

Most athletes in this study made the adjustment to a new focus without major difficulties; however, it took time to do so. Therefore, teaching transfer skills along with positive interventions upon retirement would likely enable more athletes to make the transition from competent athlete to competent person/performer in another domain more quickly and smoothly.

Future Directions

All transitions are followed by a period of disruption in which old routines, assumptions, and relationships change and new ones evolve (Schlossberg, et al, 1989). In sport, it appears that most organizations have not paid the same attention to helping athletes move out of the organizational structure as they have to helping them move in. Nor has any organization developed a detailed conceptualization of what is effective in helping athletes move smoothly and quickly through the transition process. Thus, it seems prudent that future research in the area of transition from high-performance sport begin to focus on the implementation of positive interventions not only to improve the transition experience but to minimize the time it takes to adjust.

Several recommendations for intervention, or strategies for change, are evident:

1. *Continue financial support* for a reasonable period following retirement (e.g., 1 year). Athletes feel this would be most beneficial because they would be able to continue their education uninterrupted, begin a degree program, or find suitable employment.
2. *Offer seminars dealing with adjustment issues.* Athletes feel it would be helpful if they were informed about what emotions to expect, when to expect them, and for how long; what coping strategies are most effective; and from

whom to seek support. Former high-performance athletes would be a useful resource for sharing knowledge and participating in such seminars. Ideally such exchanges would begin during the athlete's competitive career. Realistically, however, most of these exchanges would have to occur when close to retirement or upon retirement, as many athletes are not mentally ready for the serious discussion of retirement issues while still actively competing.

3. *Provide opportunities to contribute in the sport system.* Former athletes are a valuable resource in terms of their specific sport knowledge with respect to skill, technique, strategy, physiological, and mental training. Their expertise is invaluable to continued coaching depth. National sport organizations should seek out former athletes for coaching positions or other roles that would benefit from their experience.
4. *Provide a practical resource center for athletes.* An athlete resource center capable of directing or connecting athletes to the desired service should be operable. This center could coordinate and provide seminars, workshops, mental training consultation, and relevant readings (e.g., Orlick, 1990; Orlick & Werthner, 1987) to interested athletes.
5. *Encourage national sport organizations to maintain contact with retired athletes.* Often retirement does not diminish athletes' interest in their sport or their desire to be involved in some capacity. One of the difficulties that athletes acknowledged in this study was that they missed the social aspect of their sport. Many were unhappy that once they retired they were no longer considered members of their organization who were eligible for team updates or inclusion in various functions. National sport organizations should continue contact with their former athletes by such simple means as newsletters, invitations to organization-related functions, or requests for input or assistance from the athletes.
6. *Continue to implement mental skills training programs* for athletes, and discuss the ways in which these same mental readying and focusing skills can be applied to any endeavor.
7. *Act upon athlete recommendations.* We are pleased to be able to conclude this article on a positive note. A series of transition seminars began for retiring Canadian Olympic athletes in major centers across Canada following the 1992 winter and summer Olympic Games. These seminars were stimulated at least in part by this study and previous work in this area by Werthner and Orlick (1986) and Orlick and Werthner (1992). These transition seminars were designed and conducted by Orlick and Werthner, guided by athlete input, and funded by the COA Olympic Athlete Career Center.

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Manuscript submitted: July 31, 1991

Revision received: August 28, 1992

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