

Degrees of Success

Negotiating Dual Career Paths in Elite Sport and University Education in Finland, France and the UK

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1. Research Aims

Although there is a significant body of literature on athlete transitions through career and life stages, and a growing literature on policy initiatives aimed at fostering education services for elite athletes, to date little attempt has been made to identify athletes' own perspectives on educational decision-making. Most such work focuses on a coach's, administrator's or policy maker's prescriptive view of how an athlete might deal with the dual demands of an academic and elite sporting career. The researcher's own previous work (see Amara, Aquilina, Henry and PMP, 2004) in this field has evaluated how educational and sporting policy makers perceive the needs of athletes and how systems of provision are designed to meet such needs. Therefore the aim of this study is to shift the focus onto the athletes identifying their perspectives in different sporting contexts and in different national educational systems. To this end the following research questions were set to address this gap in the literature:

- What are the decision-making processes that elite athletes go through in order to combine their sporting and academic careers successfully while at university?
- How is the nature of the university system, and the type of sport, impacting on the athlete's perceived experience of sporting and educational decisions on their life now and for post-athletic careers?
- What are the struggles and constraints that exist in combining a 'dual career' and how might policy be adapted to ameliorate these life experiences?

For the purpose of this research the term 'elite' was taken to refer to those athletes who have had experience in representing their country in major international competitions such as European, World Championships and the

Olympic Games. This implies that such individuals are included on official lists such as the World Class Performance Programme in the UK or *Pôles Espoirs* in France. In terms of the professional players interviewed, only those individuals who currently (or had previously held) a full-time contract with a professional club were taken into consideration. This definition of 'elite' was analogous to that provided in the literature by Baillie and Ogilvie (2002:395) who utilised the term to refer to those athletes 'whose pursuit of excellence in sport has led to their participation and success in competition at the Olympic or professional level'.

The term 'student-athlete' has also been used extensively throughout the writing of this thesis and although various definitions were provided in the literature, in the context of this research study it refers to those individuals who were undertaking (or had completed) university-level education and who were also actively involved in (or recently retired from) elite-level sport. This term is therefore often used to reflect the direct link of being a full-time athlete and a university student.

1.2. Research Context

In the period January – September 2004 the Institute of Sport and Leisure Policy was commissioned by DG Education and Culture of the European Commission (with PMP Consultancy) to undertake a review of 'The Education of Young Elite Sportspersons' in all 25 Member States of the European Union. The Commission's interest in this field stemmed from a concern that elite sportspersons' rights and interests in terms of education were being increasingly prejudiced by the growing demands of competition and training in elite sport, the European Union's recognition of its responsibilities in this area having been underlined by the addition of a competence in relation to sport in the *Draft Constitution for Europe* adopted by the Council of Ministers in October 2004.

The study focused on policy in terms of the provision of special measures to serve the interests of elite sportspersons (rather than on sportspersons'

experience of such special measures). It addressed issues relating to educational provisions across the full range of services from compulsory education, through post-compulsory further education, higher education / university provision, professional sports academies, to vocational training for post-athletic career employment.

The study was reported to the Commission in September 2004 and to the Council of Ministers in Liverpool in Sept. 2005 and has been published by the European Commission on its website (Amara, Aquilina, Henry and PMP, 2004). The report has generated significant interest in the academic and policy communities¹.

While the EC commissioned study ranged across the full range of educational services on offer, this thesis focuses solely on the university and higher education sector. It also differs from the EC study by focusing not on the education services provided but on the perceptions of decision-making processes of the elite sportspersons, the chronology of such decision-making, rationales for choices made and consequences of such decisions. As such the study is intended to complement the insights gained in the earlier study.

Having previously adopted a 'top-down' approach for the European study in order to map out the full range of educational services on offer, the principal aim of the current study is to gain an insight into the elite athlete's worldview, and his/her perceptions of the significant factors in personal educational decision-making. This 'bottom-up' approach in turn is intended to provide insight into the decision-making processes that these athletes make use of in order to negotiate their dual career paths, and how these have been adapted by athletes in different sporting contexts and in different types of educational

¹ Findings were reported at two international conferences in 2004 (European Congress of Sport Sciences and European Association of Sport Management) and since these presentations the project has generated invitations for keynote and invited papers at three international conferences and a public lecture in 2004 and 2005.

system, with what kinds of outcome. Evidence of good practice and major challenges that exist in combining an elite sporting career together with a university career within the three European contexts; Finland, France and the UK, investigated, will also be highlighted and ways of how policy can be ameliorated to improve these life experiences will be suggested.

1.3. Rationale for investigating this research area

There are a number of justifications that underpin the rationale for investigating this research area, the first relating to the fact it is still a relatively under-explored topic of research. From a scoping study undertaken to inform the systematic review stage of this thesis it was evident that most of the studies carried out with student-athletes at University level were located in North America. Very little research has been carried out in Europe by individual nation states and even fewer studies of a comparative nature such as this one. DeKnop et. al., (1999:59) who are members of a prominent research group in this area in Europe have argued for a greater collaborative effort by European nation states to inform each other of examples of good practice:

At European level, the need for collaboration, via exchange of information and co-operation, may be beneficiary to the guidance of student-athletes within each country. In order to enhance such a pan-European co-operation, empirical and applied data on the specificity, as well as generalisability of the situation of student-athletes in different countries, should be gathered and compared.

This particular research area also continues to be of growing importance to individual nation states as the proportion of elite athletes in higher education continues to increase. Official statistics released by the British Universities and Colleges Sport (BUCS) website state that over 60 per cent of the Great Britain team participating at the Athens Olympic Games, 2004 were in fact 'products' of the higher education system (BUCS, 2008). More recent statistics on the Beijing Olympic Games, 2008, show that 58 per cent of Team GB consisted of current and former student-athletes. There were 77

British competitors in total who won a medal in Beijing with 42 (55%) of these having come through the university system. Table 1.1 below shows the demographics of those elite athletes with a higher education background.

Table 1.1 – Contribution of British student / graduate-athletes to the medal tally at the Beijing Olympic Games, 2008

	GB Total	Students / Graduates contribution
Number of elite athletes	311	180
Medals won at the Beijing Olympic Games 2008	77	42
	Gold – 19	Gold – 12
	Silver – 13	Silver – 7
	Bronze - 15	Bronze – 7
Gender	168 (men)	87 (men)
	143 (women)	93 (women)

(Adapted from BUCS website, 2008)

In France the statistics from the Athens Olympic Games are comparable to those of the UK. Bayle, Durand, Nikonoff (2008:153) observed that almost half of the medallists (16 out of 33) were in fact student-athletes based at INSEP (National Institute of Sport and Physical Education). Therefore the authors argued how the elite training centre, (which also provides academic programmes) is regarded as a highly successful system as it consistently manages to produce exceptional athletes who have contributed towards France's 5th place ranking in the world in both the Olympic Games and World Championships.

A further reason for investigating this research area stems from the realisation that over the past few years there has been an increased effort both by national sport organisations such as UK Sport nationally (Argent, Aquilina and Henry, 2005; Douglas and Carless, 2006a, 2006b) and the European Commission at a European level (Amara et al., 2004; German Sport Confederation, 2004, INEUM Consulting & TAJ, 2007) to start looking at elite athletes in a more 'holistic' manner. There is an increased awareness of the need to appreciate all facets of an athlete's life, particularly those to do

with their personal and educational development. To this end, the method chosen for the collection of data – the life story approach fits well with the aim of eliciting these student-athletes' own personal life experiences, and the nature of the decision-making processes they go through, in order to manage their dual career effectively. Thus, acknowledging the fact that athletes have a complex biography outside their sport has had a major impact in the shaping of this study.

From a methodological point of view the life-story approach was chosen specifically to give 'voice' to the athletes as the focus of the study is shifted to the student-athletes themselves. As Douglas and Carless (2006a:11) argued this type of rich biographical accounts with elite athletes has been generally overlooked in previous research 'as a result of the research methods used and the way research findings are often represented' and thus this study is an attempt to capture more fully the athletes' own life experiences in order to present the research findings and implications in a more relevant manner.

There have also been some ethical concerns voiced in relation to elite athletes' career decision-making since it was argued that the current elite sporting systems have tended to 'de-humanise' the athletes in their pursuit of success and they "effectively exclude any concern for individual moral reasoning or political autonomy in the developing athlete as a performance machine" (Brackenridge, 2004:324). As Breivik (1998) argues:

The problem for the athletes seems more and more to be their increasing lack of autonomy, their inability to lead their own life. The athletes seem in many cases to be spectators to their own career development.

This research study therefore aims to provide insight into some of the opportunities and challenges that have been highlighted by student-athletes themselves in combining a dual career and will seek to propose ways in which some of the unsustainable practices that characterise the current elite sporting system can be ameliorated.

1.4. Thesis structure

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 outlines the systematic review methodology, discussing the rationale for opting to undertake a systematic review in contrast to a more traditional narrative review more widely utilised in the social sciences. A total of 737 articles were initially retrieved but after exclusionary criteria was set, 122 were analysed in detail for the purpose of this study. A descriptive and thematic analysis of the literature retrieved was carried out to identify the emergent themes that have been deemed key to managing a dual career of academia and elite sport successfully.

Chapter 3 takes into consideration the methodological implications for this research study. The philosophical premise – critical realism underpinning this study will be discussed in relation to the method – the life story approach that was adopted for the data collection phase. The approach adopted is a critical realist one, as a defining feature of critical theories is their emancipatory function, that thus sits well with the researcher's concern with the protection of athletes' rights in the field of education and vocational preparation for life beyond sports. The purpose of the study was to gain insight into student-athletes' experience of combining a dual career of university education and elite sport and to identify the significant factors that influence their personal educational decision-making. Thus interviews adopting a life story approach (Miller 1999) were conducted with elite athletes who have experience of university level education, to understand what constraints and opportunities exist, and how these have been negotiated by athletes in different sporting contexts and in different types of educational systems across three European countries: Finland, France and the UK.

Chapter 4 seeks to locate these life-story interviews within a socio-political context providing a descriptive analysis of the political, academic and elite sporting structures and systems established within the European Union

context more broadly, and then going on to highlight the specific cases of the three European states under investigation.

Chapter 5 includes the first level of analysis as Wylleman and Lavallee's (2003) Developmental model on transitions faced by athletes was utilised to explore in more depth the key developmental stages that a student-athlete typically goes through across four domains: athletic, academic, psychological and psycho-social. This in turn highlighted critical normative transitional periods together with a number of non-normative transitions based on each of the interviewee's personal experiences.

Chapter 6 comprises of the second level of analysis of the interviews which revealed student-athletes' own explanations of how they have identified priorities and developed strategies to combine a dual career of university education and elite sport, and how successful such strategies have been. This analysis also aimed to provide insight into the type of university careers experienced by elite athletes in the three European nation states of Finland, France and the UK and to identify the structural processes or conditions associated with such types. Such athlete based accounts have clear policy implications, informing thinking in relation to how policy makers, administrators, educators and coaches might enhance student / athlete experience at universities, which are discussed in Chapter 7 of this thesis.

The final chapter is a brief account seeking to outline the original contribution of this thesis to existing knowledge in this particular research area. It also demonstrates the theoretical implications of undertaking such a study including the key theoretical insights acquired through the research process, and some indications of potential future directions for research in this domain.

Chapter 2 - Systematic Review

2.1. Systematic Review Methodology

2.1.1. The Systematic Review Approach

The literature review process is an integral part of the research process and instrumental in guiding the decisions made by the researcher on how to carry the study forward. Getting to know about the literature disseminated about a particular topic of interest, and identifying the gaps where further research is necessary, are the principal forces driving this process. Traditionally literature reviews in qualitative research are presented in a 'narrative' form, where it is left to the researcher's discretion which literature to review in order to further guide his/her particular study. However, this has been met by criticism since it is claimed that "these reviews can be biased by the researcher's own past history and thus lack rigour" and 'in many cases are not undertaken as genuine pieces of investigatory science' (Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003). Consequently over the last 15 years, there has been a re-evaluation of the way literature reviews are conducted and both academics and policy-makers have urged for a more reliable basis to formulate decisions and take action. Following approaches developed in the medical sciences, the social sciences have adopted systematic reviews "to improve the review process by synthesising reviews of research in a systematic, transparent, and reproducible manner with the twin aims of enhancing the knowledge base and informing policymaking and practice" (Tranfield et al., 2003).

2.1.2. What is a systematic review?

Systematic reviews are investigations, following a stringent protocol in order to synthesise the results of a large number of primary studies utilising a number of 'strategies' to minimise bias by the reviewer. These strategies include a comprehensive search to identify all potentially relevant articles in key databases and the use of explicit, reproducible criteria in the selection of articles for review. Following this, articles are read, emergent themes are identified, and the results interpreted. Links between studies are made and

overarching themes are discussed in further detail. “When the results of primary studies are summarised but not statistically combined, the review may be called a qualitative systematic review” (Cook, Mulrow, & Haynes, 1997:377). The review protocol in the social sciences such as management reviews varies slightly in the sense that it is not restricted to evaluation of empirical studies but may place more significance on ‘conceptual discussion’ of the research problem and in articulating the problem’s ‘significance’. Systematic reviews here are often regarded as a process of exploration, discovery and development and hence adopt a more flexible approach (Tranfield et al., 2003).

Since most articles reviewed are of a qualitative nature, the type of analysis adopted was more of a descriptive and thematic nature as will be explained in subsequent sections of this chapter, as opposed to meta-analysis often used in quantitative studies. As Table 2.1 below illustrates, there are various alternative methods to scoping and reviewing qualitative literature which can be adopted. For the purpose of this study the scoping and nominal methods were adapted to fit the requirements of this type of research. These two procedures will be described in further detail in the next section.

Table 2.1 - Examples of Qualitative Review Techniques

Method	Data Collection	Analysis	Benefits
Delphi	Consensus building	Inductive	Reflective; avoids personality conflicts
Nominal	Brainstorming and Ranking	Inductive	Physical gathering, encourages contributions
Signal and Noise	Documents and literature	Intuitive, value-based	Simultaneous considerations of criteria
Grey literature	Alternative documents, web-based literature, etc.	Can be analysed inductively or deductively	Uncovers under-used resources and voices
Scoping	Literature and stakeholders	Consultative. Intuitive consensus building approach	Produces overview in short timeframe
Meta-ethnography	Like-with-like comparisons, case-study method	Comparative, textural, interpretive	Alternative to positivist paradigm; allows for further interpretation

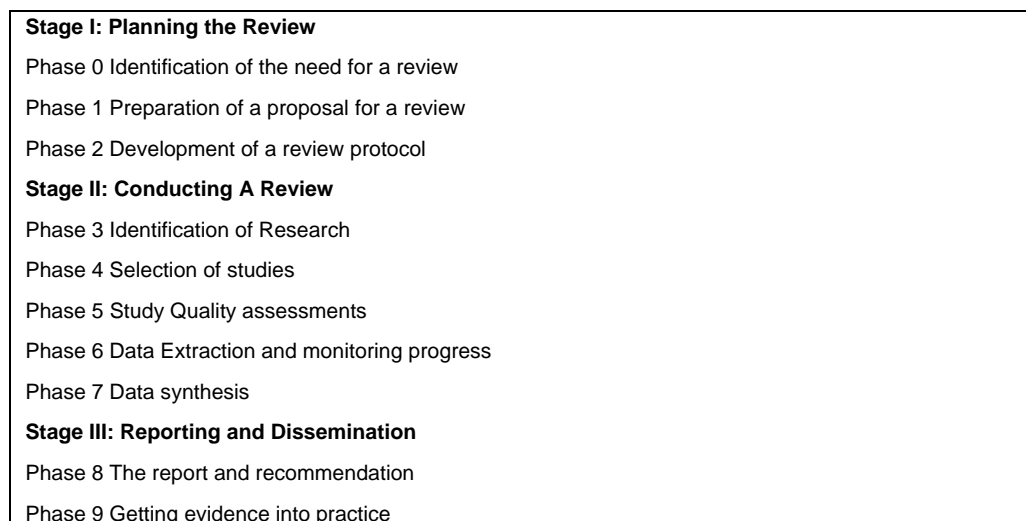
Table taken from Jones (2004:102)

2.1.3. Stages of a Systematic Review

Stage 1- Scoping

Before the final decision to undertake a systematic review was made, the researcher conducted a brief scoping study to get an overview of the literature and key discussions associated with the research area. Therefore, a short literature review containing articles and reports (published over the last thirty years) and unpublished theses was carried out in order to investigate further the aims of the proposed topic. This scoping study was particularly useful because it provided a good approximation of the number of articles available, gave some indication to the quality of the literature sourced, and whether there were specific issues with regard to terminology used (Jones, 2004:100). For example in this case key words such as 'elite' and 'student-athlete' were not used consistently across the literature and therefore the researcher had to define these concepts beforehand and then exclude any studies that did not define these terms in a similar way. This preliminary study also gave a clear indication of the databases with the highest number of relevant articles, a point that was later verified with the information scientist. Having compiled all this data and carried out a brief analysis of the scoping study, it was deduced that a systematic review is feasible and should be undertaken.

Figure 2.1: Stages of a systematic Review



Stages of a Systematic Review (Clarke & Oxman, 2001)

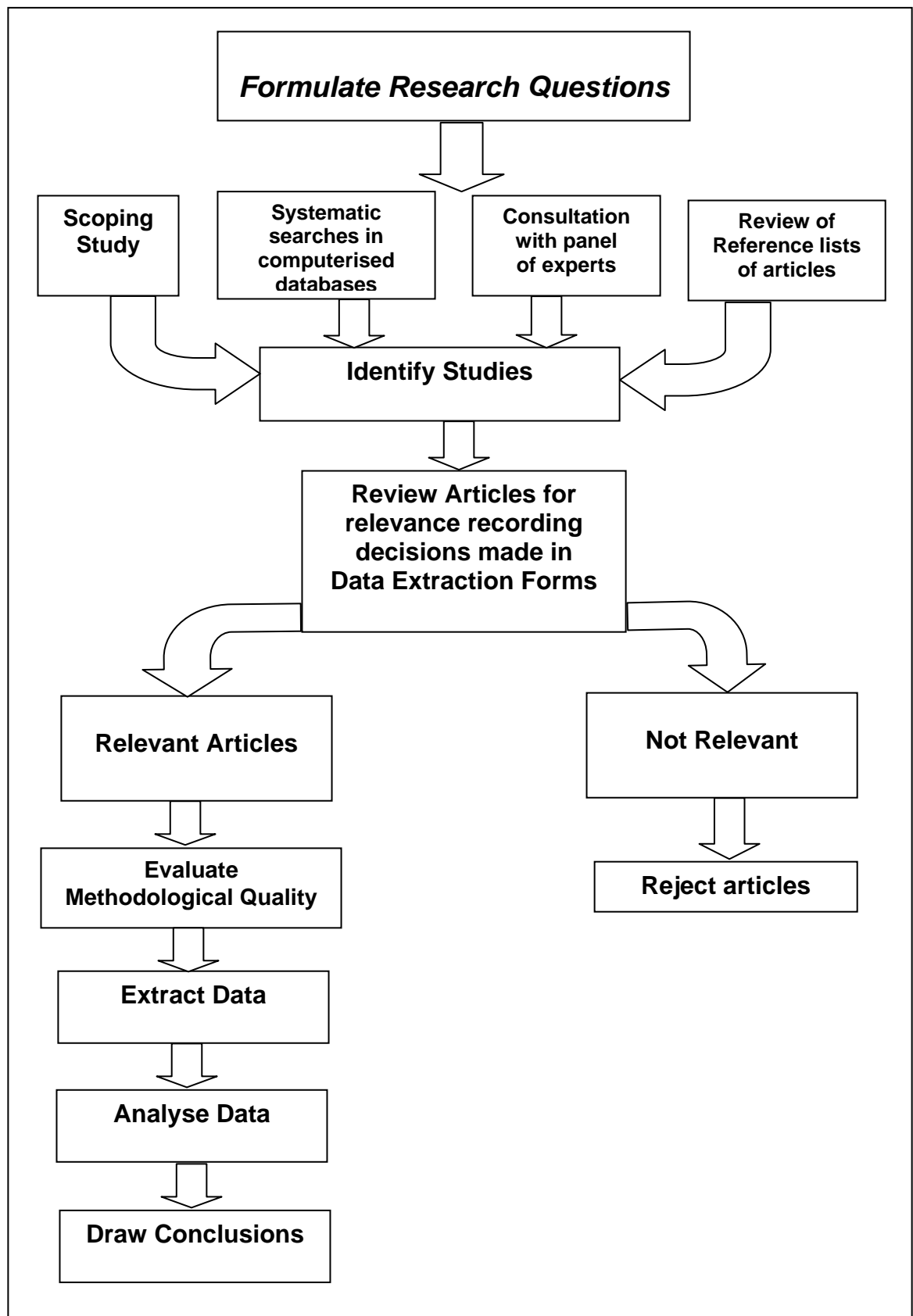
The first step in the systematic review process is to form a panel of experts with a broad range of knowledge in both the research topic and methodology. For the purpose of this study, the panel consisted of the director of studies, supervisor, a library and information scientist, a senior lecturer and the researcher. By utilising an adapted version of the nominal method, a brainstorming session was held with each member of the panel, and the feedback received was very helpful to explore other field(s) and sub-field(s) within the research area and expand the list of databases used.

The second step to the systematic review process is to plan a review protocol, which ensures objectivity on behalf of the researcher as it provides detailed descriptions of the decisions taken along the process. (Tranfield et al., 2003). There are various types of review protocols that can be utilised and can include a number of factors such as those suggested by Davies and Crombie (1998):

- i. The specific questions addressed by the study
- ii. The study focus in terms of population and sample
- iii. The search strategy for identification of relevant studies

The protocol used for this specific systematic review is the one outlined below which has been slightly adapted from the one devised by Papadopoulos and Rheeder (2000) to reflect better the measures taken for this review. A fuller account of these steps and the decisions made at every stage is provided in Figure 2.2 below.

Figure 2.2 - Documenting the steps of a Systematic Review in a Protocol



Adapted from Papadopoulos & Rheeder, (2000)

Step II – Conducting a Review

The search starts with the identification of keywords, usually as a result of the scoping study and discussions with the expert panel. The search strategy has to be reported in significant detail to allow for replication if necessary, making sure that at every stage there is a clear, audit trail that makes it possible to follow the researcher's steps in the process.

It was decided for pragmatic reasons that the search should be limited to published journals listed in bibliographic databases and unpublished theses. The criteria for inclusion and exclusion were discussed between the researcher, supervisor and information scientist. With regard to theses, only those submitted within the last five years were taken into consideration; the reasons being two-fold; first due to the fact that there have been significant advances in the research area over the last few years and dated studies might not necessarily reflect this reality and second that pragmatically the research project had only a limited allowance to pay for accessing copies of unpublished dissertations. For the journal articles the dates for inclusion of publications were from 1996 to 2007.

Having decided on the time span and data sources, the reviewer then conducted a review of all potentially relevant citations identified in the search. Relevant sources were retrieved for a more thorough reading and then from these the final selection was made for the systematic review. The reasons for inclusion and exclusion at this point were documented and stored in data extraction forms. A limited selection of data extraction forms are included in the appendices section for illustrative purposes (see appendix 1).

These forms are intended to reduce human error and bias as much as possible and usually contain (Clarke & Oxman, 2001):

- i. General information (title, author, publication details)
- ii. Study features and specific information (details and methods)
- iii. Notes on emerging themes

Step III – Reporting and dissemination

In a social science systematic review, a two-stage report is usually produced. The first stage is a more ‘descriptive analysis’, the second identifies and evaluates a number of themes.

(i) *Descriptive analysis* – Using a very simple set of categories usually derived from the data extraction forms, the researcher then gave a broad description of the field of study with specific examples and an audit trail justifying conclusions drawn.

(ii) *Thematic analysis* – Using an interpretive approach to analyse the data, the broad themes emerging from the literature were reviewed and documented. This in theory could lead to the development of overarching themes and formulation of key questions. ‘Linking themes across the various core contributions wherever possible and highlighting such links is an important part of the reporting process’ (Tranfield et al., 2003). This type of analysis can be theory- or data-driven. Further, it provides a means for practitioners to use the evidence provided by research to inform their decisions’ (Tranfield et al., 2003).

The following table is a comprehensive illustration of the four key stages characterising a systematic review of a qualitative nature.

Table 2.2 - Key Stages of the Systematic Review Undertaken for this project

Stage 1 – Planning the Review	
Step 1 – Forming a Review Panel	Dawn Aquilina (researcher) Louise Fletcher (Library and Information Scientist, specialising in matters that concern the School of Sport and Exercise Sciences) Professor Ian Henry (supervisor - Sport Policy) Dr Sophia Jowett (Sport and Educational Psychology) Dr David Lavalley (Former Director of studies - Sport Psychology)
Step 2 – Mapping the field of study	Definition, clarification and refinement of research aims. Review of key papers, used to justify key

Conducting scoping study	<p>word selection and review strategy</p> <p>Meta Keywords – Elite OR Professional OR Olympic athletes and Education and University OR Academies</p> <p>Additional Keywords – Career transitions, retirement, post-athletic careers, decision-making, lifestyle management, athletic identity, self-identity, Europe, sport.</p>
Step 3 – Producing a review protocol	Discussion of the research area and its significance, search strategy, study selection criteria. Data extraction forms, project timetable.
Discussion of the problem	The aim of the systematic review is to identify the explanations of elite athletes, educated in European universities, of decision-making in relation to balancing the demands of education and an elite sporting career, including the transitions they go through to meet this end and how they plan for their post-athletic careers.
Search strategy	Several key words were strung together to narrow down the focus.
Define criteria for including studies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Time frame: 1996-2007 2. Academic Relevance 3. Written in English 4. Length (3 pages or more)
Project time-table	Aug 2006 to Feb 2007
Stage 2 – Identifying and evaluating Studies	
Step 4 – Conducting a systematic research	The main search strategy utilised to identify relevant articles was the MetaLib service available online at Loughborough University. This facility allows the screening of a number of databases simultaneously according to one's field of research which makes it highly efficient to access a large number of articles relevant to the study. Records of the searches can be saved online for future reference and to account towards the audit trail, evident at every stage of the systematic review
Group keywords into search strings	<p>Group keywords into search strings</p> <p>E.g.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. elite athletes AND education AND universit* 2. professional athlete* AND transition
Define appropriate databases	ASSIA, ArticleFirst, PsycINFO, Sociological Abstracts, SPORTDiscus, SCOPUS, ERIC, Physical Education Index and Zetoc

Stage 3 - Extracting and Synthesising Data	
Step 5 – Evaluation of studies	Include studies based on set criteria in the review protocol - The populations targeted are elite athletes, professional players and student-athletes. In relation to the sample size the researcher was not restricted to a specific number. Both empirical studies and narrative commentaries were taken into consideration
Step 6 – Conducting data extraction	Provide a historical record for the decisions made during the review process Data Extraction Forms – A further audit measure is that of data extraction forms which hold information about the articles accessed, where and when are they published, and the criteria for inclusion and exclusion. For an illustrative list of these forms please refer to Appendix 1.
Step 7 – Conducting data synthesis	Descriptive and thematic Analysis
Stage 4 – Reporting and dissemination	
Step 8 – Reporting the descriptive and thematic findings	Introduction, review methodology, findings, discussion, conclusion.
Step 9 – Informing research and practice	Dissemination of systematic review findings and analysis

iv. Results of Key word Searches

Following the expert panel session, the meta key words were mapped out for the initial single key word search. Table 2.3 below illustrates the number of 'hits', obtained from the nine databases as identified during the researcher's meeting with the information scientist. The use of the systematic review approach has only really become feasible with the advent of computer searchable databases of (in this case, social sciences) material. The decision concerning which databases to search for materials is obviously crucial and the expertise of the information scientist/librarian on the expert panel was thus critical. Databases were selected for reasons of relevance to the fields of study (social sciences specifically the disciplines of education, psychology, sociology and sport). ASSIA, Article First, psycINFO, Sociological Abstracts, SPORTDiscus, SCOPUS, ERIC, Zetoc and Physical Education Index were

the databases used for this study. A number of others were also initially sampled but rejected since they rendered no relevant references additional to those sourced through the selected databases.

Table 2.3 - Single Key Word Search

Key words	Databases								
	ASSIA	Article First	Zetoc	Psyc Info	Sociological Abstracts	SPORT Discus	SCOPUS	ERIC	Physical education Index
Elite athletes	14	374	440	555	43	1,359	241	49	600
Professional athletes	9	152	123	105	65	389	124	241	111
Education	35,538	301,400	544,891	328,840	76,856	86,428	72,954	842,040	274,985
Universit*	8,186	131,013	1,811,826	446,982	52,100	69,576	42,824	123,568	27,810
(Sport) Academ*	0	1	15	0	0	0	23	7	0
Transition*	4239	80,174	183,292	35,217	17,428	2,528	23,609	13,532	531
Retirement	1,164	7,764	6,967	6,044	3,111	1,563	9,895	4,305	220
Career*	3,848	23,000	20,300	33,730	11,518	8,881	9,895	54,342	1,015
Career decision-making	58	112	93	1,449	47	9	788	1,377	3
Career Transition	5	208	98	204	17	43	396	2143	8
Post-athletic careers	0	0	1	1	0	7	1	1	1
Identity	7,837	25,605	55,575	73,392	92,251	2,032	26,700	11,841	646
Athletic identit*	4	24	34	151	17	69	73	42	31
Lifestyle management	7	178	38	94	3	11	271	202	9
Lifestyle support	2	31	5	10	0	0	475	244	0
National Sports policy	0	12	7	0	4	35	55	31	1
Europe	5,395	78,764	178,516	18,197	25, 165	4,963	29,038	6,997	371

Due to the high number of returns in most of the main categories initially employed (e.g. elite athletes, professional athletes and education) the researcher subsequently opted for a combined search of two key words, to narrow down the search to more manageable numbers. The acceptable level of documents returned by each database for this combined search was set at

300, deemed to be the maximum that could be handled by a single researcher in this time frame.

The two main categories elite athletes and professional athletes were combined with the rest of the sub-categories. The number of hits from the nine databases are illustrated in the two tables below.

Table 2.4 - Results for combined searches of two key words

Meta- Category	<i>Databases</i>								
Elite athlete* And	ASSIA	Article First	Zetoc	PsycInfo	Sociological Abstracts	SPORTDiscus	SCOPUS	ERIC	Physical education Index
Education	1	10	21	258	22	158	17	24	600
University	0	0	23	359	16	207	8	1	199
Sport Academ*	0	14	0	0	0	30	0	2	0
Transition*	1	0	2	76	3	141	10	1	6
Retirement	0	1	2	37	2	86	9	0	8
Career*	2	0	2	29	5	26	17	0	1
Career decision-making	0	0	0	3	0	1	1	0	0
Career transitions	0	0	0	17	1	6	10	0	2
Post-athletic career	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Identit*	0	2	2	91	18	54	14	0	4
Athletic Identity	0	0	0	31	3	1	8	0	0
Lifestyle management	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lifestyle support	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Support Mechanisms	0	0	0	2	0	1		0	0
Sport* polic*	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	2	0
Europe	0	0	0	12	1	11	2	1	2

Table 2.4b – Results for combined searches of two key words *cont.*

Meta- Category	<i>Databases</i>								
Professional player* And	ASSIA	Article First	Zetoc	PsycInfo	Sociological Abstracts	SPORTDiscus	SCOPUS	ERIC	Physical education Index
Education	0	5	2	5	3	9		20*	39
Universit*	1	1	0	7	4	10	13	3*	26
Sport Academ*	0	4	0	0	0	0	6	3	0
Transition*	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	4	0
Retire*	0	6	1	1	0	2	4	1	0
Career*	7	4	1	2	6	17	17	17	4
Identit*	3	0	0	0	4	0	10	7	1
Sport Polic*	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	0
Europe	1	2	0	0	3	2	12	1	1

* A separate search was performed for the two keywords (professional player*² and universit*) in the database ERIC emphasising that they are professional *sport* players because the articles returned for 'professional players' were not relevant to the subject matter.

² The question mark (?) character is used in many database search criteria to represent any character. The star character (*) is used to represent any string of characters.

Since the combined search of elite athletes and (i) education, (ii) university still returned a large number of articles the next set of combined searches used three key words. Elite athletes and education were kept as meta-categories, which were in turn combined with the sub-category -university.

Table 2.5 – Results of three key word searches

Meta- Category	Databases								
<i>Elite athletes And Education</i>	ASSIA	Article First	Zetoc	Psyc Info	Sociological Abstracts	SPORT Discus	SCOPUS	ERIC	Physical education Index
University	0	0	0	210	13	62	17	1	202

**Table 2.
5b – Results of three key word searches cont.**

Meta- Categories	Databases								
<i>Student-athlete* And Universit *</i>	ASSIA	Article First	Zetoc	PsycInfo	Sociological Abstracts	SPORTDiscus	SCOPUS	ERIC	Physical education Index
Transition	2	0	0	58	5	10	1	1	3
Retirement	0	0	0	32	2	8	0	1	0
Career*	2	0		123	12	45	15	5	16
Identit*	1	0	1	134	30	16	14	3	9
Sports policy	0	0	0	1	0	0	3	1	0
Europe	0	0	0	10	3	2	0	0	1

The number of returns in these tables of results are at times misleading because by searching a number of databases simultaneously the researcher could not limit the publishing date to include only those studies that were published since 1996. Hence, the tables include all the studies that were published on that particular keyword or meta-category for the full period covered by all databases searched. For a more accurate representation of the number of entries that the researcher worked with, please refer to the flow chart below .

The flow chart below (Figure 2.3) illustrates the number of retrieved articles and a breakdown of the number of studies that were included and excluded together with some of the criteria that were used to guide this analysis.

(Please note that some of the studies pertain to more than one category and therefore the sum of articles in the category list does not coincide with the global sum of included articles).

At this stage data extraction forms were also recorded for the whole set of studies that the systematic review returned according to the protocol adopted. Criteria for exclusion and inclusion are included next to each entry which were based on the following four measures:

- i. Source/publication status (limited to published journals listed in bibliographic databases and unpublished theses)
- ii. Length of article (more than three pages long)
- iii. Language (only articles published in English were taken into consideration)
- iv. Date (the publication date had to be from 1996 to 2007)

Figure 2.3 - Assessment of the literature retrieved based on defined eligibility criteria

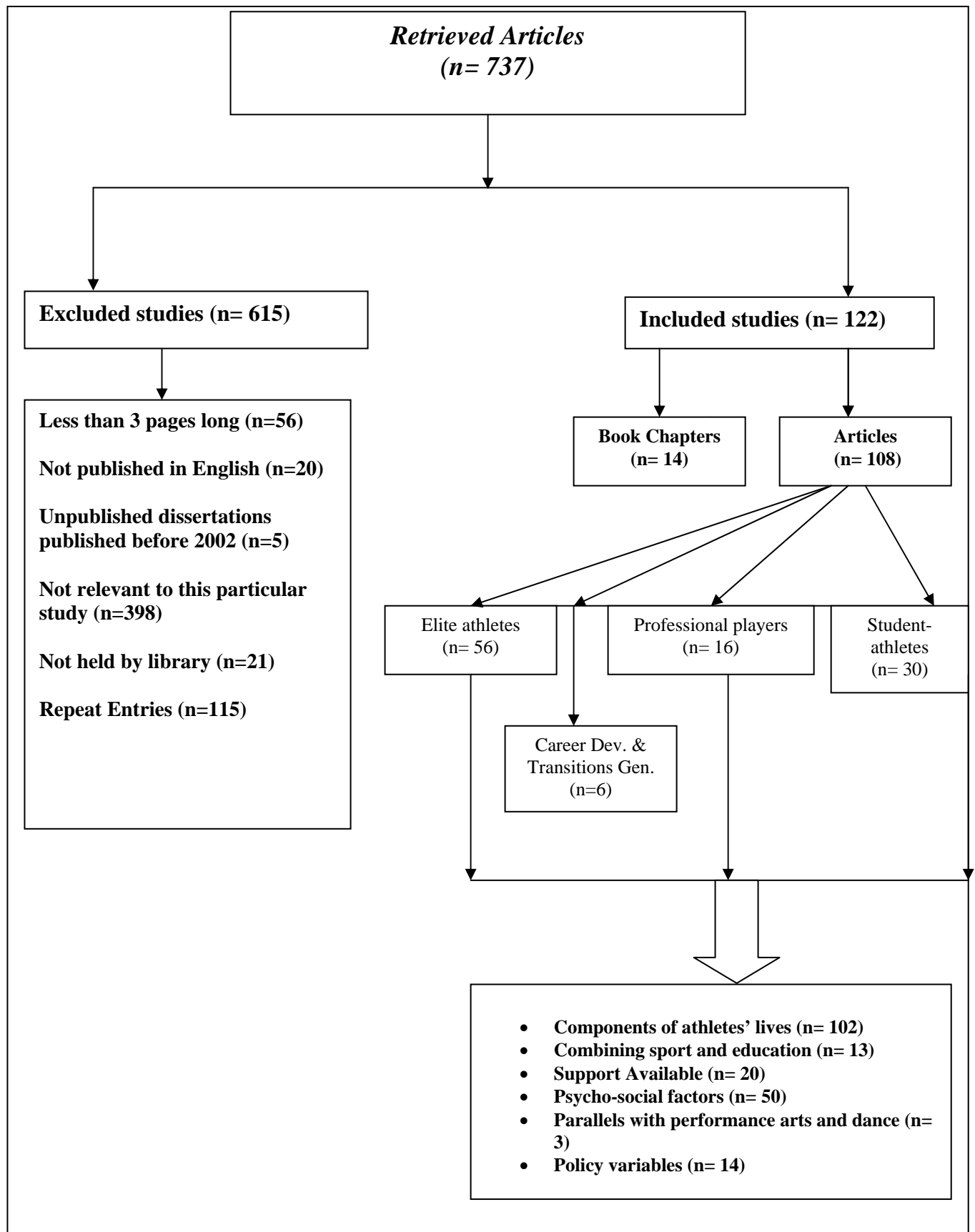
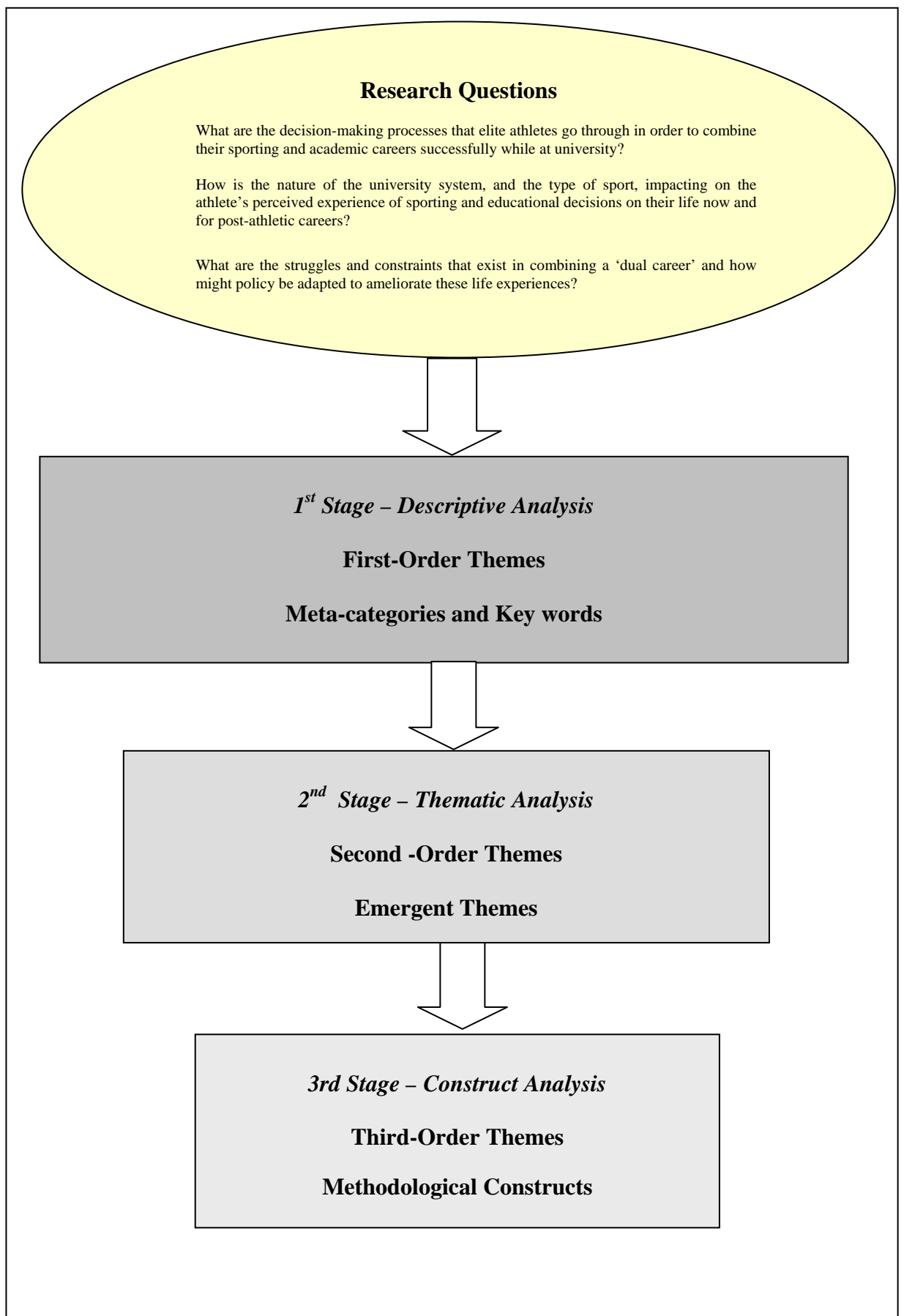


Figure 2.4 – Systematic Review Analysis Strategy



2.2. First Stage - Descriptive Analysis

2.2.1. First Order Themes

The first stage in the analysis of a systematic review in qualitative studies tends to be descriptive in nature and aims to map out the broad categories researched. In this case, the researcher adopted three meta-categories of; student-athletes, elite athletes and professional players. Each of these were in turn cross-searched with a number of other key terms identified by the expert panel and scoping study in the initial stages of this review. These terms were used in order to assess in some significant detail if and how the issues relating to the research questions had been discussed in previous literature. These included elements such as; education, university, academy, career, identity, transition, support systems, retirement and policy. A discussion of the articles that were included follows below to provide the first level of analysis.

Student-Athletes

The first category of student-athletes comprised studies primarily from Europe and North America. The term of 'student-athlete' per se is largely used in the American literature hence the predominance of articles from this source. However, there are examples of adoption of the term by some of the European researchers (McKenna & Dunstan-Lewis, 2004); (De Knop, Wylleman, Van Hoecke, De Martelaer, & Bollaert, 1999).

Although there does not seem to be a strict definition of the term 'student-athlete' it is self-explanatory and refers to a group of individuals who are still in education but also train at a high level in sport. The type of students that were taken into consideration for this systematic review were those who were in higher education.

The issues under discussion in this category range from combining competitive sport and education (McKenna & Dunstan-Lewis, 2004), (Miller &

Kerr, 2002), types of support offered (Curry & Maniar, 2004), (Maniar, Curry, Sommers-Flanagan, & Walsh, 2001), psycho-social factors that affect this target group's experience of higher education (Giacobbi et al., 2004), (Brown, Glastetter-Fender, & Shelton, 2000) and also more general social experiences (Miller & Kerr, 2003).

Professional Players

The relevant articles that were incorporated discussing professional players were predominantly from the United Kingdom and Ireland and were studies conducted mostly on the sport of football (soccer) and to a lesser degree rugby. One study included football players both from the United Kingdom and Canada. The issues raised in these articles could be roughly divided into three parts; those that are encountered:

- i. earlier on in an aspiring professional footballer's life, usually while training at a professional academy (psychosocial competencies and environmental factors conditions associated with success (Holt & Dunn, 2004), support mechanisms available (Richardson, Gilbourne, & Littlewood, 2004), decision-making and career planning (Bourke, 2003)
- ii. during a professional career in football (uncertainty in the working life and risk of injury (McGillvray, Fearn, & McIntosh, 2005), (Roderick, 2006a&b)
- iii. preparation for a post-athletic career; retirement issues (Lavalley, 2005) reformulation of identities (Gearing, 1999) and engagement (or lack of engagement) with educational discourses (McGillvray & McIntosh, 2006)

One study on rugby players was conducted in New Zealand and explored the issue of player burnout. Two of the attributions reported as being a cause for burnout pertinent to this study are the pressures that exist within the highly 'competitive rugby environment' (such as low job security, threat of non-selection, fear of injury, and concerns about life after rugby) which might lead to conflicting values with regards to expectations of others, money, tradition,

welfare and career (Cresswell & Eklund, 2006). The other study based in France by Fleuriel and Vincent (2007) traces the transition that rugby as a sport had to make in becoming a professional sport in 1995. Some of the athletes' experiences are highlighted in the text to illustrate how they are coping with such structural changes in their club set-up. The general idea is that professionalism with its "brutal invasion of the economy" has had significant impact on the personal relationships between players and management and also the professional players' working conditions (Fleuriel & Vincent, 2007:37).

Elite Athletes

This meta-category generated the largest number of articles ranging across different sports and focussing on a range of issues. The studies are mainly based in Europe, North America and Australia. The issues discussed range from the personal - mostly psycho-social factors (micro-level), to the broader policy concepts such as elite athlete development systems (meso-level), and the broader social and cultural context (macro-level) (DeBosscher et al., 2006).

For the purpose of this systematic review and the study in general the definition of 'elite' provided by Baillie and Ogilvie (2002) was utilised referring to those athletes 'whose pursuit of excellence in sport has led to their participation and success in competition at the Olympic or professional level'.

The psycho-social factors affecting elite athletes relate to coping responses (Poczwardowski & Conroy, 2002), general transitions (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004), career development and decision-making (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997); (Cohen, 2000); (Bright, Robert, & Pryor, 2005), career transitions (Heppner, 1998); (Grove, Lavallee, & Gordon, 1998); (Conzelmann & Nagel, 2003); (Harrison & Malia Lawrence, 2004); (Wylleman, Alfermann, & Lavallee, 2004) retirement issues (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000); (Yannick, Bilard, Ninot, & Delignieres, 2003), athletic identity (Murphy, Petitpas, & Brewer, 1996); (Balague, 1999); (Grove, Lavallee, & Gordon, 1997); (Tsang, 2000),

crises management (Stambulova, 2000) and interpersonal relationships (Wylleman, 2000); (Vanden Auweele & Rzewnicki, 2000); (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003).

The policy driven studies are mainly comparative studies undertaken in order to:

- i. explore national elite sport development systems (Oakley & Green, 2001); (Green & Oakley, 2001), (Green, 2004a&b); (Green & Houlihan, 2004)
- ii. identify determinants that can lead to international sporting success (De Bosscher et al., 2006)
- iii. examine factors that contribute to the development and maintenance of expert athletic performance (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002)
- iv. analyse elite sport policy change (Green, 2004a, 2006)

However, there are also some studies looking at a specific policy area in a nation state. Thibault & Babiak (2005) looked at the re-orientation of priorities and actions in the Canadian high-performance system to move towards a more athlete-centred approach, while Reid, Stewart and Thorne (2004) focussed on the implications for developing multidisciplinary sport science teams in Australian elite sport.

The next stage of analysis aimed to elicit the themes that run through the discussions across the three meta-categories providing a better picture of what has already been investigated, which helped the researcher to position this research study strategically within the literature.

2.3. Second Stage – Thematic Analysis

2.3.1. Components of student-athletes' lives

It has been observed by De Knop et al. that "It is only .. [since the early 1990s] .. that initiatives have been developed in Europe favouring the

combination of academic and high level athletic activities” (De Knop et al., 1999:51). The main driving force behind these initiatives was the acknowledgement by various entities of the rising pressures with which student-athletes have to cope in order to balance their academic and sporting commitments. Being an elite athlete has become increasingly demanding at a time when training volume and frequency of competition have clearly intensified (Conzelmann and Nagel, 2003:262). This has immediate implications for the lifestyle of the athlete in terms of time management, required effort and commitment to fulfil his or her role both as a student and athlete.

Using a qualitative approach Miller and Kerr (2002) set out to investigate the athletic, academic and social experiences of intercollegiate student athletes in Canada. The purpose of this study was to:

- i. Identify the central components in the lives of Canadian student-athletes
- ii. Consider the relationships between these components
- iii. Map how these components of their lives unfolded over the length of their university careers

There seemed to be a constant tension on between the three identified components (athletic, academic and social) that constitute a student-athlete’s life. The athletic and academic components clearly took precedence over the social, the latter being the first to be compromised due to the increasing time restrictions. In fact the authors comment that social relationships are strictly confined within the context of athletic events and people. The findings of this study illustrate how contrary to popular opinion Canadian student-athletes were found to be heavily committed to their sporting development. In fact student-athletes dedicated a lot of time and effort into their sport, often compromising their educational success.

In conclusion, the authors recommended that sport psychology practitioners should develop interventions to anticipate this over-identification with the athlete role and encourage athletes to explore and develop multiple role

identities. This is not simply a matter for sport psychologists but also key people working around the athlete. Miller and Kerr urged this support staff to educate themselves better with regard to the risks of 'over-identification with a single role' and emphasised the need for balance.

It has to be mentioned at this stage that this category was very broad since most of the studies discussed the various components of athletes' lives to varying degrees and therefore further qualification had to be made to synthesise the data.

2.3. Combining sport and education – the need for balance

Although the term 'balance' has not been discussed extensively in the literature it is a concept that is widely used in the literature and has been deemed a critical element in an elite athlete's life in a variety of contexts and on a number of levels.

The first level to be taken into consideration is a personal one, and it encompasses the various components that make up the athlete's life, such as sport, education and social relations. Balancing priorities to manage both educational and sporting commitments by elite athletes has been discussed by researchers such as McKenna and Dunstan-Lewis (2004) and Miller and Kerr (2002, 2003). The emphasis is on finding a balance in the various roles and responsibilities that they fulfil, particularly as students and elite athletes. Miller and Kerr (2002) attempt to account for negative academic experiences by suggesting that: there may be other factors such as fatigue, lack of role experimentation, and delayed identity development which were having a significant impact on the relationship between athletic participation and academic performance. As the authors reiterate "there is always the potential to lose sight of the importance of balance in pursuit of one's goals and objectives" (Miller & Kerr, 2003:351). To this end McKenna and Dunstan-Lewis (2004:190) propose that any programme intended to support student-

athletes should aim to “achieve a cognitive shift, from seeing the ‘oppositeness’ of the ‘student’ and ‘athlete’ roles to balancing them”.

The same concerns over maintaining balance with regard to education alongside sporting development in relation to professional athletes have been voiced by McGillvray and McIntosh (2006) and Bourke (2003). Having particular resonance in terms of enhanced opportunities available for post-athletic careers, this group of researchers argue for increased awareness and educational options within professional sport establishments. The link between balance in life and a smoother transition to a post-athletic career has also been documented by Kerr and Dacyshyn (2000:132) in their study with elite gymnasts where they concluded that “athletes should be discouraged from making sport the only avenue from which they derive a sense of personal worth and identity...and have a more ‘normal’ balanced life”.

The second level of argument is that it is not only the athlete who has responsibility for seeking to maintain the potential for balance in his/her lives but also the wider network of people who work around the athlete such as coaches and managers (Miller, Salmela, & Kerr, 2002). Although professional sport institutions such as football academies have gone some way to addressing this with the introduction of Education and Welfare Officers to help the young players develop in a more ‘holistic’ manner (Richardson et al., 2004), it is yet to be investigated whether a level of balance is truly maintained due to the heavy demands placed by the sport and the particular subculture characterising the sport “In the footballing dream world where the game shapes the attitudes, behaviours and responses of its young recruits to the detriment of formal educational attainment” (McGillvray et al., 2005:113). The same goes for the professional rugby players who were interviewed by Cresswell and Eklund (2006) who have voiced considerable concerns about pressure in maintaining balance in life in general. Other relationships were found to suffer as the athletes struggle to fulfil their year-round sporting commitments on and off the pitch. The experience of increased stress was highlighted as these national team athletes tried to reconcile media and

public expectations with their own expectations, often compromising the latter.

2.3.3. Types of Support available at Academic Institutions

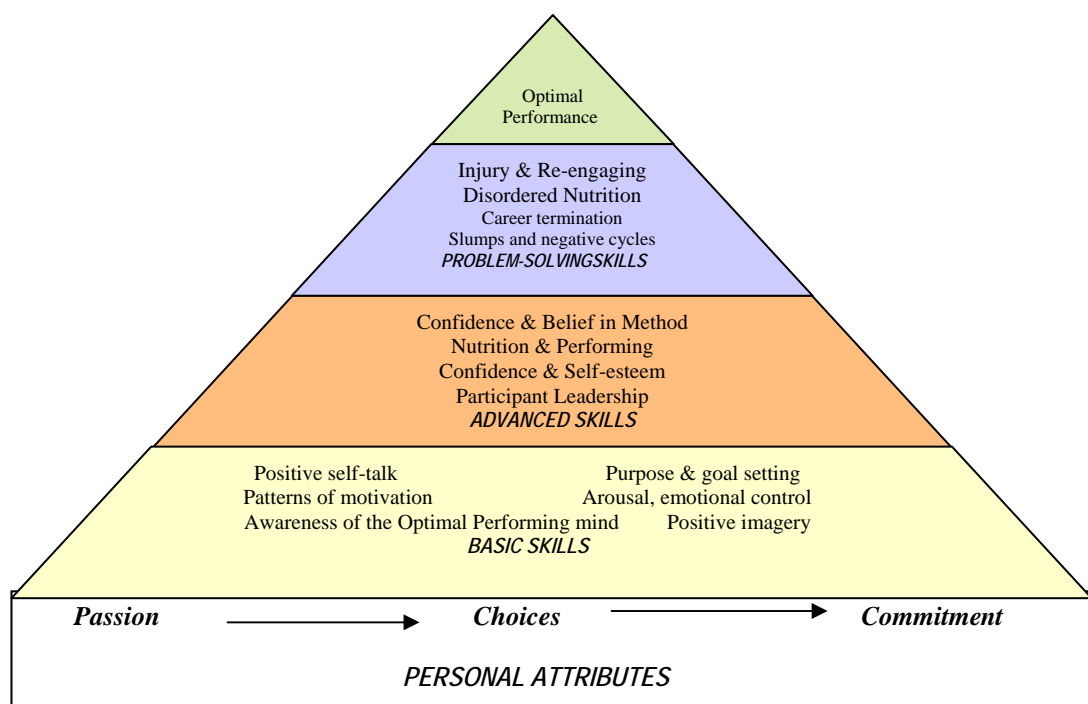
In their study of student-athletes at a leading 'traditional' British university, McKenna and Dunstan-Lewis (2004) identified three main areas of concern: (i) establishing priorities of the 'student' and 'athlete' roles, (ii) relationships with academia and (iii) lack of support and understanding. Although these findings echo in part earlier studies conducted in North American colleges it is still a critical text, primarily because it is one of the very few attempts to shed light on the university experience of student-athletes in Britain. More importantly it differentiates itself in the sense that the student-athletes at this university are equally driven to achieve their goals in their academic and sporting lives. As the authors pointed out the student-athletes are high achievers in both the sport and academic domains. This contrasts with the other studies which illustrate how most of the student-athletes considered felt that they had to compromise one aspect for the benefit of the other at different stages of their academic lives. To this end this study aims to consider ways to improve the quality of services provided in their in-house support programme 'Advanced Support Squad'.

In a similar vein, De Knop et al. (1999), present the case of one particular university in Belgium, which established the department of Top-level sport and study and therefore made it possible for elite student-athletes to achieve academic and sporting excellence without having to resort to alternative ways such as studying in American colleges to combine the two. However, in order for this to be possible the authors argue that there has to be a structural and organisational framework/programme incorporating services and personnel that takes into consideration the needs of the student-athletes and helps them to combine sport and academic life successfully. Given the relative increase in freedom found in colleges and universities, student-athletes have to be even more vigilant that their studies do not suffer and thus having

support services available within their academic institution will contribute to ensuring that student-athletes develop their academic career effectively (De Knop et al., 1999).

Congruent with the support initiatives developed in Europe, a NCAA Division I University developed an academic course focussing on the application of intervention strategies specific to issues and problems faced by student-athletes in collegiate environments (Curry & Maniar, 2004). Although the principal aim of this course was to aid peak performance in sports, the content included psychological skills training which was deemed critical to the day-to-day decision making processes that athletes go through. By utilising the optimal performance success pyramid (see Figure 2.6 below) the emphasis lies in showing how long-term outcome success is derived from the daily choices athletes make. The prevalent argument is that if the athletes are in control of the small everyday choices of, for example, working out, eating correctly and thinking positive thoughts, most often it will lead to having opportunities to make more important choices in relation to school, relationships and career (Curry & Maniar, 2004).

Figure 2.6 - Optimal Performance Success Model



Adapted from Curry & Maniar (2004:302)

In an earlier study Curry et. al (2001) evaluated the athletes willingness to seek help from various support staff when they encounter sport performance problems. This article tackled service provision purely from an athlete's point of view. Tracing the type of services that athletes availed themselves of and the people they talked to during traumatic situations, the authors draw the reader's attention to the fact that historically athletes predominantly seek help from family, friends and coaches but rarely seek assistance from counsellors. A plausible reason for this preference is that athletes depend more on people who are readily available and close to them in their lives. In conclusion the researchers generally conclude that athletes are complex and sensitive when it comes to making decisions about what type of professional assistance they seek.

2.3.4. Type of support available at Sport Institutions

(i) Within National Institutes of Sport

ACE UK (Athlete Career and Education Programme) was established in 1999 by the UK Sports Institute as a strategy to provide career, education and personal development guidance. Adapted largely from the Australian ACE program, it aims to offer useful guide tips and support for the athletes to help them achieve a balanced lifestyle. This is based on the premise that 'athletes with a balanced lifestyle are more likely to achieve their sporting goals, cope better with problems such as injury and retirement, and have more confidence in their future after sport' (North & Lavalley, 2004). Therefore, programmes on offer include:

- Personal development courses
- Education guidance
- Career planning
- Career transition support
- Olympic and Paralympic Employment Network

(ii) Within professional sports academies

The FA (Football Association) in England is adamant that ‘the education of the player should not be compromised by the player’s soccer development’ and thus it is now mandatory for clubs to appoint a Head of Education and Welfare if clubs wish to ensure that their academy achieves recognition by the FA (Richardson et al., 2004). According to the FA Technical Department’s Charter for Quality, 1997 the Education and Welfare officer’s role includes providing advice and support about vocational programmes and career choices (Richardson et al., 2004). Further, an educational programme overseen by the Footballers Further Education and Vocational Training Society is offered and requires that full-time athletes dedicate ten hours per week to gain this academic/vocational qualification. Although, clubs are in fact remunerated for offering this service, the standard of such vocational courses seems to be questionable (McGillvray & McIntosh, 2006) and the general perception is still that professional players in England have too much free time with “little by way of intellectual stimulation” (Bourke, 2003:415).

Psycho-social factors

2.3.5. Careers

Baruch and Rosenstein (1992 cited in Baruch, 2004:61) defined career as being a “process of development of the employee along a path of experience and jobs in one or more organizations”. This more current definition sees career paths as being “multidirectional, dynamic and fluid” as opposed to the more traditional view where careers were seen to be more “linear, static and rigid”. The latter tended to be highly structured where success was measured in terms of income, rank and status whereas the relatively modern approach takes other elements into consideration such as “inner satisfaction, life balance, autonomy and freedom” (Baruch, 2004:61). However, it is not only the benchmarks of what constitutes a successful career that have changed but also a number of other characteristics as Table 2.6 below illustrates.

Table 2.6 – Characteristics of traditional and ‘modern’ careers

Aspect	Traditional deal	Transformed deal
Environment characteristic	Stability	Dynamism
Career choice being made	Once, at an early career age	Repeated, sometimes cyclical, at different age stages
Main career responsibility lies with	Organization	Individual
Career horizon (workplace)	One organization	Several organizations
Career horizon (time)	Long	Short
Scope of change	Incremental	Transformational
Employer expectations	Loyalty and commitment	Long time working hours
Employee expectations	Job security	Investment in employability
Progress criteria	Advance according to tenure	Advances according to results and knowledge
Success means	Winning the tournament i.e. progress on the hierarchy ladder	Inner feeling of achievement
Training	Formal programmes, Generalist	On-the-job, company specific
Essence of career direction	Linear	Multidirectional

Adapted from Baruch (2004: 66)

Baruch (2004) observed that careers themselves are in transition, and therefore in order for individuals to cope with such periods of change, they need to gain ‘survival tools’ to help them remain in gainful employment throughout the life-course. These tools have been conceptualised in career literature as resilience, intelligence and employability. Resilience has to do with taking ownership of one’s own career as the individual negotiates his/her own pathway at every stage. Gaining employability suggests that individuals should strive to better themselves in terms of their competences in the work place, which will enable them to secure the employment of their choice whether they move on or are made redundant. Intelligence is all about “effective career management by the individual”. Arthur et al. (1995 cited in Baruch 2004:61) sums it up in the following manner:

The ‘intelligence’ meant the ‘know why’ (values, attitudes, internal needs, identity, and life style; ‘know how’ (career competencies: skills, expertise, capabilities, tacit and explicit knowledge); and ‘know whom’ (networking, relationships, how to find the right people).

Career Decision- Making

Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) contend that career decision-making is context related and cannot be separated from the background, culture and life-histories of the individuals. Building on existing models of career decision-making (largely in the psychology literature), they attempted to add a sociological dimension to develop a theory that encompassed:

- Social and cultural factors with 'personal' choices
- A more sophisticated model of learning
- Individual preferences merged with opportunity structures in a way that incorporates serendipity

Coining the term as 'careership', the decisive element is what is referred to as 'horizons for action' referring to the "arena within which actions can be taken and decisions made". This is basically what people usually perceive to be a potential career opportunity for them as a result of the influence subjected through their habitus, external education, and the opportunity structures of the labour market. This also has implications for the type of career advice that these young people would listen to, since if it falls outside their horizons, then it will not fit with their "existing schematic view of themselves" and their perceptions of appropriate career opportunities (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997:34).

Career Decision-making in Elite Sport

It has been argued by Sugarman (2001:29) that deciding to specialise in a particular career 'in order to optimise the chances of career success and advancement' may come at a price as choosing a particular career path might "close off other potentially rewarding avenues". The hypothesis suggests that:

Concentration of efforts in one domain may restrict development in another, as for example when the development of musical or athletic talent is at the expense of a broad range of social activities (Sugarman, 2001:14)

Tracing some of the life histories of prospective Irish professional footballers, Bourke (2003) sheds some light on the typical age of which such career decisions are made. Her study reveals that 50% of the respondents decided on a professional career in football before the age of 15, some when they were just seven years old. This has some very immediate implications for the type of education received by these individuals. In fact Bourke reiterates that 'many soccer players do not complete formal education', and the study goes to show that only one third of the sample completed secondary level education. As for third level schooling, only two per cent attended a higher education institution. McGillvray and McIntosh (2006:375) try to account for this phenomenon in the context of Scottish professional football by arguing that "young men disassociate themselves from formal education long before they are able to leave school". The attractions of becoming a professional player outweigh by far the importance of getting a good education in these young people's minds and therefore the likelihood is that the higher the attraction towards the sport is, the fiercer the level of downgrading of their education.

The findings in the study carried out by Brown, Glasstetter-Fender and Shelton (2000) with college student-athletes suggest that the more hours spent in the sport, the lower the level of self-efficacy for career decision-making tasks. This finding is congruent with earlier studies that have claimed that "extensive time demands and sport role commitments, place athletes at risk for adjustment difficulties and career-development deficiencies" (McPherson, 1980; Ogilvie & Howe, 1982 in Brown et al., 2000).

Career Transitions

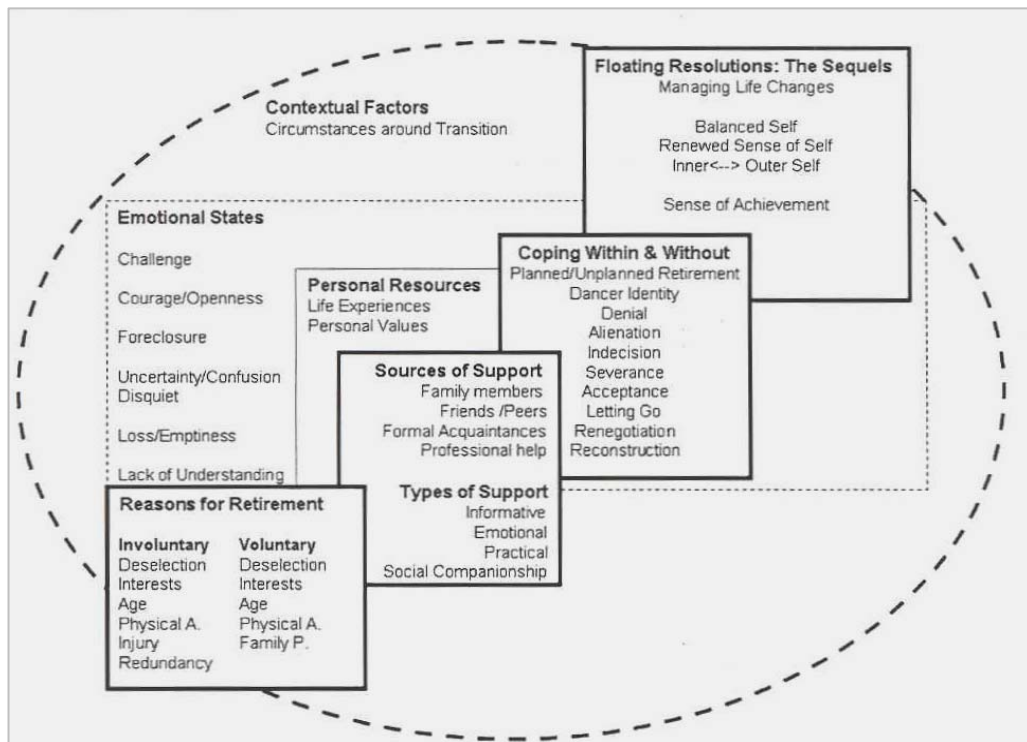
During the course of career development, an individual goes through a series of transitions or turning-points, in which s/he usually goes through a significant transformation of identity and thus change may be incremental or sudden (Strauss, 1962 in Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997). Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997:39) discerned three different types of turning points: structural (determined by the external institutions involved); self-initiated (brought about

by the person him/herself as a response to a range of factors in their personal lives) and forced (determined by external events and/or actions of others).

In her study on the retirement of ballet dancers, Roncaglia (2006) developed a career transition model in the ballet dancing profession but that has particular resonance within the elite sport domain. The emergent five themes were classified as follows:

1. Reasons for retirement
2. Sources of support and types
3. Emotional states
4. Coping within and without
5. Floating resolutions

Figure 2.7- Career Transition Model for Ballet Dancers



Taken from Roncaglia (2006:188)

Characteristics of a professional sporting career

Becoming a professional player is seen by many as a 'prestigious' form of employment (Roderick, 2006a) and evokes images of grandeur as it allows certain individuals to construct their 'glorified selves' (Adler and Adler, 1989 in Roderick, 2006a) and these identities are recognised by the rest of the public as such. However, the choice of this particular career comes at a price and the researchers in this field have striven to uncover the 'darker' aspects of this 'desirable' career.

These negative elements concern issues of intense, and at times, ruthless competition to achieve selection (Cresswell & Eklund, 2006), the disparity between supply and demand where the former markedly exceeds the latter (Bourke, 2003) which often lead to wasteful and unsustainable player-development practices in professional clubs (McGillvray & McIntosh, 2006). Moreover, the instability and short-term cycle of a professional career hampered by the pervasive risk of injury and the inescapable vulnerability to ageing (Roderick, 2006a) diminish the future career prospects of these players.

To complicate matters there does not seem to be a logical progression in how this type of career should evolve (Roderick, 2006b), coupled with the gradual rise of attrition in professional football contracts in some countries (e.g. Scotland), players have had to resort to part-time contracts in some instances. An alarming statistic from McGillvray and McIntosh's (2006) study on Scottish professional football clubs is that only one out of 160 will never need a job outside the sport. A further concern in professional football is that unlike other more conservative professions (such as medicine or the law), working abroad does not always mean that on return home a player is likely to be promoted. 'There is no guarantee of success, and should he decide to return home, he is often labelled a failure and may find it difficult to resume his playing career (O'Brien, 2002 cited in Bourke, 2003). Statistics in England consolidate this high rate of fallout from the industry. Citing Monk (2000) in

McGillvray et al., (2005) it is estimated that 75% of football apprentices do not make it in professional football.

Taking all these elements into consideration, all these researchers echo to some degree McGillvray and McIntosh's (2006) concerns with regard to the importance in engaging as much as possible with educational opportunities. Professional players should thus try and develop transferable skills and/or obtain some qualifications that can help them overcome some of the difficulties inherent in a professional sporting career. Further elaboration of the growing importance placed on education will follow in the subsequent sections.

Planning Post-Athletic Careers

Criticism of professional sport clubs and academies has developed since these institutions seem to have inculcated an anti-intellectual philosophy whereby education is seen as a threat to the sporting development of these talented athletes. Although, the F.A. in England expects football academies to provide a range of vocational courses, clubs are still placing significant restrictions on the level of educational attainment of their players. As O'Donoghue (1999, in McGillvray and McIntosh, 2006) noted club managers are unhappy about the length of time players are expected to be in the classroom and therefore do not go far in encouraging it. McGillvray and McIntosh (2006) note that further strain is detected as the quality of some educational programmes provided by professional clubs is questionable leaving the players quite disappointed with the educational opportunities on offer. These trends are not only apparent with younger footballers but senior professionals also exhibit apathy towards their educational development, and it would seem some senior professionals 'deliberately' avoid thinking about their future as a defence mechanism against the harsh reality of a post-football identity (McGillvray & McIntosh, 2006). Thus planning for a post-athletic career does not come without complications. More often than not having no academic qualifications and no perceived transferable skills instantly places these individuals at a disadvantage. Such attitudes coupled

with a fragile labour market has led to a growing interest in matters of players' education and development by players' trade unions; the Professional Football Association in England and the Scottish Professional Football Association. McGillvray and McIntosh (2006:103) note that:

These trade unions now direct much of their effort (and finance) toward the preparation of professional players for a postfootball identity – an increasingly important role given the precarious futures facing lower league professional players in the post-Bosman era.

Players have recently begun to become more aware of these risks and have started to make some conscious decisions with regards to their education to prepare better for this inevitable transition. However, McGillvray and McIntosh (2006) still argue that these decisions are at best pragmatic, outcome-based and very few players ponder on the reasons for taking up educational programmes.

Career Advice and Support

When it comes to providing advice to young people about prospective careers, Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997:34) claim that “this has to fit with their existing schematic view of themselves and their perception of appropriate career opportunities”. This has clear implications for career advisers working with young athletes since as has been argued earlier, most players' self-perception within academies and beyond seems to be that there is not much more to their identity than their sport. “Being a football player is not just something they do but is something they are” (Roderick, 2006b:246). Therefore, urging players to explore alternative roles outside football may reinforce anxiety. Unfortunately most of it is a result of ‘misguided assumptions’ and ‘trained incapacities’ nurtured within the professional club set-ups whereby the general perception is that the only thing that players know how to do is to play football, developing one-dimensional identities for their athletes. McGillvray and McIntosh (2006:385) point out that even in the event of serious injury, “players remain largely devoid of realistic alternatives

and continue to exhibit extraordinary (and unwarranted) faith in the extended corporate responsibility of their employers to take care of them”.

This holds true not only for professional players but also for other elite athletes as well. North and Lavalley (2004:82) found that 32% of the elite athletes in the UK whom they surveyed intended to work in an area connected to sport after their retirement. The authors suggest that “the choice of sport as a future career may suggest that some athletes have not developed skills, and not gained experience, in any other areas...which may not be the most desirable outcome”. This is further reflected in the relatively low usage of career transition services in a study conducted on the Australian ACE programme (Gorely et al., 2001 cited in North and Lavalley, 2004) as athletes seem to place hardly any importance on retirement issues, as a consequence of their over reliance on their sport to provide them with opportunities.

2.3.6. Athletic Identity

Brewer, Van Raalte and Linder (1993, cited in Miller & Kerr, 2003) characterised athletic identity as consisting of “cognitive, affective, behavioural and social concomitants of identifying with the athletes role”. From the studies that were reviewed, general premise is that investment in the athlete role often comes at a cost leading to negative repercussions. In a more recent study by Brewer, Van Raalte and Petitpas (2000) athletic identity was found to be inversely related to coping and adjusting to transitions especially during retirement. Over dependence by the athletes on their athletic identity not only seems to cause all sorts of ‘maladaptive’ practices but also hinder post sport career planning (Grove et al., 1997). There is also evidence of a strong link with identity foreclosure; which has been defined as the individual’s premature commitment to a certain career and lifestyle without engaging in exploratory behaviour to try out new roles and identities. Termed also in the literature as ‘role engulfment’ by Adler and Adler (1989, cited in Miller & Kerr, 2003), this suggests that the athletes stick to ‘a

preferred role identity at the expense of meaningful exploration of other, available roles.

In a study by Miller and Kerr (2003:198) using Canadian university student-athletes to examine role experimentation, the authors commented on analysis of previous literature:

Both Adler and Adler and Sparkes noted that the glorified self encouraged athletes to compromise the multidimensionality of current and future selves. These qualitative studies allow readers to understand the conflicts and contradictions that take place between role identities and individual's efforts to manage self-identities.

According to this study's findings participants' role experimentation was limited to three spheres: athletic, academic and social and it was concluded that student-athletes identify more with their athletic role at the beginning of their university life but gradually move to what has been termed as 'Deferred Role experimentation stage' which reflects the student-athletes' increased commitment to the other two spheres.

It is generally understood now that athletes who identify themselves strongly with their athletic identity are highly susceptible to develop a unidimensional identity whereby being an athlete seems all there is to be (Balague, 1999). Although there is some evidence that having an exclusive athletic identity may have a positive effect on sport performance (Danish, 1983, Wethner and Orlick, 1986 cited in Brewer et al., 2000), more recent studies seem to indicate that there are more negative connotations, not only during the athlete's athletic career but continue also during his/her post-athletic career. On leaving the sport, 'athletes not only require acquiring new knowledge and skills' but also need to redefine themselves. This process of 're-making one's identity' becomes increasingly difficult if the athlete's sense of identity is tied almost exclusively to his/her past athletic identity, affecting poorly their transition and adjustment into their 'new' lives (Gearing, 1999). This adjustment process involves an inevitable shift in the athletes' perception of

who they are, most of the time bringing along “a state of disorientation and loss of identity” until the individual finally comes to a “re-orientation and new definition of self” (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000:132).

In a study carried out by Brown, Glasstetter-Fender and Shelton (2000), 189 collegiate-student athletes were surveyed to explore relations between career decision-making, self-efficacy, career locus of control, identity foreclosure and athletic identity. Providing an explanation of how these terms have been defined in the literature the authors go on to explore how the heavy demands placed by the sport in terms of training, travelling and playing are impacting on each of these elements. In terms of athletic identity it was expected that if athletes identify strongly or even exclusively with their athlete role this may have a negative influence on career planning however since most of the athletes surveyed did not see a professional career in sport as being a realistic option, the findings suggest that athletes’ athletic and student role identities are equally salient (Brown et al., 2000).

Future Career Directions

Building on the findings of McGillvray and McIntosh (2006) and Roderick (2006b) with regard to the importance of honing the set of transferable skills developed in the world of elite sport to the post-sport career, Roncaglia (2006) draws parallels for professional dancers. She argues “they are used to working very hard, they are disciplined and ought to be seen as an excellent resource for society after their performing career has terminated” (Roncaglia, 2006:189). In short, a “good investment” for future employers. The author then goes on to develop her discussion further by drawing parallels with the more generic career development trends.

The first important development to point out is that due to recent demographic changes, the model of learning for a lifetime career is no longer applicable and instead we find a number of relatively shorter career paths in an individual’s life. Therefore as Baruch (2004) argues the focus is now on ‘employability’ rather than a secure job. Moreover, we are moving away from

a linear career path to a more multidirectional one (Baruch, 2004 cited in Roncaglia, 2006:191).

Secondly, the prognosis of new paradigms for the workforce of 2016 foresees major shifts in the career development of individuals such as: (i) “alternate career paths rather than a longitudinal career, (ii) work/family balance rather than career success, (iii) lifelong learning rather than academic degrees, (iv) competencies and development rather than position and title, and even (v) a career sabbatical rather than retirement” (Nowack, 2005 in (Roncaglia, 2006:191). This has immediate implications for the post-sport/dance career of professional athletes and dancers since their career development seem to be already reflecting these future trends of ‘retirement and rehirement’ on a number of instances in an individual’s working life span (Roncaglia, 2006).

2.3.7. Transitions - General context

Colley (2007) notes that discussions about transitions are generating political and academic interest both in the UK and Europe as policy-makers are becoming increasingly concerned with the effective management of transitions in contexts such as learning, as this is one of the opportunities that countries have to “increase the competitiveness of their economies” (Colley, 2007:427). Failure to do so as has been argued by Fouad and Bynner (2008) is regarded as a major challenge to these policy makers as poor transitions are gradually being associated more with “marginalized lifestyles, criminality and economic disadvantage” (Fouad & Bynner, 2008:248). As Schlossberg (1981) argues transitions are an inevitable part of an individual’s life and therefore learning how to deal with them successfully can help to lessen the level of disruptiveness that is characteristic of such an event both for the benefit of the person and society at large.

Transitions have been defined in a myriad of ways in the literature, however the gist of the term implies ‘a process of change over time’ (Colley, 2007:428)

One of the more inclusive definitions is the one provided by Schlossberg (1981:5) in her psychosocial study on human adaptation to transition:

A transition can be said to occur if an event or non-event results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behaviour and relationships

Schlossberg (1981) highlights the fact that transitions whether positive or negative, life-changing or ordinary, are always followed by a period of upheaval in which old habits, taken for granted assumptions and relationships are questioned and re-evaluated. This process of change occurs in the instance of both an 'event'; which refers to anticipated life changes such as going to university or marriage and also a 'non-event'; which encompasses less obvious life changes and other aspirations in life that never materialise for example failing to conceive a planned baby (Sugarman, 2001:144). However, Schlossberg's major concern is not over the actual type of transition but more importantly how this fits within the broader context of the individual's life stage, perception and situation at that particular time. Each of these concepts has been taken into consideration in the formulation of her model for analyzing human adaptation to transition which is illustrated in Figure 2.9 below.

Transitions through the life course

Colley (2007) in her overview of how learning transitions are being conceptualised in the literature distinguishes between (i) institutional transitions, (ii) transitions between institutional contexts, (iii) 'life-as-transition' and (iv) individual and collective transitions of a broader social and cultural nature. She stresses the point that by adopting a transitional approach she is not only concerned with formal learning at established institutions but also 'informal learning about who we can become and where we can locate ourselves socially and spatially' (Colley, 2007:428).

Institutional transitions represent the various stages within academic and vocational career pathways, and therefore include transitions such as going from nursery to compulsory schooling, from secondary to either higher education or employment. An individual might then typically go through a number of occupations throughout his/her working life and then retirement. Colley notes that such an institutional view of transitions is dominant within the policy literature and lies at the core of European policies as 'more specific measures for education, training and mobility to prepare young people for transition into employment' have been incorporated in the re-launch of the Lisbon Strategy (European Commission, 2005 cited in Colley, 2007:429). However, the author also argues against the seemingly simplistic notions of smooth and successful progression through these life stages evident in some of these policy documents. Echoing Hodkinson & Sparkes (1997:41) concerns about "the futility of policy-making that over simplifies, or is ignorant of the social and cultural complexity involved in career decision-making made by young people" the authors urge for a more integrated approach.

The second type of transitions are those which occur "between institutional contexts but with a more complex layering of experiences" (Colley, 2007:429). Such perspectives are located more within educational research studies as they look at the way institutions for example schools or universities influence the opportunities and constraints experienced by the individual and the type of transitions he/she goes through. The third type of transitions are 'life-as-transition'. This approach denotes that the individual is constantly going through periods of change during the life-course. This particular approach has been adopted in some of the feminist research. The fourth type focuses on those transitions that take into consideration the broader social and cultural context through the life-course. This approach has been adopted more within the anthropological, sociological and psychological literature as the works of Hodkinson & Sparkes (1997) and Lavalley & Wylleman (2003) attest.

By adopting a similar developmental perspective which takes into account the broader context of the individual, Wylleman and Lavalley (2003) focussed

exclusively on athletes. By identifying seven dimensions to athletes' development which include: athletic, academic, psychological, social, legal, financial and vocational factors, this represents the first attempt to build a conceptual model that considered athletes' career transitions more holistically.

Developed predominantly within the discipline of psychology, Wylleman and Lavallee's (2003) developmental model on transitions faced by athletes addresses the individual's development across four domains: athletic, psychological, psycho-social and academic, comprising of a number of transitions that an athlete can be expected to experience in life. The rationale for the development of such a model was based 'on the strong concurrent, interactive and reciprocal nature of transitions' which not only impacted on the athletic career of athletes but was found to have a significant influence in other aspects of life such as academia and professional employment (Marthinus, 2007:55). The underlying premise of this model implies that if an individual is able to effectively manage and cope with a transitional period in one domain of life this would impact positively on other aspects.

The value of such a model is in its ability to conceptualise how there are decisive moments with an athlete's life where a number of critical transitions are running parallel to each other which can lead to challenges that need to be overcome in order to ensure a smooth career progression. Although the authors insist that the ages at which the transition can be expected in the model (see Figure 2.8 below) are tentative it is nevertheless useful to indicate when a particular transition is likely to take place which can help student-athletes to prepare for such an eventuality.

However, a limitation of this model is that it only includes 'normative' transitions which refer to those expected transitions such as progressing from junior to senior level competition or from primary to secondary schooling. It thus lacks consideration of the likelihood of non-normative transitions which can include factors such as suffering a major injury or having to change coaches unexpectedly. Other types of transitions that are not accounted for

in the model have been highlighted by Schlossberg (1984). She terms these ‘non-events’ referring to those expected events which never materialised. Such examples within a student-athlete’s life include not being selected for a major sporting tournament despite initial expectations, or failing to make a full recovery on coming back from injury. As with professional career transitions, non-events tend to be more problematic, given the athlete’s lack of control over decisions being made.

Figure 2.8 - A Developmental perspective on transitions faced by athletes at athletic, individual, psychosocial, and academic/vocational levels

AGE	10	15	20	25	30	35
Athletic Level	Initiation Development		Mastery		Discontinuation	
Psychological Level	Childhood Adolescence		Adulthood			
Psycho-social Level	Parents	Peers		Partner		Family
	Siblings	Coach		Coach		(Coach)
	Peers	Parents				
Academic Vocational Level	Primary	Secondary	Higher	Vocational Training		
	Education	Education	Education	Professional Occupation		

Note: A dotted line indicates that the age at which the transition occurs is an approximation

Figure taken from Wylleman & Lavallee (2003:516)

Drawing predominantly on a psychological perspective, Wylleman & Lavallee (2003) also discuss those transitions occurring at a psychological level, tracing the stages that an individual goes through from childhood to adulthood, including those at a psycho-social level which typically include an individual’s interpersonal relationships. The basic premise behind this model is that the effective coping in each transition experienced within each of these four levels, will have an impact on the overall athletic talent development of the athlete.

Decision-making around transitions

Levinson et. al’s seminal work on adult development views the life course as having two types of phases; the transitional phase which is termed as ‘structure-changing’ and the more steady phase, defined as ‘structure building’. The principle behind this perspective is that each phase between transitions tends to last from five to seven years, at which point the individual

is faced with the need to make major life decisions and commitments concerning elements such as 'education, career and intimate relationships (Sugarman, 2001:76). Examples of structure changing decisions might include choosing whether to go to university or not, deciding which degree to take up, which might also include decisions about leaving home and living with peers for the first time in their life. Having made these decisions, the next phase is one where the individual has to live with the consequences of those decisions and s/he therefore moves into a structure building phase. The general aim is to acquire a good 'fit' between the person and his/her structure although Levinson reiterates that from the onset this is a finite period until the next structure-changing phase starts.

Athletic Career transitions

Within the sporting literature the career transition that has been extensively discussed is retirement from sport. Formerly seen as a singular event, it is now being regarded by researchers as a transitional phase (Wylleman et al., 2004). The main distinction highlighted by researchers seems to depend on whether the decision to retire was made voluntarily by the athlete or whether it was forced due to reasons such as de-selection, age or injury. Congruent with other studies, Erpic et al., (2004) have shown that the greater the sense of control the athlete has over the decision, the smoother the transition to a post-athletic career will be. This also depends greatly on a number of athletic and non-athletic factors listed below.

Table 2.7 – Factors affecting the retirement from elite sport process

Athletic factors	Non-athletic factors
Voluntary nature of the decision	Age
Gradualness of sport career termination	Educational Status
Subjective evaluation of sports achievement	Positive non-athletic transitions
Post-Sports life planning	Negative non-athletic transitions
Athletic Identity	

Adapted from Erpic Cecic et al., 2004

In her study on retired gymnasts, Dacyshyn (1999) focused more on the emotional turmoil that some athletes seem to go through on leaving their sport. Some suffer difficulties such as depression, eating disorders, substance abuse and even suicide. Although support programmes have been implemented to help cope with retirement in some countries such as Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom, the focus is decidedly on career planning with hardly any regard for the social, psychological and emotional impact of retirement. For example it has been argued that in France there are neither national programmes nor career advisers to help athletes cope with retirement and therefore the onus is usually on the athlete to seek psychological help should she/he start experiencing difficulties in coping (Stambulova, Stephan, & Japhag, 2007).

Dacyshyn (1999) observed that the nature and extent of adjustments required generally depended on: (i) the nature of sport experiences, (ii) the quality of the coach-athlete relationship and (iii) the circumstances surrounding the decision to retire. Adding another layer of complexity to this transition out of sport, Stambulova et al., (2007:116) show how retirement is a “multidimensional, multilevel and multifactor process in which nationality/culture plays a rather important role”.

Coping with general transitions

Heppner (1998) in her study to assess psychological resources/barriers that adults may experience during a career transition, defined the latter as a situation where three types of changes could take place:

- task change (a shift to a new set of tasks within the same workplace)
- position change (either a different role at the same workplace or the same role but at a new workplace)
- occupation change (a change in tasks, roles and workplace)

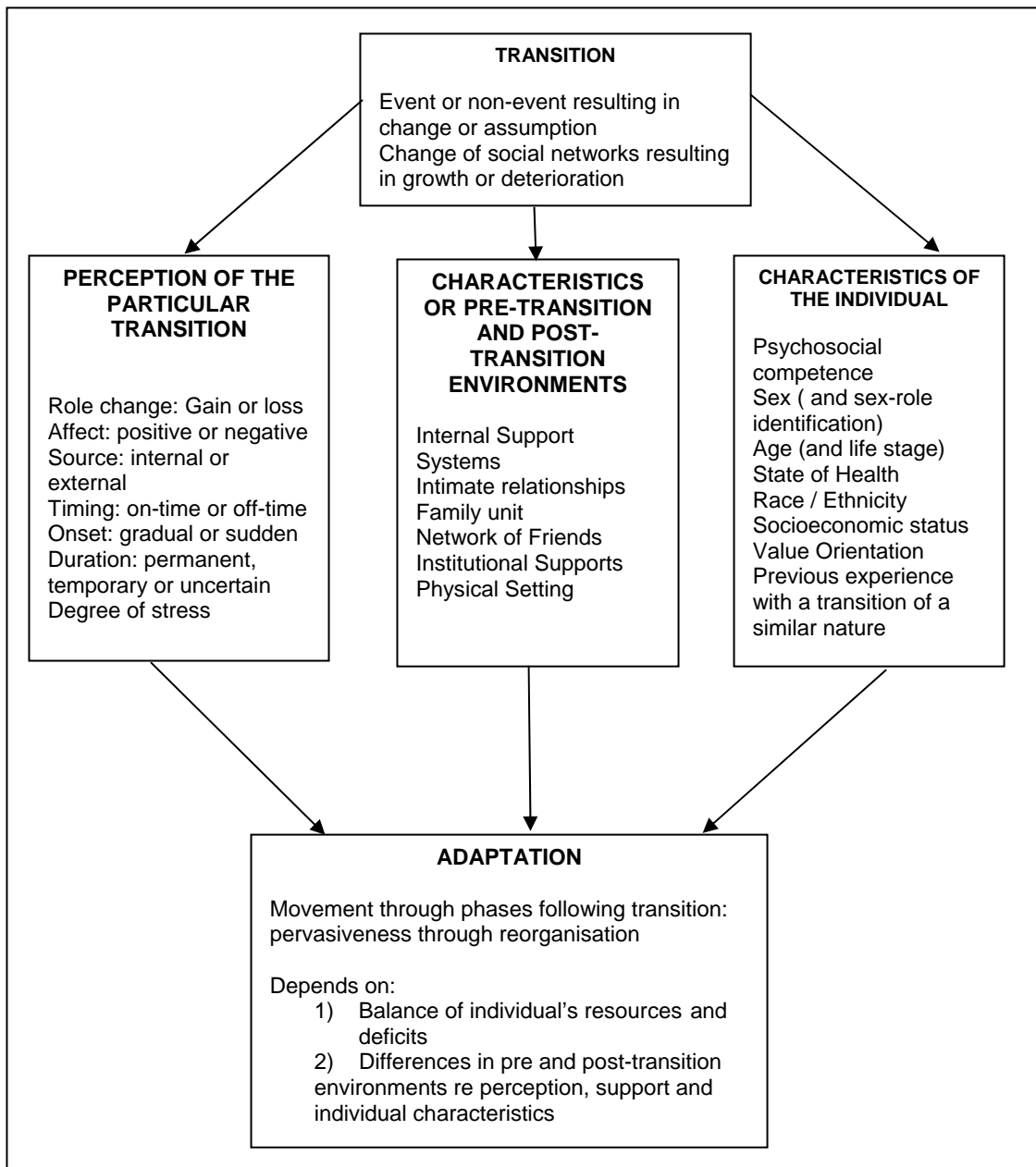
A five-factor solution (a) readiness, (b) confidence, (c) personal control, (d) support, (e) independence was constructed to gain a deeper understanding of the internal dynamics and psychological resources adults make use of

during their career transition (Heppner, 1998). The basic premise highlighted in the literature is that with every transition, an individual is presented with an opportunity for either 'psychological growth' if she/he deals with it effectively or risk the 'danger of psychological deterioration' if the person is unable to adapt to new circumstances (Moos & Tsu, 1976:13, cited in Schlossberg, 1981).

The factors affecting the quality of adaptation have been outlined by Schlossberg (1981) in the model illustrated below in Figure 2.9. The model is comprised of three broad aspects: the individual's perception, characteristics of the environment and the personal attributes of the person dealing with the transition, all of which have an impact on how well he/she adapts to change.

The individual's perception takes into consideration aspects such as whether that particular transition is generally being viewed as being either positive or negative, permanent or temporary and whether it is timely or occurring at a seemingly inappropriate time. It also includes the level of stress it generated for that person. The second factor has been defined as the environment although the author uses this term loosely to incorporate both the pre and post-transition environments, with each containing aspects such as interpersonal support systems for example family and friends, institutional support and the physical setting which could mean the community at large. The third set of factors that determine whether an individual adapts well is dependent upon the his/her own characteristics. Age, gender, race, socio-economic status, psychosocial competence and previous experience in managing transitions can all have an impact on the transitional experience. Schlossberg concludes that "adaptation can be assessed in terms of the individual's resources-deficits balance or in terms of degree of similarity and difference between the pre- and post-transition environment" (Schlossberg, 1981:15).

Figure 2.9 - A model for Analyzing Human Adaptation to Transition



Taken from Schlossberg (1981:5)

Coping with Transitions in Elite sport

In their study on coping responses to failure and success by elite athletes and performing artists, Poczwadowski and Conroy (2002) attempted to identify parallels and differences between the two groups across a range of categories. Working with a definition of coping as being “any focused attempt to manage situational demands that does not imply effectiveness or success”

(Compas, 1987 cited in Poczwadowski & Conroy, 2002) they identified five strategies of coping responses:

- Problem-focused (e.g. learning and improving, increased effort)
- Emotion-focused (e.g. controlling emotions, seeking support from others)
- Appraisal-focused (e.g. looking into the future, keeping things in perspective)
- Avoidance-focused (e.g. avoidance to protect self, decreased motivation to perform)
- Failure in coping (e.g. failing to cope well, crying)

Looking at studies that diverge outside of the sport domain is particularly useful to see how other top performers deal with similar situations as do elite athletes. Roderick (2006a) also drew comparisons between professional players and ballet dancers in terms of the relative short career duration, the uncertainty of the marketplace, the internal competition for places such that there is normally an excessive supply of potential quality labour, the risk of injury and the vulnerability to ageing. As this study illustrated there are lessons to be learnt from doing such cross-domain comparisons, especially as in this case, since similar research methods are utilised to collect and analyse data.

The changes that come about with transitions can affect the athlete cognitively, emotionally and behaviourally. Thus the quality of the adaptation to these transitional experiences will depend largely on the manner in which they address these changes (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994 cited in Lavalley and Wylleman, 2000). The availability of effective coping skills may facilitate this process and reduce the likelihood of difficulties.

- Achieving sport-related goals
- Pre-transition planning
- Previous experience with transitions
- Continued involvement in sport
- Possession and awareness of transferable skills

- New focus after transition
- Access to, and use of, transition support
- Social support

Danish, Petitpas, and Hale (1993, cited in Stambulova, 2000) suggest three alternatives of how one can deal with a critical life event: ineffective coping which leads to a crisis situation; minimal friction which leads to a smooth transition; and effective encounter which leads to new opportunities and personal growth. In an attempt to counteract some of the distressing reactions to transitions such as retirement, researchers have also looked into the various ways of overcoming these negative aspects by evaluating the coping resources that athletes often make use of and measure the quality of adjustment to their post-athletic career stage (Grove et al., 1998; Lavalley, 2005). Lavalley's (2005) life development intervention strategies are aimed at assisting athletes at three periods of their career transition; before, during and after. The type of support also varies according to the needs of the athlete at that specific time.

Giacobi et al. (2004) focussed their study on elements of stress and coping during the transition to University for first-year female students. The article outlines some adaptational processes and adjustment challenges previously discussed in the literature. Social support was found to be one of the key predictors to ensure a smooth transition and is one of the main coping strategies often used by athletes.

From the findings, Giacobbi et al. identified five general dimensions of stress that this specific group of athletes experience in varying degrees relating to training intensity, high performance expectations, interpersonal relationships, being away from home and academics. The general dimensions of coping were labelled as social support, active cognitive efforts, emotional release and religion. The authors conclude that athletes should be encouraged to develop enriching social support systems because there is a lot to be gained both in the athletes' sporting and personal contexts which offer potential

emotional, social, and cognitive mechanisms for growth (Giacobbi et al., 2004).

2.3.8. Support Networks - Interpersonal Relationships

Wylleman (2000) maps this relative 'uncharted territory' of interpersonal relationships in sport by drawing attention to the fact that relationships are critical to the athlete from the outset, throughout, and, even beyond their athletic career. The general premise is that social support is always expected and in most of the cases provided. A network of relationships is always presumed' (Vanden Auweele & Rzewnicki, 2000). Yet there are few studies that explore and try to explain the importance of having healthy interpersonal relationships with significant others, who are generally parents, coaches and to a lesser extent peers and partner (Wylleman, 2000).

Jowett and Cockerill (2003) elaborated on the type of relationships established within an elite sporting context by investigating the nature and significance of the athlete-coach relationship within the context of interpersonal constructs of closeness (trust and respect), co-orientation (common goals) and complementarity (complementary roles, tasks and resources) as viewed by elite athletes themselves. It was concluded that the quality of such a relationship has a huge bearing not only on the athlete's sporting development but also on a personal level.

Kerr and Dacyshyn (2000) in their study on the retirement of elite, female gymnasts discuss the importance in getting the power balance right in this athlete-coach relationship since it could have a negative influence on the type of transition athletes experience as they come out of the sport. Feelings of bitterness, anger and regret have been recorded by some athletes as they struggled to take control over decisions in regard to their career. In a more recent study by Lavalley and Robinson (2007) also with retired female gymnasts, the focus was also on open communication especially between coach and athlete, with the latter encouraged to take a lot more control over their career. Age-appropriate decision-making for athletes is again

highlighted while also urging coaches to start appreciating their athletes' lives outside the sport more.

Naturally, other factors such as age, gender, and the stage in career that the athletes are at, also come into play when evaluating the quality of such interpersonal relationships (Vanden Auweele & Rzewnicki, 2000). Attention has also been given to the specific culture and sub-cultures that the athletes belong to as a determinant of the kind of relationships they will develop in (Vergeer, 2000). The particular culture of the sport incites a certain type of support system. For example in professional football, the type of support systems are characteristically informal and usually rely on "former work colleagues who now play for, or are contracted in some manner, with other clubs. Access to and movement within professional football is strongly influenced by relatively complex social relationships developed within the industry" (Roderick, 2006b:258).

2.3.9. Elite Sport Policy Systems

The articles that discuss elite athletes and policy can be broadly divided into two categories, those which deal with the development of elite systems (Oakley & Green, 2001); (Green, 2004); (Green & Houlihan, 2004); (De Bosscher et al., 2006) and those which focus on elite athlete development (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002); (Thibault & Babiak, 2005).

With the increasing level of investment in national elite sporting systems it is not surprising that governments, the principal investors, are keen to learn from successful sporting nations leading to researchers trying to identify 'models that work' to this end. Oakley and Green (2001) had observed that national elite sporting systems of historically successful nations such as the UK, the US and Australia amongst others all seem to converge at various points offering very similar services to their elite athletes and built on the same strategies. More recently, De Bosscher et al. (2006) in another comparative study, which incorporated the six nations of Belgium, the

Netherlands, UK, Canada, Norway and Italy attempted to identify the sport policy factors leading to international success. Developing a nine-policy dimension framework at the meso-level, the factors that were deemed key to achieving sporting success were finance, an integrated approach, initiation, talent development and performance, athletic and post-athletic career support, training facilities, coaching, international competition and scientific research. However, keeping all this in mind De Bosscher et al. (2006) concluded that 50 per cent of achieving excellence still depends on factors at the macro-level which are not easily influenced by policy measures.

Research in Australia by Reid, Stewart and Thorne (2004) focussed more narrowly on the service-provision aspect within elite sporting systems deliberating whether multidisciplinary teams, now often found surrounding the athlete, are facilitating or hindering the achievement of excellence in sport performance. Although currently the general perception is still that 'the more the better' this study goes some way in showing that there needs to be a service-delivery model that takes into consideration the mix of professions in order to make these services more manageable and effective. The athlete being the focal recipient of this wide range of services, it is important that all the people involved collaborate in developing a standard procedure to deal with decision-making and conflict resolution in order to avoid unnecessary tension in situations of high emotion akin to the athlete.

Power Relations in Elite Sport Policy Systems

In keeping with the athlete-centred approach, three studies conducted with Canadian athletes have examined the development and maintenance of expert athletic performance (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002) while Thibault and Babiak (2005) have observed the shift in priorities in elite sport from the administrative aspects of sport delivery to high performance athletes. The first study is a description of personal journeys with a number of top athletes tracing their paths to sporting success, identifying the routes, resources and strategies that they availed themselves of to become champions. The second study looks at the broader picture where a number of changes in the

approach of elite athlete development in Canada have been taking place. Evidence for this change could be seen through the weightier presence of athletes in decision-making roles, increased funding, more facilities and the establishment of a forum for athletes to discuss issues with coaches or federations. A significant shift of the power balance towards the elite athlete is stressed, arguing that at least within the Canadian context this is the most effective way to developing and retain athletes at the top-most levels of sport. The researchers conclude that although there is still progress to be made, it is a step in the right direction.

2.3.10. Power

Although power as a concept has not been exclusively identified as a key variable during the initial searching process, it has been discussed in a number of research papers and therefore is being treated as one of the emergent themes here. Power has been discussed in one of these two ways; as 'disciplinary power' in relation to the coach-athlete relationship and 'power balance' in relation to the elite sport policy systems (as illustrated above).

Disciplinary Power

Johns and Johns (2000) point out that "in an ideal sport setting, power would not exist" but then are quick to add "it is difficult to imagine how knowledge in sport can exist without a power arrangement that is characterised by asymmetry and domination" (Johns & Johns, 2000:230). Within the coach-athlete relationship, the dominating figure is usually the coach, the dominated; the athlete. How this relationship forms, is accepted and most of the time is normalised to the point of becoming the only acceptable way of 'making it in elite sport' is discussed extensively in terms of the assumptions around the coach's 'expertise' and the consequences of some given 'truths' that characterise elite sport (Johns & Johns, 2000:230):

“...one group is privileged with knowledge, resources and influence (coaches). The other group is characterized by a need to know, a desire

to conform, an inability to risk, a concern to avoid chances and a feeling of security of knowing that all acts are rational and lead to success”.

This drive to success is most often the reason why certain ‘knowledges’ and practices are legitimated by the athletes and sporting structures alike are “accepted as ‘regimes of truth’ created and fuelled by the discursive actions of coaches” (Chapman, 1997:206 in Jones et al., 2005).

However, as one of the retired athletes participating in Johns and Johns (2000) study commented, in hindsight she would have preferred if her relationship with her coach was based on mutual respect rather than being patronised all the time having suffered the consequences of such an arrangement long after she had retired from her sport. Therefore, Jones et al. (2005:388) argue in favour of readdressing coaches’ roles and responsibilities and raise questions whether coach education programmes are doing enough “to equip coaches how to deal with complex human problems and issues”.

Johns and Johns (2000) conclude that from their data athletes are willing to accept a kind of power structure as long as they can justify the reasons for doing so. The key to such justifications suggested by the authors is the deconstruction-reformulation process of the social relations between coach and athlete.

2.4. Third Stage – Construct Analysis

2.4.1. Third order themes - Methodological Constructs

Constructing and Analysing Narratives in qualitative research

There has been a number of researchers who have made use of narratives or life-stories (used interchangeably in most of the studies under discussion) as their primary tool of data collection. Sparkes (2004), Tsang (2000) and Gearing (1999) all used narratives in some of their research studies as they argued that they provide a structure for the interviewees to create their very own 'sense of selfhood and identity' (Sparkes, 2004). Tsang (2000) reiterated that there has to be recognition and acknowledgement that a narrative is always told from a particular vantage point be it temporally, spatially, culturally or historically, or an amalgamation of these variables, which in itself has implications for the process of meaning making through narrative (Gearing, 1999).

By using biographical-type interviews influenced by a life-course perspective, researchers such as Roderick (2006a) and Gearing (1999) were also able to explore 'turning points' at the various stages in their athletes' lives. A term coined by Strauss (1962, cited in Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997:39) 'turning points' usually refer to the key transitional periods that a person goes through. Looking also at the wider network of people that these athletes (professional footballers) turned to in order to deal with such transitions, Roderick (2006a) was able to gain insight into the decision-making processes and how these players make sense of their world circumstances.

When it comes to the analytical stage of such narratives, most researchers "do not see themselves as independent and separate from the analysis and interpretation of the data but as active participants in inquiry" (Miller & Kerr, 2003:212). Of the same view one finds other researchers such as Tsang (2000) and Richardson et al. (2004), the latter who through the interpersonal nature of such a research process, became increasingly embedded and involved with their interviewees.

Bourdieu, professional sport and career decision-making

Within the sporting literature, Bourdieu's concept of habitus has been employed by a number of researchers (Roderick, 2006; Cushion and Jones, 2006; McGillvray et al., 2005) investigating for example the elite sporting context and how this might impact on athletes' current sporting career and post-athletic career choices within professional football academy set-ups. Bourdieu's theory of social practice with the formula of habitus, capital and field has been utilised by McGillvray and McIntosh (2006) to conceptualise professional footballers' (agents) social practices. The component of habitus defined 'as a set of durable dispositions, which work to shape attitudes, behaviours and responses to given situations' makes up who someone is. The capital; taken here as the 'currency tradable in a specific field' which in relation to professional players encompasses both the cultural and physical, "helps us understand how cultural advantage, distinction and domination is reproduced in and through social fields". The field therefore has an 'active relationship' with habitus and capital where, as some researchers have argued within the professional football field (structure), it constructs, promotes and reinforces a particular habitus. Due to the specificity of the sport, the physical capital is regarded more highly than any other capital, such as academic achievement, and therefore professional players invest a lot of their time and energy in cultivating the former resulting 'in expressions of (hyper) masculinised identities'.

Though there may be nothing wrong in valuing physical capital per se, it can have some negative repercussions since professional players are particularly vulnerable to 'occupational obsolescence' (e.g. through serious injury) making the athlete feel helpless in the face of events. Although the authors reiterate that they are not arguing that the field 'imposes' these conditions, the players are to an "extent complicit in their own oppression and disempowerment". Therefore, players find themselves moving from a situation of having rich symbolic capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992 in Roderick, 2006a) to one of symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992

in McGillvray and McIntosh, 2006). The term symbolic violence is defined by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992:98) in the following manner:

Agents are subjected to forms of violence (treated as inferior, limited in their social mobility and aspirations), but they do not perceive it that way, rather their situation seems to them to be the natural way of things.

Subsequently, given the context and the decisive influence that the cultural habitus has on career choices of young players the authors suggest that Bourdieu's concept of strategy might be employed to help footballers "reformulate and reposition themselves in relation to educational discourses as a means of facilitating future career transitions" (McGillvray & McIntosh, 2006).

Working with the same concepts of habitus and field, Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) draw on Bourdieu's work to present a new model of career decision-making as they trace decision processes made by young people. Elaborating the concept of habitus as not only to be taken on an individual subjective level but also acknowledging that it is influenced by the "objective social networks and cultural traditions in which the person lives", the premise is developed that no one can 'step outside' their habitus and therefore decision-making can never be context-free. The authors (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997:33) argue that:

Career decisions can only be understood in terms of the life histories of those who make them, wherein identity has evolved through interaction with significant others and with the culture in which the subject has lived and is living.

By 'culture' the authors here use the term to describe "the socially-constructed and the historically-derived knowledge...that people grow into and come to take as a natural way of life" (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997:33). This clearly, therefore has serious implications for the career opportunities of

young players who find themselves embroiled in the unsustainable practices of the professional football system.

2.5. Conclusion

This chapter has provided a three-stage analysis of some of the key readings that were retrieved during the systematic review process. The first stage comprised of first order themes containing the meta-categories of student-athletes, elite athletes and professional players, which were employed in combination with a number of key words.

During the second stage a number of emergent themes were identified and discussed. This thematic analysis provided an evaluation of some of the issues highlighted in the literature in combining competitive elite sport with higher education for student-athletes and the types of support available to them. It also considered some of the psycho-social factors affecting how these athletes manage their dual careers of sport and academic life, while dealing effectively with the inevitable eventuality of transitions. The policy-related research on the various National elite sport development systems in turn provided insight into the ways some Nations view their elite athletes' roles as they strive towards a more athlete-centred approach.

The critical factor identified by a number of researchers in successfully combining an elite sporting career with an academic one is balance (see Miller & Kerr, 2003, Dunstan-Lewis, 2004). As has been argued previously in this chapter the literature does not provide a definition for this term however it is clear that it does not mean that the student-athlete should invest equal amounts of time, commitment and resources in the various components (sporting, academic, personal and social) of his/her life. From the readings it can be concluded that finding the right balance for a student-athlete depends to varying degrees on the individual's personal characteristics, his/her sport and specific choice of lifestyle. However, the general consensus among researchers is that a degree of balance must be attained in order for the student-athlete to deal effectively with the demands of a dual career. The

second point that has been highlighted in the literature with regard to this concept of balance is that both the support network of professionals and the support system surrounding the student-athlete must be conducive in helping these individuals to find and, more importantly to maintaining a level of balance throughout their careers (Miller & Kerr, 2002).

The psycho-social factors identified in this systematic review revolve largely around two main themes: careers and transitions. Having outlined current trends in the general professional careers literature (see Baruch, 2004) and the decision-making processes that individuals go through in order to assess what their realistic opportunities in the job market are (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997), the next step was to analyse in detail the specific characteristics of elite sporting careers. Researchers investigating professional sporting contexts in particular tended to be critical as they argued that elite sport is characterized by intense, and at times, ruthless competition to achieve selection (Cresswell & Eklund, 2006). This immediately implied that in order to succeed most athletes' time will be dedicated towards developing their sporting career, with very little time left to develop other aspects of their lives outside their sport. Thus many athletes will be subject to a double threat – on the one hand they engage in an athletic career which is subject to instability often hampered by injury and the inescapable impact of aging (Roderick, 2006a), while on the other they are forced to make sacrifices in terms of education and their subsequent work career (Bourke, 2003). This unfavourable situation is further exacerbated with those athletes who despite being very successful on the world sporting stage, are still unable to make a living out of their sport and therefore have to think of some alternative means to support themselves during and after their sporting career is over (David, 1999). In the light of such observations the researchers urged managers of elite sporting establishments to encourage their active athletes to give serious consideration to their post-athletic career prospects, in order to have a smoother transition out of the sport.

Transitions are an inevitable part of an individual's life and according to Schlossberg (1981) one of the leading researchers in career transition, they

are always followed by a period of change. The literature on transitions highlighted the fact that learning how to cope effectively with both minor and major transitional phases during the life-course is critical in order to minimise the level of disruptiveness as much as possible. From the readings which dealt specifically with athletes' career transitions it can be concluded that to date these transitions have not always been managed well and there is evidence in most sports, across a number of countries where varying levels of difficulty have been experienced by athletes as they have struggled to adjust (Dacyshyn, 1999; Wylleman and Lavallee, 2003; Stambulova, Stephan & Japhag, 2007). A plausible reason for this is that research on how elite sport fits within the athletes' wider picture of life course transitions is still an under-researched area. Learning about major transitions such as moving from compulsory schooling to higher education or employment, leaving home to independent living and shifting to top-class senior competitions all intersect within the same period of an athlete's life. Therefore, future research should be targeted towards providing insight into these complex life experiences and seek as far as possible to facilitate these transitions for the benefit of both the athlete and the sport.

The literature also highlighted recent developments in the way career transitions in sport are being conceptualized. Having formerly focused solely on one particular stage – retirement, career transitions now encompass a number of stages and levels as identified by Wylleman and Lavallee (2003) in their developmental model on transitions faced by athletes. Adopting a life-span perspective in their research, the authors urge other researchers and practitioners to look at athletes in a more holistic manner (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). The impact of psychological factors such as athletic identity and coping skills are also being taken into consideration as they too can effect the quality of career transitions. The type of support and intervention programmes available to elite athletes have also been re-evaluated to encompass a broader range of services to deal with the various changes as these athletes navigate through their academic and sporting careers (Lavallee, 2005). There has also been a rapid increase in interest in career transitions generally by academics and policy-makers both in the UK and in

Europe as this topic of debate has not remained solely within the sport psychology literature but has become a more multi-disciplinary area of research (Colley, 2007).

The analysis of the policy literature was particularly useful as it provided insight into the broader network of systems and professionals surrounding the elite athlete. Most of the research reviewed in this area adopted more of a 'top-down' approach to map out the diverse elite sporting systems established in various Nation states. For example in an attempt to try and identify the key aspects that make up a successful sporting nation Oakley and Green (2001) observed that there were a number of convergences between countries, such as the type of service provision for elite athletes. This observation was again confirmed in a comparative study by DeBosscher et al. (2006) as they identified nine-policy dimensions that were deemed critical to ensure sporting success. In contrast Thibault & Babiak (2005) among others shifted the focus back to the athlete as they analysed the Canadian elite sport policy system. The key message from the evaluation of such policies was that new elite sport policies should allow for bigger decision-making roles for elite athletes.

The third and final stage of this review of literature comprised of third-order themes and was defined as construct analysis. In this section a number of methodological constructs discussed by researchers which had particular resonance with the research questions of this study were reflected upon. The underlying premise for conducting this type of analysis is that it continued to inform both the methodological and empirical work of the subsequent stages of the research process. What the nature of this particular analysis illustrated was that the most potentially fruitful methods to investigate the lived experience of being an elite athlete making life choices were generated from the qualitative insights rather than the quantitative generalisable types of data provided by empiricist research. The rationale for this choice as highlighted by McGillvray & McIntosh (2006:376) suggests that:

a qualitative research strategy is a more appropriate means of understanding how individuals use, inhabit, negotiate or elude their foundational objective conditions...it provides space for the voice of the actors themselves (i.e. athletes) to be heard...

Sparkes and Smith (2002, cited in Roderick, 2006a) argued in a similar vein that many of the early theorising by social scientists “lacked any direct connection to the lived experiences” of these athletes and therefore, for the purpose of this research study the life-story approach was consequently chosen to collect the empirical data. The following chapter will elaborate on both the research strategy and choice of method and demonstrate how having collected the data, Wylleman and Lavalley’s (2003) Developmental model on transitions faced by athletes in turn provided an appropriate theoretical framework to capture and analyse holistically these student-athletes’ life experiences.

Chapter 3 - Research Strategy and Methods

3.1. Introduction

This chapter is an outline of the research strategy or methodology adopted for this study. Methodology refers to the relationship between theory and method. In this chapter which represents a defence of the methodological strategy, the researcher will therefore seek to address the theoretical context of, the rationale for, and the relation with the choices of method adopted.

The structure of this chapter is therefore as follows; first it restates the research questions which form the basis of this study. Second, it discusses the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underpin the research, which directly inform the choice of method adopted. Third, due to the comparative nature of this research study, issues surrounding comparative analysis in sport policy studies will be discussed drawing on a four-fold typology (Henry et al. 2007:22). The final section of this chapter will then evaluate in retrospect the general methodology and specific methods employed, highlighting their strengths and limitations.

3.2. Aims of the research study

The point for departure for this study is the research questions developed in Chapter 1 of the thesis. To remind the reader they are listed again below.

- What are the decision-making processes that elite athletes go through in order to combine their sporting and academic careers successfully while at university?
- How is the nature of the university system, and the type of sport, impacting on the athlete's perceived experience of sporting and educational decisions on their life now and for post-athletic careers?

- What are the struggles and constraints that exist in combining a 'dual career' and how might policy be adapted to ameliorate these life experiences?

The principal aims of this study which are reflected in the research questions was to gain insight into the elite athletes' worldview, and their perceptions of the significant factors in personal educational decision-making. To this end detailed interviews were conducted employing a life-story approach (Miller, 2000) with elite athletes who had experience of university level education, to understand what constraints and opportunities exist, and how these have been negotiated by athletes in different sporting contexts and in different types of educational system, with what kinds of outcome. By identifying examples of good practice in the three European contexts together with barriers and constraints such as the hindering of a student-athlete's academic and /or athletic development this research will seek to propose ways in which some of these difficulties may be overcome. Finally, a third objective is to evaluate ways in which such athlete based accounts may have clear implications for policy, informing thinking in relation to how policy makers, administrators, educators and coaches might enhance the student-athlete experience at university.

Thus, it is centrally important to this study to develop a strategy and method that would enable the researcher to gather data which related to athletes' own perceptions and experiences. Following the analysis of the systematic review data discussed in the previous chapter, it was concluded that adopting a qualitative research strategy and specifically the life-story method as advocated for example by McGillvray and McIntosh (2006), Gearing (1999); Sparkes and Smith (2002); and Roderick (2006) would provide an effective approach as it allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the lives of the athletes interviewed.

These life stories do not however stand on their own and a context of how they 'sit' within the human world and the social reality characterising it is

critical in order to understand what kinds of knowledge are attainable through this research process.

3.3. *Ontological Assumptions*

The nature of reality or ontology has been characterised by Blaikie (1993:8) as relating to “claims and assumptions about the nature of social reality, claims about what exists, what it looks like, what units make it up and how these units interact with each other. In short, ontological assumptions are concerned with what we believe constitutes social reality”.

Ontological assumptions in social science research can be broadly classified into a series of paradigms that are important as they guide the researcher in viewing the world in a certain way. At the outset it must be stated that the literature provides a number of ‘terms’ to define each of these paradigms which can often be used slightly inconsistently by different authors however for the purpose of this study, a brief outline of the positivist, interpretivist and critical realism paradigms will be provided. Subsequently, the researcher’s own position will be discussed in relation to her own research.

Positivism or objectivism as it is sometimes termed, ‘assumes that social phenomena exist independently of both the observer and social actors; it is the regularities or patterns in this reality that social research endeavours to discover and describe, and it is elements of this reality that determine social behaviour’ (Blaikie 2000:119). Positivists view the world as having an external reality, separate from any of the descriptions that they might have of it. Therefore for positivists the starting point is always a foundational description of what this reality ‘out there’ is, whether in experiential or material terms (Gergen, 1994:72). Furthermore, realists share “the belief that the natural sciences and the social sciences can and should apply the same kinds of approach to the collection of data and to explanation” (Bryman & Bell, 2003:14). This implies that realists believe that by adopting specific research methods it is possible to make rational and universal claims by generalising from the data generated.

At the opposite end of the continuum, one finds the constructivist paradigm, which 'entails the assumption that social reality is produced and reproduced by social actors; it is a pre-interpreted, inter-subjective world of cultural objects, meanings and social institutions. A consequence of this position is that in any social situation there may be multiple realities' (Blaikie, 1993:203). It therefore treats knowledge as situated, contingent, accomplished for settings and institutional occasions (Potter, 1998:42). In recent years, the term has also come to include the notion that researcher's own accounts of the social world should be seen as constructions. In other words, the researcher always presents a specific version of social reality, rather than one that can be regarded as definitive (Bryman & Bell, 2003:20).

The third paradigm that will be taken into consideration is critical realism, which straddles the other two paradigms discussed above, "sharing a foundationalist ontology with positivism and allowing for interpretation in research" (Grix, 2004:86). Critical realism among whose leading proponents are Bhaskar (1975, 1989) and Harré and Madden (1975) goes by the premise "that knowledge of the real cannot escape the limitations of our particular social context, but nevertheless holds it a mistake to abandon the task of searching for traces of the real in the manifestations which compose the actual world as we conceive it" (Brown, Pujol, Curt, 1998:79).

Bhaskar's (1978:56) ontological 'map' distinguishes between three types of domains that stratify reality: the empirical, the actual and the real. The empirical domain consists of those experiences that can be observed directly. It is separated from the actual domain where events happen whether they can be observed or not. The premise underpinning this domain implies that what happens in the world is not the same as that which is observed. In the real domain there are processes that can produce events in the world, that which metaphorically can be called mechanisms (or causal powers). The observation of the third domain of reality, the "deep dimension where generative mechanisms are to be found, is thus what distinguishes critical realism from other forms of realism (that is to say philosophical positions holding that things have an objective existence" (Danermark et al. 2002:21).

Table 3.1 – Basic beliefs of Inquiry paradigms

	Positivist	Critical Realism	Interpretative
Ontology	External – Realist	External-realist or Real but inter-subjectively	Internal – idealist relativist
Epistemology	Objectivist, dualist	Subjectivist, Interactive	Subjectivist, Interactive
Methodology	Nomothetic, experimental, manipulative	Ideographic, participative, transformative	Ideographic, hermeneutical, dialectical
Interests	Prediction and control (technical)	Emancipation (Criticism and liberation)	Understanding and Interpretation (Practical)

Adapted from Sparkes (1992:21)

According to Marsh and Smith (2002) a critical realist ontology provides the researcher with the following four specific philosophical assumptions which will be discussed in light of this research study:

- i. The world exists independently of our knowledge of it
- ii. There are deep structures that cannot be directly observed, but which can be understood or conceptualised via theorisation and observations at different strata of reality: through retroductive inference
- iii. Social structures and actors exert causal power; however, structures do not determine outcomes, rather they constrain and facilitate actions and may be modified by individual action
- iv. People's discursive knowledge about 'reality' (which exists independently of that knowledge) may affect the outcomes of social interaction

Critical realists believe that there are underlying structures that exist that might not be directly observable through empirical research but which are discernable by their effects. It is an implicit understanding. However, there is a degree of superficial activity which sheds light on these structures. This does not necessarily occur at a conscious level and therefore some agents

might not be aware of being, or do not claim to be, part of an epistemic community.

In the context of this research such structures could be taken to be the elite sporting system and academic institutions in place at a national level, which could be both facilitating and / or constraining agents or their actions, in this case student-athletes' activities. For example Bayle, Durand and Nikonoff (2008:162) have argued that recently in France there has been an increased effort to win in international competitions as elite sport continues to be used as a tool by governments to meet political agendas. This has led some sport governing bodies to develop unsustainable practices where training hours continue to rise often to the detriment of other developmental aspects of the athlete such as education (as will be illustrated in the following chapters of this thesis). Another example in which a critical realist analysis of student-athlete accounts will allow inference to the actual and the real domains is presented in Table 3.2 below, where a concrete example has been extracted from the interviews. One of the Finnish female athletes had noted how there is a discrepancy in the treatment between male and female athletes within her sport, assigning a professional status to the male athletes who can sign professional contracts and treating the females as semi-professional athletes. Thus as a female athlete she has to act (normally unconsciously) in ways which differ from male athletes, having to find alternative means to support herself so here we can see how gender structures in our societies have real consequences.

Table 3.2 - A critical realist ontological map

Dimensions of reality		Examples
Empirical	Student-athlete interviews	"Here you don't get paid to participate in the national team and the schedule is really hard, we train as much as the professionals (men) but without the money so you still have to combine it with work and that I found pretty hard" (FIN B)
Actual	Perceptions of the actual	Even if not perceived there are actual consequences of being a student-athlete, a parent, a female athlete
Real	Can generate real causes	Gender structures, or institutional structures in educational systems can have 'real' effects

However in order to clarify these philosophical assumptions an elaboration on the terms of structure and agency will be provided as they are deemed critical concepts underpinning all social scientific research (Cruickshank, 2003).

3.3.1. Structure and Agency

Structuration Theory advocated by Anthony Giddens provides an ontological framework that can be utilised for the study of human social action, based on the assumption of the duality of structure and agency. Although, Giddens argued that structuration theory itself 'is not intended to be a theory 'of' anything' he explains how his intention was to 'offer a conceptual scheme that allows one to understand both how actors are at the same time creators of social systems yet created by them' (Giddens, 1991:204). The basic premise underpinning this ontological framework was summed up by Cohen (1989:2) in the following manner:

All social life is generated in and through social *praxis*; where social *praxis* is defined to include the nature, conditions and consequences of historically and spatio-temporally situated activities and interactions produced through the agency of social actors.

As such Structuration Theory should not be regarded as a 'grand theory' and it does not provide a method of how theory should be constructed. It does not start with a pre-determined set of epistemological principles and therefore it does not assume which forms of knowledge are acceptable (Blaikie, 1993:99). There has been a number of criticisms directed at the apparent limited usefulness of Structuration Theory in conducting social research by those who argue that it provides "too little space for free action or alternatively that it underestimates the influence of structural constraints" (Giddens, 1991:205) and others who note that it has to date failed to generate any specific research projects. Giddens however maintains his position by arguing that the concepts elaborated within the Structuration

Theory can be used as sensitizing devices to help social researchers in how they think about research questions and interpret findings (Blaikie, 1993:121). Thus the following sections will illustrate how these two concepts and their immanent relationship, were evidenced within the material from the systematic review and the wider literature.

In life-history research the concept of social structure has been defined by Sewell (1992 cited in Berger, 2008:311) as consisting of cultural schemas and social resources. Cultural schemas “refer to generalised prescriptions for actions, both formal and informal, including modes of thought, conventions and habits of speech” while social resources “refer to capabilities both human and nonhuman, that enable actors to acquire, maintain, or generate power in social relationships”. Agency in this context is then taken to imply “the capacity to exert control and to some extent even transform the social relations in which one is enmeshed” (Berger, 2008:311).

The underlying argument presented by school-work transition researchers is that “transition processes involve reflexive and acting individuals but whose agency is nevertheless constrained by very real structure conditions that exist *de facto*” (Lehmann, 2005:331). In an attempt to conceptualise this agency, Bourdieu’s concept of habitus is helpful to explore these students’ disposition to think and act in a certain way in relation to their prospective professional careers. This point was further developed by Hodgkinson and Sparkes (1997) (as discussed in the previous chapter) in respect of young people’s decision-making processes with regard to their future occupations.

Within the sporting literature, Bourdieu’s concept of habitus has been employed by a number of researchers (e.g. Roderick, 2006; Cushion and Jones, 2006; McGillvray et al., 2005) investigating for example the elite sporting context and how this might impact on athletes’ current sporting career and post-athletic career choices within professional football academies. Of particular relevance to this research study was the argument put forward by Cushion and Jones (2006:144) that habitus ‘links between decision-making of the individual to wider social structures’. Thus in certain

respects a Bourdieusienne approach implies an ontological approach consistent with the critical realist thinking since it moves from the empirical to the real positing real structures such as habitus, field, and various forms of capital to explain observed behaviour.

For the purpose of this study the theoretical position that was adopted was a critical realist one, which supports a recursive relationship between structure and agency. As Marsh and Smith (2000:5) warn “an approach that stresses exclusively either structure or agency has severe limitations” and therefore we have rejected the two extremes of, on the one hand structuralism where agents’ activities are completely determined by the context, and on the other voluntarism where agents are thought to be completely autonomous and free to make their own choices without any structural constraints. As Cruickshank (2003:2) argues critical realism allows the researcher to negotiate a theoretical position which enables one to explore both how an individual’s agency is being influenced by the social environment and to what extent this context is conducive and / or restrictive to the types of decisions that are being taken by the agent.

Social scientific research is concerned with exploring how individual’s agency is influenced by the social context, and therefore there will be assumptions concerning the extent to which individuals had free will, to what extent individuals were constrained by structures, how different individuals were enabled and constrained by the social context in different ways, and so forth. In which case, what is required is a theory (critical realism) to explain how structure can influence agency. This is needed to avoid the problems of overemphasising agency, overemphasising structure, or arbitrarily overemphasising both in one piece of research.

3.4. Epistemology

Epistemology is concerned with how we know the world. It attempts to provide answers to questions such as how and what can we investigate about social reality? As Willig argues “this involves thinking about the nature of knowledge itself, about its scope and about the validity and reliability of claims to knowledge” (Willig, 2001: 2).

Critical realists are willing to accept that scientific inquiry operates in a climate of 'epistemic relativism' in which knowledge is always conditional, subject to discussion (Bhaskar, 1986; Collier, 1994). In accordance with a critical realist epistemology the research is more concerned with constructing a narrative than discovering the 'truth' (Cruickshank, 2003). It is about the athletes' version/s of the truth. The researcher and athlete jointly construct a 'story' about the athlete's perceptions of reality. By using the interviewing method to capture life stories the objective is more to understand the reality constructed by the interviewees rather than discovering or investigating the truth about this reality. As Cruickshank (2003:1) continues to argue another aspect to take into consideration with this particular type of research is that in constructing a narrative about the perceptions of reality of these individuals, the social origin of the researcher will influence to a certain degree the outcome of such an interaction. Subjective epistemology in this research context was taken to imply that the researcher and respondent co-create understandings and therefore the narrative that gets co-constructed is "as much about the researcher's biography as the people studied" (Cruickshank, 2003:1). As will be discussed in the subsequent methods section of this chapter, the level of interaction between researcher and the student-athletes during the interview process was a key aspect that characterised the empirical stage of this research study.

In conclusion, the ontological and epistemological assumptions in relation to adopting a narrative approach to life-stories (where reality was being co-constructed) was taken to be a reflection of the type of resources these participants had available including linguistic, epistemic and material (economic / institutional). As Cohen (1989:151) argued 'resources provide agents who have access to them with a range of facilities to achieve outcomes', and therefore through this research process the researcher was able to identify the type of resources that were available to these student-athletes in order to manage their dual career successfully. A student-athlete might of course make unconscious use of resources. I may borrow money, for example, because lenders know I have affluent relatives. I may be unconscious of the nature of this resource and not therefore report it at

interview. I may assume all student-athletes would have the same facility to borrow. However, the interview provides a means to reflect on one's own situation, and the structures and actions which constitute one's own world.

3.5. Theoretical Adequacy

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, the researcher did not start with a *priori* theory or hypothesis-driven theoretical assumption characteristic of a deductive research approach and thus an inductive research strategy was adopted. Induction was defined by Landman (2000:226) as 'the process by which conclusions are drawn from direct observation of empirical evidence' (cited in Grix, 2004:113). This approach entails the researcher looking for particular patterns in the data and establishing relationships between variables. A key element of the inductive approach to theory building is that generalisations from this type of research are 'sought from the specific to other wider contexts' suggesting that conclusions drawn from empirical research can be generalised to a certain extent, leading the researcher to more abstract ideas including conceptual models and theory formation (Grix, 2004: 113).

Concomitant with other inductive approaches such as grounded theory, in life story research the researcher gives primacy first to the data and it is only after the initial analysis stage has taken place that theory starts being built into the research. The premise behind this kind of approach is that in order for the findings to be 'the most valid' they can be, 'the theory that is more appropriate to the specific story will flow from the story itself' (Atkinson, 1998). One other strength of such an approach is that the researcher can avoid the risk during the analysis stage of reading narratives as evidence to justify a prior theory. As Atkinson (1998:66) attests:

An outside frame of reference or theory, may help to gain a greater appreciation of the story. No one theory will fit all people anyway, so the objective in interpreting a life story is to explore the data of the story itself.

A critical weakness that certain 'fundamentalist' versions of the life history methodology and grounded theory approaches share is that they advocate the denial or rejection of prior knowledge / theory. Simply starting from data gathered inductively, the researcher builds explanations into theory. Such accounts are naïve however since the data we collect or the phenomena we choose to look at, and treat seriously, rather than regarding as trivial, are a product of prior thoughts, concepts, conceptual schemes, or theories. There is a distinction, or balance to be sought, between theory testing, and theory informed data collection. The critical thing for the researcher to do is not to 'empty her head' of prior theory, but rather to acknowledge the theoretical influences on the data collection process.

Thus in the context of this research the Development model on transitions faced by athletes of Wylleman and Lavallee (2003) significantly informed the researcher's approach to the interview process. The model was not used as a point of reference against which to test the data, but rather its abstraction of stages, and of life domains (athletic level, psychological level, psycho-social level, academic-vocational level) were significant precursors to the researcher's interview approach and the model is therefore introduced here in some detail.

The objectives behind this developmental model are to (a) 'take a beginning-to-end perspective and (b) reflect the developmental as well as interactive nature of normative transitions at athletic, psychological, social, academic and vocational levels' (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2003:515). By normative transitions the authors imply those changes that are anticipated and predictable in athletes' lives as they negotiate through the various stages of their academic and sporting careers. However the model does not incorporate those transitions that are unexpected, unforeseen and involuntary.

Thus the life stories developed were a product of researcher-interviewee interaction with the researcher's approach of relatively open questions about athletic and educational careers being informed by awareness of the

literature, and specifically of the transitions literature of which Wylleman and Lavallee's work presents perhaps the best example.

3.6. Method Appropriateness

Although life-stories have been extensively used in psychology and anthropology, this approach has lately gained wider popularity in sociological studies (Berger, 2008, Bertaux, 1981; Roos, 1985). Specific to studies in the sporting field, the work of Sparkes and colleagues is of note (Sparkes, 1994, 1998, 2002; Smith and Sparkes, 2002, 2004, 2005; Phoenix and Sparkes, 2007) as has been illustrated in the previous chapter.

3.6.1. What is a life story?

A life story is an effective method used for obtaining in-depth accounts about and by an individual. It allows the researcher to gain a fuller understanding of the interviewees being studied and more importantly allows the latter to account for their life in the manner that they prefer. As McAdams (1990) argues, the stories that people choose to tell about themselves define who they are, shaping their identity as they go through their life experiences. One of the strengths of life story research is that it captures how people develop and change over time. As Atkinson (1998:7) observes:

In the telling of a life story, we get a good sense of how and why the various parts of a life are connected and what gives the person meaning in life

Perhaps more accurately we get a good sense of how the interviewee at this point in time makes sense of the connections between the various parts of his / her life. One of the principal aims for conducting this study, as was discussed above, was to gain insight into how student-athletes portrayed their dual career and constructed their world-view. The study therefore took into consideration the pathways that participants had chosen to negotiate their way through their educational and sporting careers, which opportunities

they had availed themselves of, and which others they had had to forego. By engaging the athletes in a dialogue through life stories, the researcher was able to trace the decision-making processes that gave meaning to the athletes' lives and how these decisions then affected the way these athletes viewed their world. Although informed by a concern with transitions, by using a non-directive form of questioning the interview was able to encompass more elements of the participants' life over a period of time. As will be discussed in the subsequent sections of this chapter there are a number of strengths in using such a method but perhaps the most critical to note is that it gives 'voice' to the interviewees, empowering them from the very start of the interview process, and shifted the power balance in their favour as they could take greater control of the narrative provided. As Atkinson (1998:8) argues:

As a way of meaning making, identifying life influences, and interpreting experiences, there may be no better method than the subjective narrative of the life story to help the researcher understand a life from the insider's point of view.

As Lieblich et al. observed "by studying and interpreting self-narratives, the researcher can access not only the individual identity and its systems of meaning but also the teller's culture and social world" (Lieblich et al. 1998:9). Since systems of meaning that get constructed are embedded within a historical and social world, this had immediate implications for the life-stories conducted in each of the three countries under study; France, Finland and the UK. Each of these accounts had to be understood within a specific point in time, representing one of the many voices of that culture. As Crotty (2003) has argued every human being is born in a world of meaning where 'a system of significant symbols' are inherited in order to be able to comprehend the social world they inhabit:

When we first see the world in a meaningful fashion, we are inevitably viewing it through lenses bestowed upon us by our culture. Our culture brings things into view for us and endows them with meaning, and by the same token leads us to ignore other things.

Extending the above observation to this research study, it is possible that the way that these elite athletes are making sense of their world is through the values and targets that both their sporting and national culture are inculcating. For example targets that are meaningful to elite athletes may be attributed to winning medals which are encouraged within the sporting culture but perhaps to the detriment of other aspects in life potentially education and professional development. Furthermore, although all the athletes interviewed inhabited the world of elite sport there were still nuances that were particular to specific individuals, such as the type of sport they practised with its particular sporting culture, the athlete's gender and the life stage that they were at. At a more complex level, one also had to take into consideration that there were further differences between local and between national cultures, which could have led to even more diverse interpretations of the same phenomena (Crotty, 2003). Therefore, in order to help the reader contextualise these life accounts better, the following chapter will provide a socio-political outline for each of the three countries: Finland, France and the UK giving particular attention to the higher-education and elite sporting systems operating there.

3.6.2. Rationale for using life stories

In the socio-psychological literature, life stories are often used to trace the critical moments of a person's life. Sometimes referred to as 'career transitions' or 'status passage narrative' by Plummer (2001) for example, these life events can tell us a lot about an individual's identity and the decision-making processes that usually take place around these 'turning-points'. Such transitions can range from the conventional life events such as getting married or divorced to other significant changes such as moving house, changing careers or living in a new country. The shift into new roles brings with it a shift into new identities and therefore this method has been chosen to capture both the transitions that athletes go through in their personal and sporting life and also the decision-making processes that they make use of in order to cope with such critical moments.

From the athletes' point of view, knowing about how elite sport fits within their wider picture of life course transitions is still an under-researched area (Wylleman et al., 2004), (Lavallee, 2000b). Learning about major transitions such as moving from compulsory schooling to higher education or employment, leaving home to independent living or being selected for top-class senior competitions all intersect within the same period of a student-athlete's life. Therefore, this research is targeted towards providing insight into these complex life experiences and seeking where possible to propose ways of facilitating these transitions for the benefit of both the athlete and the sport.

From a policy point of view there is also a concern expressed by Douglas and Carless (2006a) with regard to the way that elite athletes have been investigated by the research community to date. 'As a result of the research methods used and the way research findings are often represented, the experiences of athletes themselves are often missing from the research' (Douglas & Carless, 2006a). This has led to some re-direction in the type of studies that are being commissioned both by UK Sport nationally and other elite sport governing bodies globally, in line with recent policy shifts in elite sport development; that of a more athlete-centred approach (Douglas & Carless, 2006a), (De Bosscher et al., 2006), (Thibault & Babiak, 2005). Therefore, this study focuses predominantly on the student-athletes' experiences in an attempt to recapture their 'voice' and give primacy to it.

3.6.3. Approaches to life stories

Miller (2000) in his book *Researching Life Stories and Family Histories*, identifies three types of approach to conducting life stories. Although this typology is not intended to be followed in its ideal form, it is informative and structured in a way to aid the researcher adopt a practical position in relation to the field and people under study. As Miller (2000:11) reiterates:

Real researchers operate across the borders of the approaches and, while they may be based primarily within one approach, they will be aware of the arguments and virtues that constitute the strengths of the other schools and will utilise features of the other approaches in a pragmatic manner.

Figure 3.2: Three Approaches to biographical and family history research

Realist	Neo-positivist	Narrative
Inductive	Deductive	Fluid nature of individual's standpoint actively constructed as an ongoing (situational) project
Grounded theory based upon factual empirical material	Theory testing through factual empirical material	Questions of fact take second place to understanding the individual's unique and changing perception
Reality arises from the respondents' perspectives Unfocused interviews	Focused interviews The most hermeneutic – actor's subjective perspective as affected by social structure –the interplay between actor and structure	Life stories Reality structured by interplay between interviewee and interviewer in terms of representations (semiotics)
Saturation (multiple interviews with multiple respondents eventually reaching a point where little new is revealed by additional interviews) Life history as a 'microcosm' of a 'macrocosm'	Life history as a 'microcosm' of a 'macrocosm'	'postmodern', 'chaotic', ethno-methodological
Reliability is important	Validity is important The 'why?' question (e.g. why interaction proceeds as it does)	Present is a lens through which past and present can be seen Interplay between interviewee and interviewer as a 'microcosm' of a macrocosm The 'how?' question (e.g. how is context constituted?)

(Miller, 2000:13)

Realist Approach

The realist approach to life stories is more concerned with uncovering structural or collective symbolic phenomena in society as Bertaux (2005:139)

argued. This particular choice of ontological assumption about social-historical reality is required when adopting this approach. Similar to Grounded Theory based research this particular method is of an inductive nature whereby multiple cases are collected and analysed in an attempt to discern common patterns emerging from the data. This process is continued until there is not any significant 'new' data emerging from the analysis of the additional life stories also known as saturation (Miller, 2000:11).

Neo-positivist Approach

Starting off with a concept of an objective reality, the neo-positivists share the same ontological thinking as the realists. However, their method of collecting data is largely of a deductive nature. This requires the researcher to begin with a hypothetical prediction which is then tested empirically against observed or reported phenomena. Hence, 'focused modes of data collection or interviewing with semi-structured schedules are used. Issues of conceptual validity are important for this approach' (Miller, 2000:12).

Narrative Approach

Positioned at the constructivist end of the ontological spectrum, the narrativist approach is largely concerned with the individual, the subjective meaning and the context. A particular strength of the narrative interview is that it gives the interviewee more control in shaping the agenda for the interview. In contrast to the standard interview where the researcher usually makes use of a series of pre-set questions or theories that she / he would like to explore in detail this approach gives opportunity to the participant to identify central themes or key aspects that they deem important (Murray, 2003:101). The critical aspect of this approach focuses on the 'interplay between the interview partnership of interviewee and interviewer' (Miller, 2000:14) and therefore finding the right balance during the interview process is perhaps the most challenging accomplishment.

In the context of this research study, the approach to life-stories that was adopted lent itself more to the narrative approach since explained in the preceding sections the interview was co-constructed between the researcher and the interviewee. However, as indicated above the three approaches advocated by Miller (2000) were not designed to be exclusive and therefore there were some elements from the realist and neo-positivist perspectives incorporated.

3.6.4. Power in life-story research

There are obviously some issues to be addressed with adopting a narrative approach to life-story research because as Murray (2003) argues if the story is in fact a co-construction between two people then it may be the case that one party exerts more influence during the interview process which can lead to the narrative being shaped in a particular way as a result of this interaction. Therefore, getting the power balance right is a continuous challenge for the narrative researcher, in order not to reinforce one particular dominant plot line which may or may not have resonance with the other participant's world view.

As Murray (2003) argues social scientists are increasingly becoming more aware of the power issues that pervade all social relationships since the work of Foucault (1980) and therefore they must reflect on how these issues can be extended within a particular social context. He reiterates the importance of acknowledging the various power interests that are at play within each social interaction as in this case between the researcher and student-athlete and warns against the risks of reinforcing one narrative over another. Murray (2003:99) also hints at the link between personal narratives and dominant social discourses that might be influencing the participants either implicitly or explicitly in viewing their world in a particular way:

Societal narratives are not value-neutral but represent various power interests. The adoption of dominant narratives becomes a means of social discipline. People are constantly engaged in a process of negotiating the connection between their personal narratives and these dominant societal narratives.

Another important aspect to note is that the challenge in getting the power balance right does not stop with the data collection phase but carries on during the analysis stage of the interview as well. Thus the researcher must ensure that some reflection on how her own personal narrative is influencing the co-construction needs to take place. As Goodley et al. (2004:167) argued the researcher has to be 'reflexive that is, sensitive to how personal biography shapes the study and systematically reflects on this throughout the study'. An elaboration of how the researcher dealt with such issues of power in practice, both during the data collection phase and the analysis will ensue in a subsequent section of this chapter, where a detailed outline of the actual interviewing process will be provided.

3.7. *Validity of Constructs*

The term validity is used to signify truth (Silverman, 2000). In qualitative research, truth in an account is judged by how well the interpretation of the researcher accurately reflects the phenomena under study. However, "a basic problem in assessing the validity of qualitative research is how to specify the link between the relations that are studied and the version of them provided by the researcher" (Flick, 2004:225). A further concern is the criteria against which this interpretation should be judged since terms like 'validity' and 'reliability' have largely evolved for the assessment of quantitative research (Smith, 1996:192). One solution to this problem, as Flick argues is that we must reformulate the classic criterion of validity in an adequate way to fit the exigencies of qualitative research and also develop 'method-appropriate criteria', which do justice to the specificity of life stories because they have been developed from a very specific theoretical background (Flick, 2004:222).

3.7.1. Truth in life story telling

Some questions that have always been posed by life story telling are: how can the story be evaluated? How can we tell a 'good' story from a 'bad' one?

Must they be 'true' to be of any worth? And what might 'truth' mean? Are all stories equally valid or are there important ways of distinguishing between them? (Plummer, 2001:238).

Plummer (2001) suggests six ways on how one distinguish and evaluate a 'true story' drawing on various paradigms and approaches such as the 'correspondence theory of truth', realism, interpretivism, narrative theory of truth, aesthetic theory of truth and the pragmatic function of life stories. Atkinson (1998) adopting the latter approach, then uses measures like internal consistency and corroboration and persuasion to ensure validity. Roos (in (Humphrey, Miller, & Zdravomyslova, 2003) adds the concepts of authenticity, context, reflexivity and referentiality in his suggestions. Plummer (2001) goes further in that he examines the possible sources of bias and presents a checklist against which the researcher can evaluate how valid his/her life documents are. The sources of bias generally lie either with: (i) the subject being interviewed, (ii) the researcher conducting the life stories, (iii) the interaction between the subject and the researcher.

3.8. Reliability of data

"Reliability is primarily concerned with technique and consistency- with ensuring that if the study was conducted by someone else, similar findings would be obtained" (Plummer, 2001:154). But as with the criterion of validity, ensuring and evaluating reliability in qualitative studies the researcher is presented with a myriad of approaches and criteria specific to the theory of the issue under study and the methods used. For example in ethnographic research the quality of recording and documenting data is a key basis for assessing reliability (Flick, 2004:223).

In life history research the issues of reliability have been rarely discussed perhaps because of their very nature whereby their 'virtues lie in the relatively free flowing babble of talk, to attempt standardisation of any kind is to invite invalidity (Plummer, 2001:155). Yet, without some type of standardisation

and cross-checks, it would be very difficult for the researcher to defend the claims made in the thesis.

Table 3.3 – Criteria identified to assess life history research

Intentionality	“Good” life story research has both a clear <i>intellectual</i> purpose and a <i>moral</i> purpose
Researcher presence	Researcher present through an explicit reflexive self-accounting...life story texts explicitly reveal the intersection of a researcher’s life with that of the researched
Methodological Commitment	Sound life history research reflects a methodological commitment through evidence of a principled process and procedural harmony.
Holistic quality	A rigorous life history research account is imbued with an internal consistency and coherence that represents its seamless quality. Such an account also evidences a high level of authenticity that speak to the truthfulness of the research relationship, process of inquiry, interpretation and representational form.
Communicability	Issues related to audience and transformative potential. Life history research should maximise its communicative potential by addressing concerns about the accessibility of the research account, usually through the form and language with which it is written.
Aesthetic form	How insights about lives in context are conveyed is as important as what insights are conveyed. Concerned both with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aesthetic quality – how well the form adheres to a particular set of artistic processes and conventions • Aesthetic appeal – how well the form “works” as a mode of communication
Knowledge claims	Any knowledge claims made must reflect the multidimensional, complex, dynamic, intersubjective, and contextual nature of human experience. In so doing, knowledge claims must be made with sufficient ambiguity and humility to allow for multiple interpretations and reader response.
Contributions	Sound and rigorous life history research has both theoretical potential and transformative potential. The former acknowledges the centrality of the ‘so what?’ question and the power of the inquiry work to provide insight into individual lives, and more generally the human condition. The latter urges us as researchers to imagine new possibilities for those whom our work is about and for.

(Italics in original, Cole & Knowles, 2001:125)

Cole and Knowles (2001) delineate a set of eight elements and associated features that can serve as standards by which life history research can be evaluated. These criteria put emphasis on the notions of self, relationship and artfulness and illustrate how these can be judged. Table 3.3 above illustrates these defining elements and how they might usefully guide the evaluation process.

3.9. *Ethical considerations*

Elliott (2005:135) has utilised the term 'ethical' to describe those issues that relate to the relationship between the researcher and the interviewees and the impact of the research process on those individuals directly involved in the research. The two predominant ethical positions that are usually adopted in social research are the ethical absolutists, who seek to establish firm principles often encoded in professional charters and the situational relativists, who suggest that ethical dilemmas should be dealt with in a creative manner in the concrete situation at hand (Plummer, 2001:226-7). The researcher's own position in relation to this research study lends itself more to the situational relativists standpoint since the interviews are going to be carried out on an informal one-to-one basis and each of these interviews is going to be considerably different from the next. Keeping this in mind, however one must also note that all PhD methodologies have to undergo a rigorous evaluation and be cleared by the Loughborough University Ethical Advisory Committee according to a stringent protocol before researchers can go out in the field to carry out the empirical stage of their study.

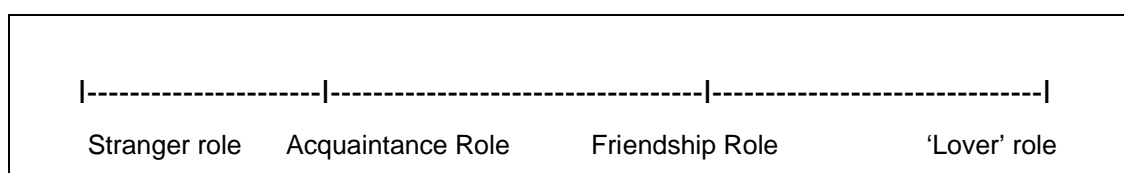
3.9.1. Ethical Concerns in the life story approach

As Atkinson (1998) observes 'it is impossible to anticipate what a life story interview will be like, not so much for how to do it but for the power of the experience itself'. It is therefore of paramount importance to discuss the ethical issues involved in conducting this research particularly with regards to

the method (life story) that is going to be employed. Due to the highly subjective/personal nature of the life story approach the researcher has a responsibility to make the interviewees aware of the risks involved in this type of interviewing method. Elliott (2005) warns about the risks that a researcher may experience during the interview process if the participant decides to talk unexpectedly about a particular difficult or disturbing topic. Thus she recommends that the researcher should prepare for this possibility by being sensitive to the issues discussed during the course of the interview. However, Elliott (2005:137) also point out that there a number of positive aspects connected to life story research as “people can also benefit from being given the opportunity to reflect on and talk about their lives with a good listener”.

There are a number of roles that the researcher can adopt for the purpose of conducting life stories as illustrated by Figure 3.3 below taken from Plummer’s discussion on researcher-researched continuum. The role that the researcher tried to adopt for this research study was positioned between stranger and acquaintance role, since most of the life stories were conducted abroad, the only time available on the research field was only sufficient to strike up an acquaintance with the student-athletes.

Figure 3.3 - The researcher and the researched – continuum



Taken from Plummer (2001:209)

3.10. Conducting Life-story interviews

Ideally when conducting life story interviews the researcher would meet up with the interviewee at least two or three times, with the interview lasting between an hour to an hour and a half each (Atkinson, 1998). This however

is not always possible and the length of life stories vary significantly from one study to the next. In this type of research the emphasis is more on the depth of the data rather than the length and therefore each researcher must be pragmatic in light of the resources and time available.

For the purpose of this study the aim was to meet with each of the interviewees twice with the interviews lasting around one hour. However, since most of the empirical research was going to be conducted abroad, there were some factors that eventually compromised the number of interviews conducted with each of the athletes as both their time and availability were constrained due to other commitments. Therefore, following discussions with her supervisor, the researcher decided to conduct one longer interview with every athlete. The interviews lasted between 70 to 130 minutes.

Drawing on the interviewing approach of Wolcott (1995 cited in Sparkes, 1998) the researcher began the interview with a 'grand tour' question in which the interviewees were invited to say something about themselves in very general terms. Athletes were then asked questions to encourage them to talk more specifically about their academic and sporting careers to date, prompting them to discuss in detail major career decisions that they had to make during their life course. Following Miller's (1998) narrative approach to life-story interviews, the researcher adopted an interactive role by actively listening to what the athletes had to say and at times also sharing point of views when it was deemed appropriate or the researcher was invited to do so. For example drawing on her own personal experience of training and competing at a National team level while being a university student, the researcher could empathise more with some of the issues that the interviewees were raising. Most participants were also particularly interested in what other athletes interviewed before them had to say in answer to some of the questions and therefore this was a good way to make a more 'effective speaker' out of the person being interviewed (Sparkes, 1998:648). By openly acknowledging these shared experiences the researcher was able to co-

construct a potentially more meaningful narrative for both the athlete and herself.

3.10.1. Rationale for Selection

In terms of sampling seven criteria were invoked to help the researcher in selecting the 18 student-athletes who participated in the study.

(i) Country selection - The first factor required that interviewees had to be formerly or currently listed as either an elite athlete or professional player in either France, Finland or the United Kingdom. The three European states, Finland, France and the UK were specifically chosen to be representative of the first three types identified in a typology of approaches to educational services for elite athletes in Higher education in Europe. An elaboration of the review of policy descriptions (Amara et al., 2004) that was undertaken and contributed to the development of this typology will follow in the subsequent section as part of the discussion on comparative research methodology.

(ii) Nature of the sport - The second factor related to the nature of the sports that were chosen. At the outset it must be stated that the aim of this study was not to directly compare the same sports across nations. Therefore, the researcher did not restrict the number of sports (13) chosen. The limiting criteria was that the interviewee's sport had to be either an Olympic (Summer and Winter) or professional sport.

(iii) Athlete status – Following the discussion from the previous point, being aware that different countries have different criteria on how to classify a sport as being professional, for pragmatic reasons the researcher included only those athletes who were either formerly or currently on a professional contract with their club. For Olympic athletes, the restriction was that they had to have been formerly or currently on the official elite athletes lists held by each respective National Olympic Committee / Elite training centres (e.g. World Class Podium or Development in the UK, *Pôles Espoirs* or *Pôles France* in France). An in-depth discussion of the different National pathways

that lead to elite athlete status is provided in the following chapter of this thesis.

(iv) Career stage – In life-story research it is ideal to interview the same individual at various points of his/her life to gain a longitudinal view of his/her career. However, due to the time restrictions of this research it was not possible to interview the student-athletes more than once. Therefore, in order to compensate for this limitation, the researcher specifically chose student-athletes who were at various stages of their athletic and academic careers (beginning, mid-point, end) to gain a better understanding of the changing nature of the type of decisions that these individuals are making in light of their dual career.

(v) Student status – All participants that were interviewed had to be either former or current University students. All the university graduates that were interviewed had graduated within five years of when the interview took place.

(vi) Gender representation – Ensuring the sample incorporated male and female student-athletes across countries and sport. Eight male and eight female athletes were interviewed for this research study.

(vii) Language – It was imperative all student-athletes interviewed could understand and speak in English. In the context of Finland and France, the interviewees were given the option of using a translator if they did not feel confident in expressing themselves in English at all times. In the end, three of the French athletes took up this option and were aided by either their English teacher or academic co-ordinator during the course of the interview. This individual had fairly close contact with the athlete, enjoying a much closer relationship than traditional tutor-student role. This is significant because it lessened the likelihood that the interviewee did not discuss difficult topics.

3.10.2. Interview Schedule

Finland

The selection of Finnish student-athletes was co-ordinated between the researcher and the Athletes' Study and Career Co-ordinator based at the Finnish Olympic Committee in Helsinki. The interviews were scheduled between 21st to 25th January, 2008. Five out of the six elite athletes in Finland were currently active in the following sports athletics, basketball, gymnastics, ice-hockey and judo and were at various stages of their sporting careers as illustrated in Table 3.4 below. Three of them were planning to retire within the coming year. The sixth, a retired professional football player had moved on to coach a top division team. Three of the interviews took place at the Finnish Olympic Committee offices in Helsinki while the other three were carried out in a central hotel cafeteria as requested by the participants.

Most of the interviewees were studying or had studied at Helsinki University, but one athlete was registered at Jyväskylä University (the only university in Finland offering sport related degrees) and another at Tampere University. Due to the nature of university education in Finland, all of these athletes have graduated or will soon graduate with a Masters degree. A fuller description of the education system in Finland will be provided in the following chapter.

Table 3.4 – Selection criteria for Finnish student-athletes

	Age	Individual / Team	Male / Female	Early/ Late age of Specialisation	Student / Graduate	Active / Retired
<i>Athletics</i>	32	Individual	M	Late	Student	Active
<i>Basketball</i>	28	Team	F	Late	Graduate	Active
<i>Football</i>	42	Team	M	Late	Graduate	Retired
<i>Gymnastics</i>	32	Individual	M	Early	Student	Active
<i>Ice-hockey</i>	20	Team	F	Late	Student	Active
<i>Judo</i>	22	Individual	F	Early	Student	Active

France

The choice of French athletes was restricted mostly to those student-athletes who were formerly or currently training and studying at INSEP, the National Institute of Sport and Physical Education based in Paris. As described in more detail in the following chapter, INSEP is one of the largest National multi-sport training centres in France, which can host up to 1,000 high level athletes across 24 sports (Coalter and Radtke, 2007).

Following email correspondence with one of the lecturers based at INSEP, who had agreed to co-ordinate all of the interviews (5) in France, interviews were scheduled between 20th and 29th November, 2007. As Table 3.5 below illustrates four of the interviews were carried out with student- athletes in the following sports: athletics, badminton, swimming and synchronized swimming. The retired judoka had trained at INSEP in the recent past but had moved to live and work in the UK and she was therefore interviewed in England. The handball player was currently on a professional contract with one of the top teams in France. Handball is considered a professional sport in France but it is not included in the INSEP programme. The interview therefore, took place at the player's home club office in Paris.

Table 3.5 - Selection criteria for French student-athletes

	Age	Individual / Team	Male / Female	Early/ Late age of Specialisation	Student / Graduate	Active / Retired
<i>Athletics</i>	28	Individual	F	Late	Graduate	Active
<i>Badminton</i>	31	Ind. / Team	M	Late	Student	Active
<i>Handball</i>	21	Team	M	Late	Student	Active
<i>Judo</i>	27	Individual	F	Early	Graduate	Retired
<i>Swimming</i>	22	Individual	M	Early	Student	Active
<i>Synchronised Swimming</i>	20	Team	F	Early	Student	Active

United Kingdom

Since the researcher was based at Loughborough University, one of the principal elite sport training centres in the UK the researcher was able to take advantage of the proximity of participants based at the University. Therefore, after contacting the respective directors of sport requesting that they recommend one or two athletes who might be willing to take part in the research study, the athletes were sent an invitation letter [please refer to Appendix 2] to confirm that they were willing to meet. The interviews took place between May 2007 and October 2008. Five interviews were carried out at Loughborough University while one took place in Glasgow at the interviewee's home.

Five out of the six athletes interviewed in the UK were all training at Loughborough and were either currently studying or had recently graduated from Loughborough University. The sports in which they were competing were athletics, golf, gymnastics and triathlon. The professional rugby player was currently on a professional contract with one of the top Scottish rugby teams and had recently graduated from Edinburgh University.

Table 3.6 – Selection criteria for British student-athletes

	Age	Individual / Team	Male / Female	Early/ Late age of Specialisation	Student / Graduate	Active / Retired
<i>Athletics</i>	23	Individual	F	Late	Graduate	Active
<i>Athletics</i>	23	Individual	F	Late	Student	Active
<i>Gymnastics</i>	22	Individual	M	Early	Student	Active
<i>Golf</i>	22	Individual	M	Late	Student	Active
<i>Rugby</i>	26	Team	M	Late	Graduate	Active
<i>Triathlon</i>	23	Individual	F	Late	Student	Active

3.11. Data Analysis

All interviews were digitally recorded with the consent of the participants and transcribed verbatim. The interviewees were given the opportunity to check over their transcripts in case they wanted to edit any of the details disclosed during the interview. All identifying features were then changed to protect the anonymity of the participants. As soon as the researcher could confirm that there were no requests by the interviewees to edit any of the transcripts the first analysis stage started.

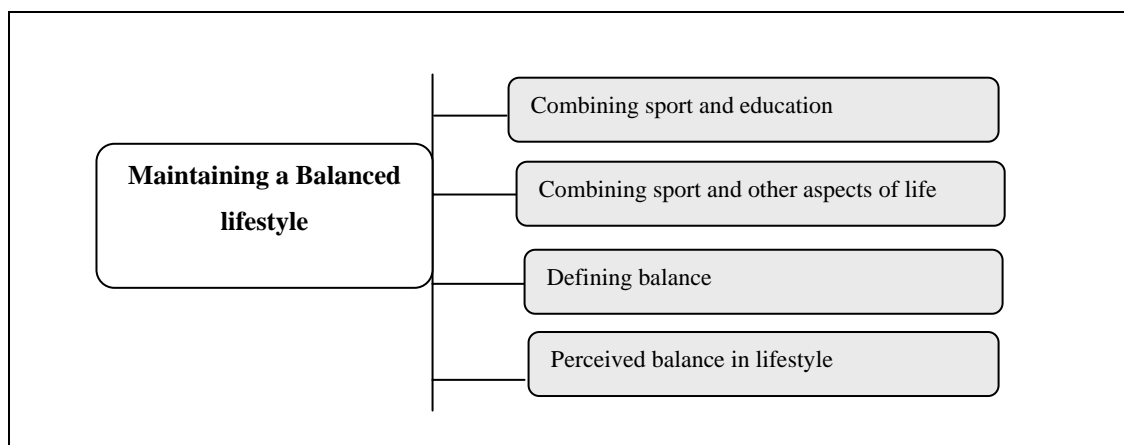
The researcher utilised the Nvivo which is a software package specifically designed for the analysis of qualitative data that captures 'in vivo coding'. This software helped facilitate the process of managing the transcripts and offers a more systematic format of recording the emergent themes in a hierarchical structure coding under tree nodes and free nodes (refer to Table 3.7 below). The focus is predominantly on inductive coding as direct quotations from the transcripts were utilised to discover patterns, identify themes and gain insight into these student-athletes' world view.

The coding was spread over 23 tree nodes and more than 50 free nodes. Nodes are labels for a concept or an idea in the data and can be found in two different formats, either as a free node or a tree node. A tree node is usually organised in a hierarchical structure as can be seen from the following example.

The first tree node has the 'parent' node entitled 'Maintaining a balanced lifestyle' and then a number of 'child' nodes such as 'combining sport and education', 'combining sport and other aspects of life', 'defining balance' and 'perceived balance in lifestyle' as illustrated in the diagram below. A free node, on the other hand is one which usually relates to 'stand-alone' concepts or ideas is usually saved as a list. For the purpose of this research study only tree nodes were utilised. Generally speaking the points were related to other tree nodes however there were some exceptions where issues were raised but interviewees asked not to be included. Both issues

related to personal relationships with coaches, which consequently have been excluded from the discussion to respect the wishes of the participants as expected by the ethics protocol.

Figure 3.4 – An example of a tree node utilised in Nvivo coding



A comprehensive list of all the tree nodes that were incorporated within the Nvivo coding system is included in Table 3.7 below. However, a full discussion of these emergent themes will ensue in Chapters 5 and 6 of this thesis. It is important to note at this stage that the use of Nvivo software was particularly useful in the analysis stage of this research project as it helped to collapse the life-stories into an amalgam of themes, highlighting both the commonalities and different experiences of these 18 student-athletes across 13 sports in three different countries.

Table 3.7 – Table illustrating the emergent themes of the first level of data analysis

Tree Node		References
General Context		
	Family Background	18
	Neighbourhood	18
Compulsory Schooling Years		1
	Attitude towards school during primary and secondary years	18
	Primary and Secondary School context	18

College years or High School		21
College -University Life		24
	Academic choice	18
	Critical moments in education	6
	Experiences or knowledge of universities abroad	12
	Flexibility (or lack of) within the university system	15
	On choosing that particular University	18
	Scholarships	7
	typical day at university	18
Life after university - prospective plans		9
General perceptions on education		18
Retrospective comments on education		20
Sporting Career		
	Introduction to the particular sport	18
	Career Highs	18
	Career lows	16
	Critical moments	14
	Goals	4
	Long-term goals	
	Short-term goals	
	Qualification to major sporting events	11
	Relationship with former clubs	4
	Retirement	18
	Support around retirement decisions	
Experience of professional Sport		9
	Agent or Manager role	2
	Contracts	4
	playing professionally locally or abroad	4
Post -Athletic career		10
	Perceived post-athletic career choices	15
	Post-athletic career experience	2
	potential post-athletic career direction	18
Life after elite sports		43
National Elite sporting		38

system		
General Perceptions on Sport		26
Relationship with NGB -		22
Retrospective comments about sports		14
Financial Constraints		4
	Education related financial constraints	5
	sport related financial constraints	8
Dual career - employment and sport		20
Identity		
	Athletic identity -Character Traits	18
	Identity -Character traits	18
	National Sporting Pride	6
	Self-rating as a student	12
	Self-rating as an athlete	15
Skills and Competences		4
	Organisational Skills	11
	Time Management	12
A balanced Lifestyle		
	combining sport and education	18
	Combining sport and other aspects of life	18
	Definition of balance	15
	is there a need for balance	10
	perceived balance in lifestyle	18
Decision-Making		213
Supporting Networks		
	Coaches' Support	13
	Family Support	18
	other professional staff	15
	Peers - University friends or Sport friends	16
	Teachers-Academic staff	13
Transitions Turning points		20

The analysis of interview data was based upon both inductive and deductive processes as outlined by Blaikie (2000). The inductive process identified a number of elements such as decision-making and effective strategies as highlighted by the student-athletes interviewed, which were deemed critical to the successful management of a dual career in elite sport and university education. However, this inductive process was also informed by deductive insights provided by the theoretical assumptions adopted by the researcher throughout the whole research process, principally critical realism and the developmental model on transitions faced by athletes as advocated by Wylleman and Lavallee (2003).

These theoretical insights led to an analysis that sought to examine ways in which student-athletes came to deal with the realities of combining a dual career. This task has been addressed, in part, by analysing the critical transitions that student-athletes typically experienced in progressing through the two careers. By focussing on these crucial turning points the researcher was able to gain a clearer understanding of the decision-making processes involved, that are in reality not always smooth. In fact by highlighting a number of non-normative (unexpected) transitions inherent in the two careers, this study aimed to broaden the knowledge on student-athlete transitions that had to date been documented in the literature. In sum, this study's analytical strategy was based on an iterative approach, where the data collection and analysis progressed concurrently, consistently referring back to and informing each other.

3.12. Conducting Comparative Research

Comparative analysis, and in particular comparative policy analysis, offers particular challenges. Henry et al. (2007) have characterised methodological approaches adopted in comparative analysis as falling into four types or categories, each with differing ontological and epistemological characteristics (Henry and Institute of Sport and Leisure Policy, 2007: chapter 2). These are: a positivistic approach (focusing through statistical analysis on the

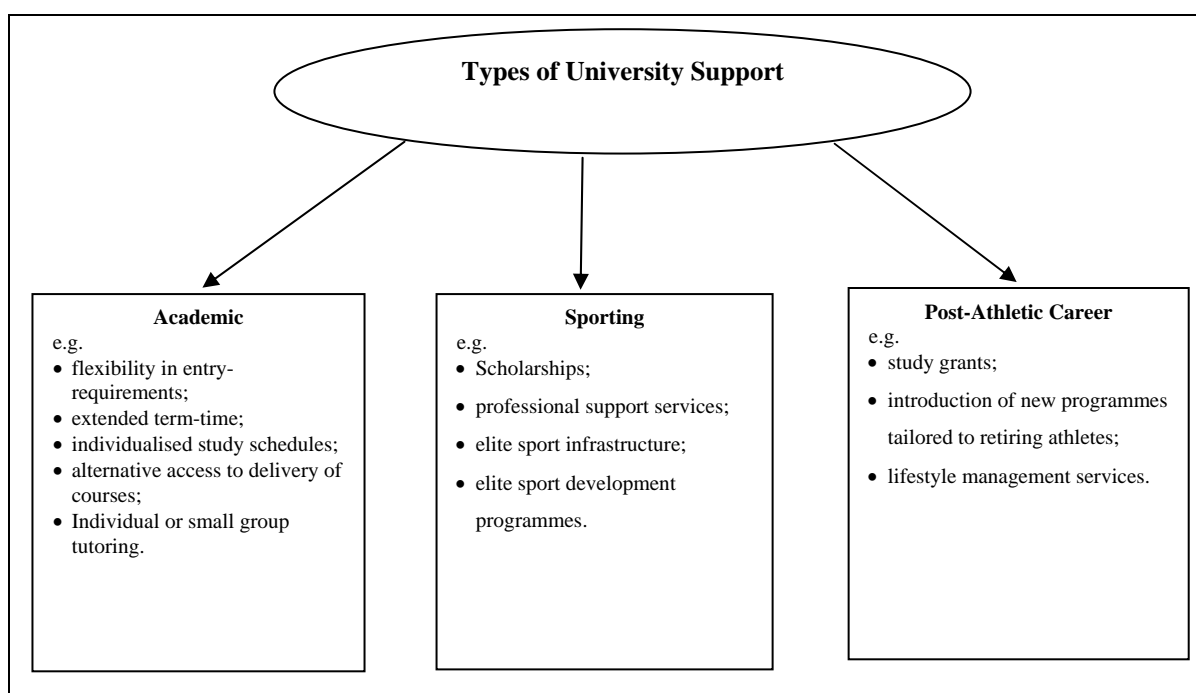
identification of shared statistical associations between the dependent policy variable and independent variables relating to local social, economic or political conditions); an ideographic approach (seeking to compare descriptions of policy systems and processes in order to define differences in the ways in which policy systems operate); a transnational approach (seeking to theorise transnational as well as local/ national influences on policy); and discourse based approaches (which seek through discourse analysis to explain how the policy universe and the possible options are prescribed and proscribed through their discursive construction, largely in political and policy statements).

The approach that was adopted by Amara et al., (2004) in reviewing the policy systems that exist across European states was ideographic, dealing with expert descriptions / accounts of national systems, and grouping these accounts together in ideal typical frameworks. The resultant categories thus constitute a typology rather than a taxonomy, that is they constitute ideal types rather than groups of national systems defined by clustering techniques employing empirical indicators in a positivistic frame.

3.12.1. University Provision for Elite athletes in European Member States

The review of policy descriptions undertaken by Amara et al. (2004) highlighted three principal categories of policy initiative within the university and higher education sector in respect of elite sportspersons namely the development of academic services, elite sporting provision, and post-athletic career preparation or support (see Figure 3.5). In so far as our concerns are with academic delivery the discussion below relates principally to the first and, to a lesser degree, the third of these categories.

Figure 3.5 – The adaptation by universities of services for elite young sports persons



The differing approaches to academic policy in relation to elite athletes derived from the process outlined above helped the researchers to define in ideal typical terms the nature of the different policy positions taken up within the Member States. What follows below is therefore an account of the nature of these ideal types and a discussion of the extent to which the policy systems of individual Member States conform to, or differ from, these ideal typical frameworks.

The findings of the European study underlined the variability of response in national systems to the demands placed on elite young sportspersons. The situation across the Member States ranged from negligible provision to established structures backed by legislation. These responses were characterised in a four-fold typology. The first type is state centric provision where action on the part of educational providers is required by legislation or by state regulation. The second relates to those systems in which the state acts as a facilitator fostering formal agreements between educational and sporting bodies or individuals. The third system is one in which the National Federations or Sports Institutes engage directly in negotiation with educational bodies on behalf of the individual athlete. The fourth type is one

of 'Laissez faire' where there are no formal channels or structures in place and where accommodation of the student-athlete's needs is either not admitted, or is largely a matter of individually and informally negotiated arrangements. Table 3.8 summarises these positions, and the typology is outlined more fully below. It is important to acknowledge that the typology is based on an ideal typical account and thus individual nation states may exhibit traits of more than one ideal type, not falling neatly into a single category. This may be particularly true in states in which education policy and / or sports policy are not direct responsibilities of the central state, and thus where there may be greater variation within the system.

Table 3.8 – Typology of Approaches to Educational Services for Elite Athletes in Higher Education

<i>Type</i>	<i>Key Features</i>	<i>Examples</i>
1. State Centric Regulation	Responsibility is placed on HE institutions to provide adapted opportunities for student-athletes through legislation, statutory requirement or government regulation.	France, Hungary, Luxembourg, Spain, Poland, Portugal
2. State as Sponsor / Facilitator	An approach where by the state promotes formal agreements to ensure that student-athletes' needs are being met at University level, for example through 'permissive legislation'.	Belgium (Flanders), Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden.
3. National Sporting Federations / Institutes as Intermediary	There is an established system of recognised channels for sporting advocates (usually national governing bodies or national institutes of sport) to act on behalf of the student to negotiate flexible educational provision with HE institutions.	Greece, United Kingdom
4. Laissez Faire: no formal structures	There are no structured measures in place and arrangements rely on individually negotiated agreements where these prove possible.	Austria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, The Netherlands Ireland, Italy, Malta, Slovakia, Slovenia

1. State Centric Regulation

This type of policy response is characterised by a requirement, typically via legislation or state regulations, placed on academic institutions to provide adapted opportunities for student-athletes in terms of entry-requirements, time-tabling flexibility, exam dates, type of course delivery and such arrangements countries are evident in France, Hungary, Spain and Portugal.

2. State as sponsor/ facilitator

The second category of policy response within this typology is characterised by a formal system for acknowledging student-athletes' needs, but which stops short of a legal requirement, often relying on permissive legislation. Seven national systems fall within this category, namely Belgium (Flanders), Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania and Sweden.

3. National Sporting Federations / Institutes as Intermediaries

The third type of policy approach is one in which the athletic development needs of the individual are catered for by the sporting institutions (national governing bodies of the particular sport or national sports institutes) and where staff of these sporting entities may advise and act on behalf of the student-athlete to secure 'appropriate' educational arrangements.

4. Laissez Faire: No Formal Structures

The fourth approach relates to cases in which there are no formal structures and any arrangements (where these prove possible) largely rely on ad hoc individually negotiated agreements. This category is very broad because there are some cases of individuals and institutions that have been very active in accommodating student-athletes' needs for example in The Netherlands, Lithuania and Cyprus but there are also countries whose educational system is still quite rigid in nature with respect to dealing with sporting exceptions such as in the case of Italy, Ireland and Malta. In this fourth category of response, while individuals and institutions may make efforts to foster appropriate forms of educational provision for elite athletes such efforts are ad hoc and practice within these states is underdeveloped and not backed by formal agreement between the stakeholders involved. In

such contexts athletes' experience of appropriately adapted higher education provision is varied and serendipitous.

For the purpose of this research study France, Finland and the UK were chosen to be the comparative states representing the first three types of approach as a result of the typology outlined above by Amara et al., 2004. Initially Italy was also being considered as a comparative state to represent the fourth category however, the researcher was restricted in terms of time and financial resources, and therefore it was decided that only three states will be investigated.

3.13. Conclusion

This chapter has considered the research strategy and methodological assumptions that underpin this study permeating the relationship between ontology, epistemology, theory and method (Grix, 2002). It has justified the adoption of a critical realist ontology and epistemology where it was argued that reality does not present itself as it really is and therefore as Hay (2002:122) argued theoretical assumptions have to help the researcher to "reveal the structured reality of the world we inhabit", by casting "our gaze beyond the superficial world of appearances, deploying theory as a sensitising device to reveal the structured reality beneath the surface".

The particular theoretical position adopted in this study was based on an anti-foundationalist ontology which assumes that there is a reality which exists independently of the researcher's knowledge of it and which cannot be directly observed though this reality may be socially constructed (Marsh and Furlong, 2002). The epistemological approach adopted was to seek to understand how the interviewees perceived, constructed and modified their world. Thus this will be reflected in how the research findings will be presented in the subsequent sections. In accordance to the critical realism tenets advocated by Marsh and Furlong (2002) social structures were not seen to determine the action of individual agents but rather they constrained

or facilitated the opportunities for such action. Social agents in turn were regarded as reflexive individuals who are able to interpret and modify structures for their own benefit as well as potentially impacting on structures unconsciously.

The method employed to gather the data for this research study was the life story approach. This decision was informed through the systematic review analysis which highlighted the advantages of adopting such a qualitative method in producing rich data and identified a limitation to the research methods that had been adopted to date in studies on elite athletes (Sparkes and Smith, 2002; McGillvray and McIntosh, 2006; Roderick, 2006a). Moreover, keeping in mind the nature of the research questions driving this study, this method seemed the most appropriate 'tool' to capture holistically the life experiences of student-athletes for the following reasons outlined by Sparkes (1995):

The ability of life history to focus upon central moments, critical incidents, or fateful moments that revolve around indecision, confusions, contradictions, and ironies, gives a greater sense of process to a life and give more ambiguous, complex and chaotic view of reality. It also presents more "rounded" and believable characters than the "flat" seemingly irrational, and linear characters from other forms of qualitative enquiry.

In life history methodology, theory is typically inductively built from the analysis of the data generated, however as argued in the preliminary sections of this chapter, even recognising the field as a field is normally dependent upon prior knowledge of ideas collected around a phenomenon. Therefore an ideal typical / radical grounded theory approach is virtually impossible to realise, but an approach which holds theory in abeyance is feasible. Here the place of Lavalley and Wylleman in informing this project or at least the researcher's approach to understanding the research domain has to be acknowledged. It is the prominent approach in the literature and certainly informed the way that the interviewer formed some of the questions addressed in the interview. On the other hand (even though the interview is recognised as a product of the interaction between interviewer and

interviewee) the researcher has consciously sought to leave open 'routes' for the story to take such that the interview is not simply a 'dialogue' with Wylleman and Lavalée's conceptual framework / theory.

Linking life story research to policy-making

In policy literature, Green and Houlihan (2004:389) argued that individual agency needs to be explored in elite sport policy-related research since it guides the researcher in the following three ways. It:

- i. Provides a more (agent) informed understanding of historically developed processes relating to elite sport policy direction
- ii. Allows distinctions to be made between the 'rhetoric' provided in the policy documents and the 'reality' of the agent's perspective
- iii. Discerns the normative values and belief systems underlying the agent's perspective as well as making an assessment of his/her perception of the constraining / facilitating structural context within which he/she operates

The above three research implications were particularly relevant to this study as the focus had been consciously and entirely shifted to these agents constituting the micro-level of policy analysis for the duration of the whole research process. Thus having identified the factors that were enabling and/or constraining the student-athletes' experience from the data gathered in the life stories as will be demonstrated in Chapters 5 and 6, while analysing the policy processes and ascertaining the priorities that characterise elite sports policy in Chapter 7, the final stage of this study will assess how well these policy assumptions articulated with these athletes' world-views. Issues such as which features of the policy were enabling or constraining the athletes' educational and sporting experience and how did these assumptions relate to what student-athletes aspired to have in their two careers will be discussed in chapter 7 of this thesis. In conclusion, the researcher will be able to consider whether these two world-views were a good fit or whether there were evident disjunctures that needed to be addressed.

Chapter 4 – Contextualising the life-stories

4.1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of the wider historical and socio-political context relevant to this study. To this end a discussion on the recent sport policy development at the European level will be included in the first part of the chapter. In the second part the focus will be narrowed to the three specific European countries under investigation; Finland, France and the UK. Key aspects of both the educational and elite sporting systems will be outlined and initiatives on how elite sport and academia can be combined in each of these countries will be discussed.

Each country profile will include three sections. The first will consider the political context and will look at the level of government intervention through the main executive and legislative bodies. The second section will outline the educational system established in each country highlighting examples of academic institutions which provide specialist sport provision. The complete lifecycle of the educational process (from compulsory schooling through university) in relation to student-athletes will be discussed, however special attention will be given to the roles adopted by some universities in this respect.

The third section will comprise of the elite sporting system and therefore will include governmental and non-governmental sport structures, which are responsible for the national development and organisation of the sport. At the outset it must be stated that this is a descriptive account of the policies and systems in place with the aim of helping the reader to contextualise the life-story accounts in the subsequent chapter.

4.2. The Policy Context: Recent developments in sports policy at the European level

The role of the EU in sport has grown considerably in importance in the last two decades. Although sport per se is still not an area in which the EU has a direct competence to act, nevertheless in so far as sport is a professional trading activity, or impinges on aspects of regional development, or social policy (such as combating social exclusion), the EU does have powers to act (Henry and Matthews, 2001). Competition policy, regional development, or social cohesion policies may not be sports policies as such but they do impinge significantly on the level and visibility of action of the EU and the Commission on citizens' everyday experience of sport (Henry, 2007).

There has been debate for some considerable time about whether the EU should have a competence, a legal basis for intervention in the field of sport (Parrish, 2003). Concrete proposals were first debated in the discussions surrounding the passage of the Maastricht Treaty. Although there was some resistance within both the sporting and political worlds, a deal was brokered which appended a statement on sport to the Maastricht treaty (Henry and Matthews, 1998). The statement, though fairly anodyne, signalled a will on the part of the majority to consider sport as a policy area for further action. A report to the Council of Ministers in Helsinki in 1999 resulted in the adoption of a Declaration on Sport as an appendix to the Nice Treaty on European Union. Though this declaration did not extend the powers of the EU it did signal the growing determination of the EU to act in the sports field in respect of the concerns of both amateur and professional sport, and more specifically in relation to the education and vocational needs of elite athletes. The Council of Ministers explicitly recognised the importance of addressing such issues in Annex IV to the Presidency Conclusions to the Nice European Council Meeting (7-9 December 2000) which urged:

the need for special heed to be paid, in particular by sporting organisations, to the education and vocational training of top young

sportsmen and -women, in order that their vocational integration is not jeopardised because of their sporting careers. (European Council of Ministers, 2000)

In the early part of the current decade the EU was absorbed in the consequences of rapid expansion and the perceived need for a more formalized framework to accommodate the increasingly complex policy context of a European Union which had grown from 15 to 25 and then 27 Member States. The inclusion of an article in the EU Treaty intended to establish a Constitution for Europe signed by the Council of Ministers in 2004 (but dropped following rejection in referenda in France and the Netherlands in 2005) represented a further step in the process of formalising the EU's role in sport policy as a competence. In the Lisbon Reform Treaty, drawn up to replace the failed Constitution, an element of Article 165 provides authority for a 'soft' competence declaring that in respect of sport the "Union shall have competence to carry out actions to support, coordinate or supplement the actions of the Member States" and that the EU would "develop the European dimension in sport, by promoting fairness and openness in sporting competitions and cooperation between bodies responsible for sports, and by protecting the physical and moral integrity of sportsmen and sportswomen, especially the youngest sportsmen and sportswomen" (European Commission, 2007b:110). While at the time of writing this Treaty was due to be ratified by June 2009, its passage in some Member States still appeared to be potentially problematic, and indeed it may have been dealt a fatal blow by the failure of the Irish referendum of June 2008 to secure a yes vote. Nevertheless its inclusion of sport as a competence reflects a continuing determination to address certain sporting issues.

The European Commission's White Paper on Sport (European Commission, 2007c) incorporated a series of policy actions, (summarised within the 'Coubertin Plan', European Commission, 2007a). While the White Paper was clearly intended to pave the way for work on a programme following acceptance of a competence in the Lisbon Treaty, nevertheless in most respects its proposed lines of action relied on existing competences covering

other areas of policy. One of these areas is the protection of the interests of young athletes in respect of (among other matters) their educational rights and interests.

The issue of the rights of young elite sportsmen and women is one which reflects two sets of concerns. The first is the need to protect them from commercial and other pressures which may erode their access to vocational or educational development, thus placing them in potentially difficult situations following retirement from sport. The second, perhaps less obvious issue, is that of unfair competition between nation states when some nations permit the exploitation of young talent without reference to the educational requirements of the individual while others do not. In the same way as the introduction of a 'Social Chapter' in the Maastricht Treaty was designed to reduce unfair competition for jobs between Member States on the basis of different levels of workers' rights, an effect of the legislation here may be to minimise the impact on nation states of differential rights accorded to athletes in terms of access to education and training.

Within the context of this developing concern for the education of elite young sportsmen and women, this thesis seeks to outline the nature of policy practice relating to higher education in the Member States of the EU.

Since the beginning of the decade, the European Commission has also shown a growing concern with the multifaceted life of young sportspeople and has concentrated its efforts in particular on the protection of their access to educational opportunities (European Parliament, 2003). The year 2004 was designated as the European Year of Education through Sport by the European Union Commission, and as part of this initiative it commissioned a number of studies and projects on a local, regional, national, transnational and community wide level, which aimed at investigating or promoting the links between sport and education in the 25 Member States of the EU. The budget for these projects was fairly substantial (approximately €12.1 million: European Commission, 2004).

In addition to the European study on which this thesis draws, a number of other major European studies concerning aspects of the education of elite sportspersons have also been recently commissioned notably, Education in Elite Sport in Europe (German Sport Confederation, 2004) co-ordinated by the German Sport Confederation and including national partners on the project team from Sweden, Czech Republic, the UK and The Netherlands; and the European Athlete as Student (Oulu Region Academy of Sport, 2004) co-ordinated by the City of Oulu Department of Education together with the Oulu Region Academy of Sports. The main aim for this project was to create a cooperative network between the participating partners (the project began with seven formal partners but eventually encompassed 20 partners in total) in order to improve athletes' opportunities of combining athletic activities and academic demands and to define a European approach to dealing with the education of athletes (Oulu Region Academy of Sport, 2004). More recently the European Commission funded a study on The Training of Young Sportsmen and Sportswomen in Europe (INEUM Consulting & TAJ, 2007). This was a response to the concerns of the sports movement and Member States in relation to the quality of the training of sportspeople in Europe. The main purpose of the study was to identify ways of improving the legal and political framework for preserving and developing high-quality training for elite sportspersons, and in particular young sportspersons, without compromising other aspects of their lives such as education.

As Donnelly and Petherick (2004) point out there are currently few protections afforded to elite athletes by the state in the following areas: limits on training time; limits on competitions; enforcement of the time that athletes devote to compulsory education; security and investing their income; and access to health and safety regulations. They further emphasise that both governments and sport organisations should ensure "the education and healthy development of children and adolescents in the sport development systems" (Donnelly and Petherick, 2004:319) since statistics clearly illustrate that only a small percentage of these young people go on to become Olympic or professional athletes, and even where they do, post-athletic careers should be considered. Similarly, David (2005:185), in his book Human Rights

in Youth Sport argues that the right to education of these sportspersons should not be neglected:

Too often the best interests of the child are not taken into consideration when a decision has to be made as to whether a child opts for intensive sport training or continues studying. Adults – parents, coaches, sponsors –tend to impose their choice on the young athlete.

Commenting on David's work, Brackenridge argues that current elite sporting systems have tended to 'de-humanise' the athletes in their pursuit of success and they "effectively exclude any concern for individual moral reasoning or political autonomy in the developing athlete as a performance machine" (Brackenridge, 2004:324). The literature reflects therefore a need to foster ethical and sustainable practices by developing an elite sporting system which will be effective in the identification and nurturing of sporting talent, while still respecting the educational / vocational needs of young athletes. Adopting a rights perspective in sport as Brackenridge suggests could go some way to changing the current 'survivalist' methods to training that are characteristic of some sports and "could lead to the empowerment of the individual athletes, better representation, reduction in their hours of training, increases in financial rewards and insurance protection, and better provision for long-term educational and career planning" (Brackenridge, 2004:334). The reality for the majority of elite athletes is that even though they may be very successful on the world sporting stage they will never make a living out of their sport and will have to think of some alternative means to support themselves during and after their sporting career (David, 1999).

Having outlined the current debates in relation to the education of elite athletes at the European level the following discussion will concentrate on the specific cases of the three European nation states of Finland, France and the UK. These country profiles were envisaged in a way to allow for a better understanding of the socio-political context in which the life-stories collected for this research study are embedded. By outlining the structural features of

the two policy areas of concern, primarily those characterising elite sport and university education, the analysis was able to identify similarities and differences in the approach that each of these states has adopted to develop in respect to their own student-athletes.

4.3. Finland

Finland has approximately five million inhabitants and it is a parliamentary republic. The Parliament composed of 200 representatives is elected by members of the public during general elections held every four years. The Parliament has the highest legislative power and oversees matters such as the state budget and Government actions in relation to legislation and statutes. The public also gets to elect the President of the republic every six years, whose main responsibilities are to put forward government bills to be discussed in Parliament, ratify laws, and issue decrees. The president has the power not to approve an act which has been passed by parliament and in such cases the application of the law is postponed.

Central administration in Finland is based on two structural systems: the ministerial administrative system (which is usually directed by a minister with political responsibility) and the system of administrative agencies. The latter functions under the supervision of the former. For example the Finnish National Board of Education is a central agency which is led by the Ministry of Education. However, central administrative bodies still operate in a relative autonomous manner although they are still legally liable for their actions (EUROPA, 2008a).

4.3.1. The Education System in Finland

The aim of the Ministry of Education is to promote education and culture. There are two ministers at the Ministry of Education: the Minister of Education and Science is responsible for matters relating to education and research and the Minister of Culture and Sport for matters relating to culture,

sports, youth, copyright, student financial aid, and church affairs. The role of the Finnish Board of Education is to develop education, evaluate education provision and offer information and services.

Compulsory schooling in Finland is between ages seven to 16. Opportunities to specialise in sport start from the age of 14, where a young athlete can decide to go either to one of the 12 sport-oriented upper-secondary school, or a sport-oriented vocational upper secondary school, or a general or vocational upper secondary school but which provide more hours of sport (Amara et al., 2004).

Elite athletes who enter the sport schools in secondary level or schools in higher-level that belong to a network of sport academies have access to counselling, personal tutoring and flexible timetables. In 2006 there were 12 established academies which aim to provide young athletes with the option of combining sport and education. All major schools within the regions are involved with the network via a designated contact responsible for co-ordinating student's training and study programme.

Although studies after the age of 16 are not compulsory, more than half of the students tend to finish upper secondary school (which lasts until the age of 18) and sit their matriculation exam, which is mandatory to enter university (Coalter and Radtke, 2007:32). The sports-oriented upper secondary sports schools in Finland require high academic entry standards and student-athletes must manage their time well in order to combine their education and sport successfully. There is a system of credits (20 out of a minimum of 75) that can be awarded to the student-athlete if they go to the training sessions provided by the school. Sports high schools tend to specialise in a number of sports however they usually also support a set of 'minority' sports so they still manage to bring together a small group of people.

A regular high school career usually lasts three years, however elite athletes have the option to extend this to either four or five years in some cases. The school provides training three to four times per week, usually in the morning

from 8am to 10am but most athletes then will join their own sport clubs in the area for the evening training sessions (Interview data, 2008).

The Finnish University System

Gaining a matriculation certificate does not necessarily mean that students get to go to the university and department of their choice as on average only one third of particular age-group in one given year is offered a place. The annual number of applicants is approximately 68,000 and on average only 28,000 candidates are admitted. In 2004, it was estimated that there were 170,000 university students, with 21,900 being post-graduates (Kanerva, 2004).

All Finnish universities (20) are state-run, with the government providing some 65% of their funding. Universities select their own students and the competition for admission is intense. However, tuition is free for all students (Kanerva, 2004). The degree system in Finland has undergone significant changes in the 1990s to allow for greater flexibility and freedom of choice on the part of the student. Following the Bologna Decree, a Bachelor's Degree (120 credits) can be completed in three years and a Masters Degree (180 credits) in five years. Up until 2006 students at Finnish universities did not have any restrictions on the number of years that they can be registered as students and therefore on average the duration of studies tended to be six and a half years. One explanation for this is that graduating with a Bachelor's Degree is not considered sufficient to secure good employment in the job market and therefore most students opt to do a Masters degree. The annual number of degrees in Finland in 2004 was 16,500 of which 12,100 were Masters Degrees and 1,200 were doctorates (Kanerva, 2004).

The Finnish University system is particular because students are not given a set time-table to follow for a degree programme. Rather students have the opportunity to pick modules according to individual preference as long as they achieve a set target of points accumulated at the end of each year. This allows the students to continue to progress at their own pace. In addition

there are also some universities such as Tampere University, which has a system where students are not even restricted to a choice of modules solely from their department but allows them to pick modules across a number of disciplines (Interview data, 2008).

Elite athlete provision by Universities

All fields apply *numerus clausus*, in which entrance examinations are a key element. The Finnish Ministry of Education awards grants for athletes proposed by the Olympic Committee and the Paralympic Committee who on the basis of their international performance have potential for winning a medal in the Olympic or Paralympic Games, or in the World Championships. The level of the tax-free sport grant is either €12,000 or €6,000 per year. Grants are allocated in both summer and winter Olympic sports as well as in non-Olympic and Paralympic sports. The total amount of sports grants for the year 2004 was €558,000 (Merikoski-Silius, 2006).

The criterion for allocation of a full (€12,000) Athlete's Grant is that the athlete has reached 6-8th place in the individual competition of the season's main event (Olympic Games, World Championships or World Cup overall competition). The criterion for the grant of €6,000 is that the athlete has finished 8-12th place in individual competition for these same events. The criterion for the award of a young athlete's grant (€6,000) is that the athlete attain 12-15 place in the corresponding competitions. An athlete who is awarded a grant must sign a training contract with the given Sports Federation and the Finnish Olympic Committee, in which the athlete agrees to follow the existing anti-doping rules as well as other requirements such as having a personal study programme. (Kanerva, 2004).

4.3.2. The Finnish Elite Sports System

Governmental Sport Structures

Sport in Finland is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. The National Sports Council (NSC) which is the expert body for advising the Ministry of Education on sports affairs has three main divisions: sports policy, adapted physical activity and sport research and physical education (EUROPA, 2008a) . The National Sports Council is in charge solely of national sport policy matters and their impact without any intervention from the non-governmental sport sector (Steinbach, Ternes and Petry, 2004:120). The Ministry of Education leads sport policy through legislation and financing.

Sport Legislation in Finland

According to Chaker (1999) Finland has adopted a non-interventionist sport legislation model supported by a basic law on sport. Finland is the only Nordic country with a general law on sport - The Sport Act (1979) - which establishes the state's "funding jurisdiction" over sport and sets out the basic government structure and responsibilities for sport (Chaker, 1999:18).

Non-governmental Sport Structures

The Finnish Sports Federation (SLU) was founded by the Finnish sports organisations in November 1993 and serves as an umbrella organisation for its 127 members, which is equivalent to the membership of over 1.1 million Finns. The local sport clubs are responsible for the organisation of sporting activities both at competitive and grassroots levels (EUROPA, 2008a).

The Finnish Olympic and Paralympic Committee, in co-operation with sport federations focus on planning and implementation of specific development projects geared to promote top-level sport. There are 11 National and three

regional sport institutes in Finland which provide coaching in competitive sports in co-operation with sport organisations (Virtala, Astala, Tolonen and Heikkala, 2004:151).

The Finnish Olympic Committee also plays a role in providing different services related to athletes' educational and career issues. Since 2001 the Olympic committee has been financed by the Ministry of Education to employ a study and career counsellor to provide assistance to athletes with study and career matters and to coordinate with educational institutions and sports federations (Merikoski-Silius, 2006:6).

Professional Sport

According to the Finnish Sport Federation website there are about 1,000 professional athletes in Finland defined as athletes who earn their principal income from sports. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health organises a separate social security system for professional athletes. The social benefits guaranteed to workers apply to athletes with taxable earnings from sport that amount to (€9,423) or more per year. Recent decisions of the Supreme Court of Finland have established a clear employment relationship between professional athletes and their clubs. The relationship binds both parties under the Employment Contracts Act. This policy is in line with the policy and case law of the EU on the application of the Treaty of Rome, which stipulates that the threshold for finding that a person is engaged in an economic activity should be low (Chaker, 1999:61).

4.4. France

France has a population of approximately 60 million people. Elections are held every five years to appoint the President of the Republic after winning by an absolute majority. The President is then responsible to appoint the Prime Minister who in consultation with the former will appoint the other members of government. The Parliament includes the National Assembly and the Senate

and represents 577 constituencies. As head of government the Prime Minister answers both to the President of the Republic and the National Assembly (EUROPA, 2008b).

4.4.1. The Education System in France

In France, school is compulsory from the age of 6 to 16. The Ministry for Youth, National Education and Research (MJENR) lays down the national educational policy. It determines school curricula and complementary activities. It ensures the running of the French education system. It recruits and trains primary school teachers, secondary school teachers and in particular, physical education teachers. The choice was made to integrate sporting activities into the school system. The specificity of the French education system lies in the fact that sport is included in the programs and sport is done in school associations. The running of school sports associations is ensured by physical education and sport teachers.

Secondary schooling is divided into two stages, or *cycles*. From 11 to 15 years, almost all children attend a *collège*, taking them from grade 6 to grade 3. After grade 3, they move onto a general, technical or vocational *lycée* (Coalter & Radtke, 2007:39). The *lycée* is the second, and last, stage of secondary education. At the end of the final year of schooling, most pupils take the *baccalauréat*. *Lycées* are divided as:

- The *lycée général*, leading to general baccalaureate,
- The *lycée technologique*, leading to the technological baccalaureate, and
- The *lycée professionnel*, leading directly to the professional baccalaureate.

In secondary schools and “lycées”, the students who are good in sports can combine normal schooling with extra sports practice (4 to 8 hours of training per week). The selected students “sport etudes” usually have training every day after school hours (Interview data, 2007). Each school or “lycée” must have a sports association. There are 9,400 sports associations in secondary

schools or lycées. These sports associations have 860,000 members. On Wednesday afternoons, pupils can take part in sporting activities, in local, regional, national and even international championships in one or more sporting disciplines (Coalter and Radtke, 2007:40).

The French University System

In France, provisions concerning the admission of high-level athletes to institutions of HE are outlined in Circular No 1455 of October 1987. Since the management of universities is decentralised, the circular invites university deans, school directors and regional directors of education to undertake the necessary measures to accommodate high-level athletes who wish to combine sport activities and studies. A number of institutions do provide flexible arrangements for elite athletes, such as extending the duration of courses, allowing reduced attendance and postponing exams, and, for example, each year the Ministry of Health awards exemption to 20 elite athletes from entrance exams to the first year of courses at Institutes for Physiotherapy and Chiropody.

The French state also operates five state-run national sports institutes to accommodate elite athletes, namely: the National Institute of Sport and Physical Education (INSEP); the National School of Ski and Mountaineering (ENSA); the National School of Sailing (ENV); the National Equestrian School (ENE); and the National School of Cross-Country Skiing and Ski Jumping (ENSF).

At the largest of these, INSEP, there are opportunities to combine high level sport with a whole range of academic programmes, from compulsory schooling to higher education diplomas and university degrees. It is estimated that about 50 per cent of former pupil athletes stay at INSEP to pursue post-secondary education.

INSEP (*Institut National des Sports et de l'Education Physique*) is a government body supervised by the Ministry of Sport and was founded in

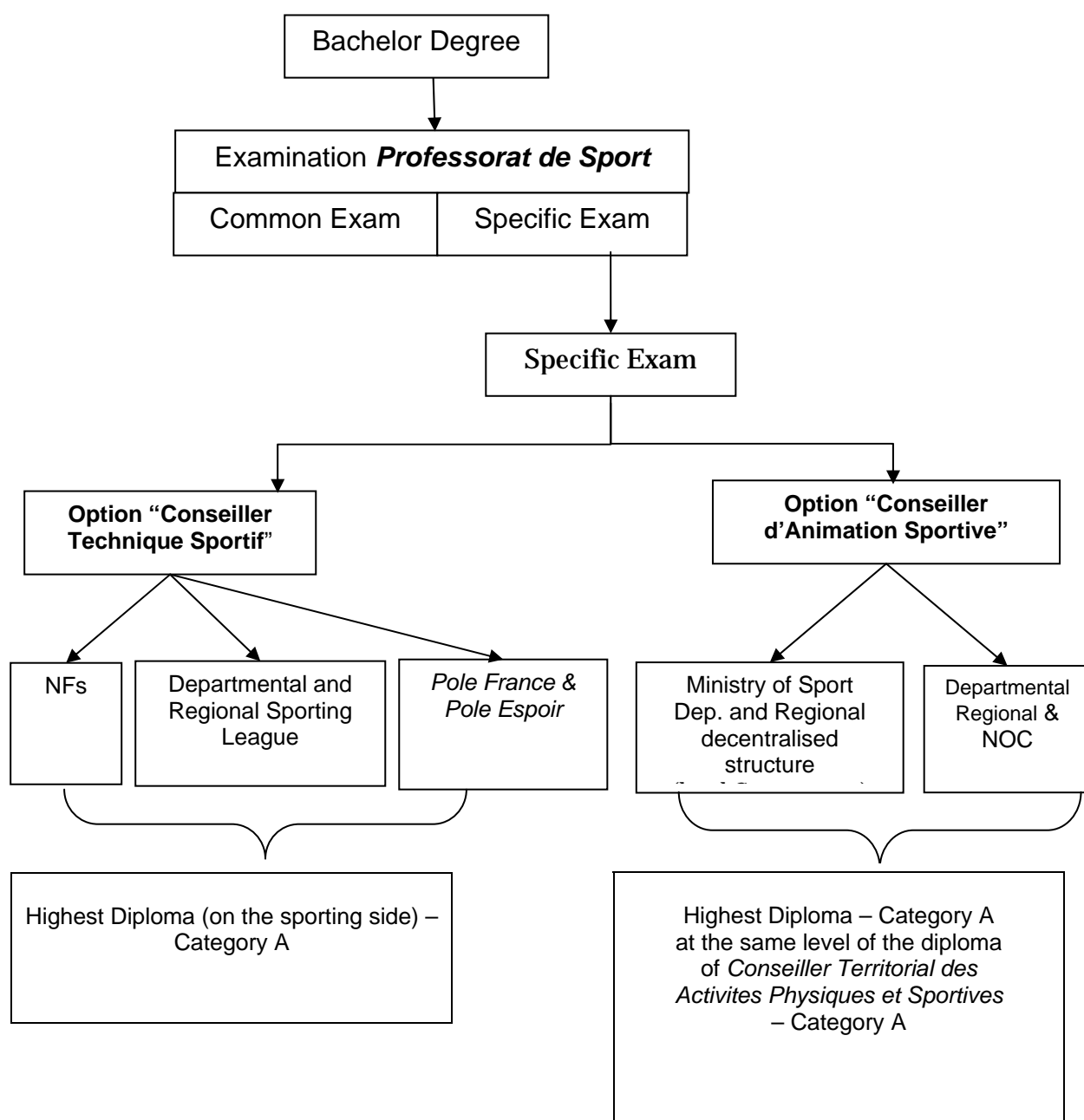
1945. Its aim is to help sportspeople of international level to balance intensive training with academic studies. INSEP can house up to 1,000 sportspeople selected by their respective sports federations. The National Technical director of the sport federation is usually the one who recommends a number of promising athletes to be taken into consideration for selection and admission to INSEP. Athletes who are accepted to attend INSEP have to pay a fee to cover training and accommodation expenses, which is usually covered by either their club, sport federation or sponsor (Interview data, 2007).

In the INSEP system, teaching staff come to the sports establishment to teach the student-athletes depending on their level and subjects of choice, though a number of student-athletes living in INSEP also attend universities in the Paris region (Coalter and Radtke, 2007). Classes at INSEP are relatively smaller having on average 15 students in each, with the aim of optimising the learning environment for student-athletes. Moreover, INSEP offers the support of an education adviser and co-ordinator if the student-athletes are experiencing difficulties with any of their study programmes or had to miss out on lessons while away on training or competition (Interview data, 2007).

INSEP offers different options to pursue college-level or university-level sports-related studies (e.g. diploma in coaching, sports and PE studies, sports administration, sports management). For a selected number of student-athletes there is also the option to do the *professorat de sport* diploma, which is specifically required if one wants to become a civil servant in the sporting sector in France. There are two pathways that a student can follow with this diploma, either option *Conseiller Technique Sportif* or *Conseiller d'Animation Sportive* (please refer to diagram below). Most high level athletes tend to go for the first option because that way they can get jobs with National Federations. *Conseiller* within public administration in France is considered as the highest grade through examination that can be achieved. So in this instance *Professorat de sport* is the highest diploma of

the departmental and regional government specific to sport matters (Interview data - 2007).

Figure 4.1 – ‘Professorat de Sport’ Pathway



4.4.2. The French Elite Sport System

Governmental sports structures

The Ministry for Sport is responsible for high-level sport (*Pôles France, Pôles Espoirs*). It liaises with the Ministry for Youth, National Education and Research for Education. In France, educational facilities are the responsibility of the Chief Education Officers under the Ministry for National Education. There is a highly developed system of national and regional high performance sports training centres with associated education and boarding facilities, co-ordinated centrally by the Minister for Sports.

The Ministry for Sport has set up a national scheme to make access easier to high-level sport. The objective of such a scheme is to enable the high level athlete to complete a dual sporting and educational project with the aid of various adaptations. The Ministry for Youth and the Ministry for National Education and Research (MJENR) are in charge of education (the choice of policies and the educational programmes and their control).

A system of training centres or *pôles* was created in 1995. The network of training centres provides athletes with excellent training conditions. These training centres are at the National Institution for Sport and Physical Education (INSEP), CREPS (Regional Centres for Education and Sport) and other places such as schools, territorial centres (the Velodrome in Hyères, the Nautical Centre in La Rochelle) or Federal Centres (the National Football centre in Clairefontaine and national rugby centre in Marcoussis). (Amara et al., 2004)

Decree No. 2002-1010 of 18th July 2002 states that access routes to high-level sport include structures which allow high-level and promising athletes to reach the highest level in their sports discipline and to benefit from training which will prepare them for a professional sports career. These structures primarily involve two groups – one for promising talented athletes and one for established professionals (*Pôles Espoirs and Pôles France*). These are

organized as a network within each sports discipline and are intended to provide training to athletes and to act as resource centres offering athletes a range of support services, notably careers and medical support.

The groups must meet specific requirements in order to guarantee optimum conditions for training and support in other aspects of life. These requirements are drawn up according to the proposal of a National Technical Director in coordination with the individual sports federation and contains stipulations which have been decided by the Minister for Sport, the Minister for Youth, the Minister for National Education and Research and the Minister for Agriculture. This decree also introduces guarantees which are indispensable as far as the protection of underage athletes are concerned and sets 12 as the lower age limit for registration in a sports group (*pôle*).

Sport Legislation in France

Since 1945 France has adopted a highly interventionist model of sport legislation. This decree had stipulated that the state had exclusive right to organise sport events and select the National team athletes who represent the nation in international sports competitions. By 1975 the legislation on sport that was drafted gave more powers to the sports federations and their mission was later defined in Article 16 of the Law of 16 July 1984. This stated that sport federations should carry out their activities in an autonomous manner but the state still retained significant power over these federations. It has been argued by Digel et al., (2006:23) that having a centralised system of political bodies like that in France 'enables clear hierarchies, central control, coordinated allocation of tasks and strategic planning' which are all factors that have been found to have a positive effect on high performance sport.

In France, elite sport has laws and regulations: law N °84-610 July 16, 1984 relating to the organization and the promotion of physical activities and sport modified by law N °2000-627 of July 6 2000 and decree N °2002-707 on April

29, 2002 for the application of article 2 of law N °84-610 on 16 July 1984 relating to high level sport.

Elite sport is based on well defined criteria which stipulate that sporting disciplines are recognized by the state. Bayle, Durand, Nikonoff, (2008:151) indicated that in 2007 there were 7,080 elite athletes: 753 recognised as having full elite status, 2,652 at 'senior' level; 3,491 juniors, and 184 'partners in training and coaching' across 54 sport disciplines. There were approximately another 8,507 young talented athletes (12 years and above) who also qualified for the elite status and therefore together it is estimated that there are nearly 16,500 individuals that make up the elite sporting environment in France.

Non-governmental sports structures

The CNOSF (French National Olympic and Sports Committee) is the umbrella organisation which includes all French sports federations (80) and is responsible for matters of top sport. The CNOSF is represented in each region by the Regional Olympic and Sports Committee (CROS) and in each département by a départemental Olympic and sports committee. (EUROPA, 2008) The CNOSF is responsible for nominating top French athletes for the Olympics and endeavours to improve the living conditions of athletes. The CNOSF is also involved in creating and enhancing the sport infrastructure (Petry and Steinbach, 2004:156)

Professional Sport in France

Professional athletes in France are defined as such by 'their exercise of a salaried activity governed by an increasingly well-defined regulatory framework, which guarantees their status as professionals' (Bayle, Durand, Nikonoff, 2008:150). In team sport the professional disciplines include football (leagues 1 and 2); basketball (Pro A and Pro B); rugby (Top 14 and Pro D2); handball (D1); volleyball (Pro A and Pro B) and ice-hockey (the

Magnus league). In the case of individual sport the decision by an athlete to turn professional often depends on whether there are established international professional circuits in that particular sport rather than it being the responsibility of the national sport federation. Bayle (2002) pointed out that this is the case for athletics, cycling, golf, tennis, snow-boarding, sailing, wind-surfing, surfing, boxing, motor sports, motor cycling and figure skating (cited in Bayle, Durand, Nikonoff, 2008:150).

In accordance with the French labour law the age limits for an athlete before signing a professional contract is normally 18 years old although in special circumstances the age can be reduced to 16 years old (for specific contracts called 'contract of apprenticeship'). Chaker (1999:62) noted that the French Labour Code makes a special exception for professional athletes. Labour contracts for sportspersons in France are presumed to be for an indefinite period of time. The professional athlete belongs to sectors of activity that do not usually apply contracts for indefinite periods because of the activity and temporary nature of the employment

French Football Federation Charter for contracts

There are 35 football academies called training centres, all obliged to provide sporting and academic provision. The youngest age that a student can join the academy is 15. The academies are financed by the football clubs, although some have links with local schools who may provide the educational component of the academy. The academy students must follow the same education programme as all secondary school children (25 hours education plus training between 12-18 hours per week). The academy provides three main services to the athlete: sport training, medical follow-up and education. The athletes have the opportunity to take A- levels and complete their education (Amara et al., 2004).

When they enter the football academy, young players, sign a special employment contract for young people (training convention as *apprenti* or training convention as *aspirant*). The contract determines the duration, the

level and the terms of the training. From age 15 years, the young player is required to study at secondary school or the University. At the age of 18, the young student-players sign an employment contract as *stagiaire*. When the contract is signed the young player becomes an employee of the club (if the club agrees). In the context of this study it is important to note that there is no legal obligation for the club to provide education for the newly signed athlete. The only legislation currently in place to safeguard the athlete's educational interests is included in the French sport law (article 15-4).

A football academy includes, on average, 30 young players under employment contracts as *stagiaire* and between 30 and 50 young football players under training conventions. Amara et al., (2004) noted that between the years 2001 – 2003, French League 1 clubs have signed an average of 1.7 of their academy players on a professional contract per year. The figure was even lower for the League 2 clubs, where the average stood at 1.2 players per year. For the season 2002/03, of the 40 professional football clubs from Leagues 1 and 2, 35% had not signed any players from their own academy.

4.5. United Kingdom

The population of the United Kingdom was estimated at 60,975,000 by the national statistics office in mid-2007. The United Kingdom consists of Great Britain (England, Wales and Scotland) and Northern Ireland. It has a constitutional monarchy and the Sovereign is Head of State and Head of Government. The UK Government encompasses the Legislature (Parliament), the Executive (the Cabinet, which consists of about 20 Ministers, usually chosen by the Prime Minister) and the Judiciary. The Queen, the appointed House of Lords and the elected House of Commons constitute the Parliament. The role of Parliament is to pass laws, oversees government policy and administration, enables the Government to levy taxes and controls finance. It also is responsible to protect and safeguards the rights of the individual, examines European Union (EU) proposals and

debates current major issues. Most of the work of Parliament is conducted in the House of Commons which is composed of 646 elected members known as Members of Parliament (MPs) (Eurydice, 2008b).

4.5.1. The Education System in the UK

In England, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), and with the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) are responsible for providing the education service. The DCSF role is to plan and supervise the education service provision in English schools by integrating policies that concern children and young people directly. DIUS is in turn responsible for the further and higher education provision with an emphasis on science and innovation and the development of skills. In Wales, the Welsh Assembly Government's Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) is the main body responsible for the education of children. In Northern Ireland, the Department of Education (DE) deals with the central administration of all aspects of education and related services, except the higher and further education sector, which is the responsibility of the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL).

In the UK, education is compulsory from age five to 16. There are a number of opportunities to pursue sports parallel to an academic career during compulsory schooling at specialist schools which focus on PE and Sport. At Key stage 4 (14 -16 years) students can follow either a GCSE short or full course. Those with a sixth form (16-18 years) have increased opportunities for pupils to study for an A level in sport studies.

A recent government initiative jointly promoted by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) created 400 specialist sports colleges within the state school system which provide funding for talented young athletes. Several further and higher education institutes have sports academies. In a third of specialist schools/colleges, talented athletes have access to personal learning mentors

who can help them plan their academic schedules in advance and also monitor that their dual career progression is going smoothly. An increasing number of sports colleges are developing more advanced elite training programmes which ensure that talented pupils receive specialist coaching and achieve very high standards (Amara et al., 2004).

Elite Athletes at University

In April 2004 the government (through DCMS) launched TASS (Talented Athlete Scholarship Scheme) a new initiative to deliver sports scholarships and bursaries to talented athletes aged 16-25. The budget for this initiative is approximately £2 million per annum over an initial three-year period. The student-athlete has to be recommended by his / her national Governing Body to be eligible for consideration. This type of scholarship is reviewed yearly and athletes can apply for a maximum of three years. However, the athletes can have a TASS scholarship in conjunction with other types of sports scholarships such as the ones provided by universities as explained below.

There are approximately 24 Universities in the UK, which offer sport scholarships in a variety of sports under different terms and conditions. The University of Stirling (Scotland) has been one of the leading universities in this area having offered sport scholarships for over 20 years. By 2004, 150 students had benefited from these scholarships (an investment of over £500,000) to help them gain a degree and achieve the highest levels of sport. 45 scholarships were awarded in 2002-2003 (Amara et al., 2004).

Loughborough University currently offers two types of scholarships; the Loughborough University Sport Scholar and the recently introduced 2012 scholarship but it also supports the Government funded initiative the Talented Athletes Scholarship Scheme (TASS). The first criterion to qualify for the university's sport scholar scholarships requires that all athletes must have been accepted by the university as students first. The second criterion is that these student-athletes have to have some experience of competing at junior

or senior international level in a number of sports that the university considers its performance sports. The 2012 scholarships in turn are restricted to Olympic sport only. The advantages of being awarded a 2012 scholarship includes up to £3,000 per year towards tuition fees, £1,000 towards living expenses, £250 towards on campus facility hire/memberships, elite coaching, sports science and medical support, top training facilities, a support network of staff and flexibility with academic workloads (Loughborough University website, 2008a).

The UK through its various National Institutes of Sport, has established regional hubs some of which are located on University campuses, where athletes can access a variety of services from medical help to lifestyle counselling. Lifestyle performance advisers are available to help student-athletes plan their time-tables months in advance to avoid any clash of commitments between sporting and educational obligations. Performance Lifestyle Advisors will also negotiate directly on behalf of student-athletes if unforeseen problems arise, a situation which is often facilitated by the fact many such advisors are based on university campuses. While the state substantially funds the elite sporting and higher education systems management of the relationship between the two is left to these third parties. The UK system results in local variations in terms of practice on admissions, rescheduling of examination and assignment dates, extensions to the length of time students may be registered and the availability of dedicated academic tutoring support. Thus, although the system for elite athletes at least is widespread (though not universal) the outcomes achieved do depend on the effectiveness of the relationship established between Performance Lifestyle Advisors and the athlete-student on the one hand and with the university staff on the other (Amara et al., 2004). There are approximately 40 advisers in the UK who are providing this Performance Lifestyle service (DeBosscher et al., 2008).

4.5.2. The Elite Sporting System in the UK

The United Kingdom is based on a complex unitary system of government, incorporating four home nations and two essentially separate legal systems. Taking into consideration the relatively newly established political bodies for Scotland and Wales as a result of devolution and the newly created Northern Ireland Assembly, it has been noted that a more decentralised approach to sports policy in the UK is expected in the near future (EUROPA, 2008c).

Sport Legislation in the United Kingdom

The UK does not have a written constitution. The policies of the United Kingdom's different levels of government are implemented through the work of five sports councils including Sport England, sportscotland, Sports Council for Wales, Sports Council for Northern Ireland and UK Sport. Chaker (1999:30-1) has observed that 'the state-given mandate to sports councils in the UK is non-interventionist in nature as it limits itself to funding and creating partnerships with the sports movement'.

Governmental Sport Organisation

Sport in the UK is co-ordinated by a wide range of organisations including national and local government, Sports Councils, national governing bodies of sport, specialist organisations, and schools and clubs. At Government level, policy direction is provided through the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), and the devolved administrations through the Department for Environment, Sport and Culture in Scotland, the Department of Education and Culture in Wales, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure in Northern Ireland. The roles of these departments are to monitor the work of their respective Home Country Sports Councils which are responsible for co-ordinating sport at all levels including grassroots sport through to elite sport.

The national governing bodies (NGBs) of sport manage the network of sports clubs throughout the UK, acting as a link between recreation and

development, training and competition as well as facility and policy development. At the elite level, the NGBs work in co-ordinate closely with Sports Councils, and other specialist partner organisations such as the British Olympic Association, the British Paralympic Association and the Commonwealth Games Associations. These organisations are responsible for the final selection of athletes representing British and Home Country teams competing in international competitions such as the Olympic Games and the Commonwealth Games. At the local level the national governing bodies of sport work in partnership with local authorities, schools and colleges to provide access to sport and physical education.

UK Sport is funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and is the body responsible for elite sport planning, development and support. In 2006, UK Sport assumed full responsibility for all Olympic and Paralympic performance-related support in England, spanning from talent identification initiatives through to elite competitions. Although in the main UK sport works with Olympic sports it also advises non-Olympic sports in England, to help them improve their performances which may lead to successful competitions. Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland athletes are funded by their home countries until they reach World Class Performance standard; who then become the responsibility of UK Sport. In 2003 it was estimated that there were 270 athletes who were supported by their home nations (DeBosscher et al., 2008:102).

World Class Performance Programme

In the UK elite level athletes are classified at three key levels that constitute the World Class Performance programme including the World Class Podium category, World Class Development and World Class talent. The World Class Podium is a programme that supports those high level athletes who have a realistic chance of winning an Olympic medal at the next Olympic/ Paralympic Games. This medal projection is based on a number of factors mainly the particular sport's results in the previous Olympic Games, the overall competitive track record and the ability to provide evidence of having

produced a number of elite athletes through the elite performance pathway (UK Sport website, 2008).

The World Class Development programme is designed to include those elite athletes whose sporting performance falls just outside the targets set for the Podium programme. However, since these athletes have also demonstrated that they possess potential to win a medal in 2012 these continue to be supported since it has been argued by UK Sport that 'continued success will only be possible if there is investment in the next wave of talented athletes coming through the system'. (Other sports not yet funded at Podium Programme level but where there is performance evidence that they have the potential to medal in the next Olympic/Paralympic cycle are eligible for consideration for funding at World Class Development level).

The World Class Talent Programme established in 2006 was designed to support the talent identification selection of athletes who have the potential to progress through the World Class performance pathway. Funding provided through the programme is geared towards identifying those athletes with all the right attributes to ensure they can go on to compete at international competitions. Another aim of this programme is to improve the talent identification process that had been adopted to date by finding creative ways of sourcing out exceptional sporting talent.

In order to be part of either a Talent, Development or Podium Programme all elite athletes in England have to be nominated by their NGB (sports federation) depending on age and/or individual performance. Nomination on to one of these programmes provides funding support from the National Lottery for their training and preparation by the NGB. In addition an athlete would receive funding for individual sporting costs and at the performance level an additional award for living costs. The funding eligibility is based on sports performance levels – top 20 in the world for athletes in individual sports and top 10 in the world for athletes in team sports. From an evaluation carried out by DeBosscher et al., (2008:102) it was estimated that on average the funding received by athletes was €15,962 per annum but the

awards ranged from €2,908 and €29,076 relative to the athlete's achievement. Nomination on to one of the programmes would also entitle the athlete to receive services from the English Institute of Sport (EIS). The EIS, the body responsible for the development and delivery of elite sport services, was created in 2001 comprising of nine regional multi-sport high performance centres co-ordinating professional support for elite athletes by providing services in sports science, medicine, physiotherapy, biomechanics, physiology, psychology, nutrition and lifestyle (Amara et al., 2004). EIS offers also financial support to World Class Performance Athletes. There is an education award of maximum £1000/year for those who want to further their education (post-graduate level only) or for adults who want to enrol for 'A' level or vocational courses. This is available up to three months after an athlete has come off a world class programme. EIS services are available up to a year following retirement from elite sport (Amara et al., 2004).

Non-Governmental Organisations

The British Olympic Association (BOA) provides elite level services and expertise for the 35 Olympic sports in the UK, assisting in their preparation, planning and ultimately responsible for sending the Great Britain Olympic team to both Winter and Summer Games. The BOA is an independent and self-funded organisation, relying on raising funds through commercial sponsorship, a nation-wide appeal and licensing (EUROPA, 2008). The British Olympic Association (BOA) collaborates with EIS through its OPEN Programme (Olympic and Paralympic Employment Network) – a network which matches athletes with companies who can offer a meaningful career path and provide flexible working arrangements (Amara et al., 2004).

National Governing Bodies of Sport are responsible for the national development, administration and organisation of their sport. The majority are led by voluntary committees, although most employ professional administrators. Governing bodies are required to spend public funding according to regulations specified by the Sports Councils (EUROPA, 2008c).

Professional Sport

The sports that traditionally evolved into professional leagues in England are basketball, cricket, football, rugby league and rugby union. To date only the men's leagues achieved full professional status.

It is mandatory for all English football clubs in the Premier League, consisting of 20 teams, to have an academy and the Football Association pays for 18 places per club. 19 Football League clubs also run academies. These academies bring together the best young players to provide them with quality coaching, development, education and medical care. The Rugby Football Union fund 12 Premiership England Rugby Academies, plus two England Regional Rugby Academies. The aim of the academy is to provide gifted players with the opportunity for them to fulfil their rugby potential. Players are provided with high quality coaching and support services to achieve this goal. The RFU also encourages all players within the academy to continue their education (Amara et al., 2004).

4.6. Conclusion

4.6.1. Explaining the Emergent Policy Pattern in Europe

It has been highlighted in the previous chapter, that there were a number of policy provisions evident in each of the European countries with regard to student-athletes however not all national systems have acknowledged such growing needs. The forms of provision made by the states thus vary from the negligible to established structures backed by legislation. There are perhaps three critical features which are important to stress here. The first is that there is a variability in state intervention from a strong 'hands on' approach to virtual 'laissez faire'. Four discernable factors underlie this variance. The first is local political culture and history. If one takes the example of France, the tradition of the dirigiste state is one which has seen direct state intervention in a broad range of social and cultural fields which would be anathema to

more liberal states. The second factor explaining this variability is that of local academic culture. In the Finnish case, for example, the opportunity for all university students to schedule their own academic workloads depending on their needs allows for relatively greater variation in the application of access, progress and examination regulations. The third factor which is evident is that of size and the availability of economies of scale. Small states such as Cyprus and Malta have relatively small higher education systems and resourcing special provision for athletes or any other special group may place an unmanageable burden on the small resource base. The fourth factor is the importance of individual agency and advocacy in certain systems where policy entrepreneurs (Laffan, 1997, Mackenzie, 2004) were significant influences in the adoption of special measures for athletes. (Professor Ian Thompson at the University of Stirling in Scotland and Professor Paul De Knop in the Vrije Universiteit Brussel in Belgium provide good examples of the influence of such individuals).

The second point to highlight is the apparent and growing willingness for greater intervention in this area. This may be motivated as much by concerns with enhancing athletic performance by removing 'worries' about dealing with the demands of education, as with a concern for the rights of athletes, but nevertheless it is evident as part of a growing concern in elite sports policy (Green and Houlihan, 2005). This point was reiterated by the German Presidency during the European Workshop entitled "Dual Career - Balancing top-level sport, education and occupational careers" (May, 2007), which argued for state governments and the European Commission itself to be more proactive with regard to supporting their elite athletes through education and eventually employment.

It has been observed that some governments perceive elite athletes as being role models for their societies, which positions elite sport in the direct interest of the state. This, however, does not come without responsibility. It has also been acknowledged that educational establishments such as universities and vocational institutes also have a role to play in this regard and should seek as

far as possible, to tailor their programmes to cater for the needs of their student-athletes. This discussion has since been pursued during the meeting of European Union sports ministers held in Biarritz (27-28 November, 2008) where a formal declaration on the protective 'dual training' programme for young athletes was agreed:

The ministers consider that a dual curriculum of education and sport is vital for the training of young sport professionals and high-level athletes to enable them to prepare for a future life after their sports career has ended (Declaration of the Sport Ministers of the European Union, 2008).

The sports ministers also urged national federations and confederations, in association with public authorities and sport/club representatives to ensure that the development of sporting facilities and structures are conducive to managing a dual curriculum and to establish a quality measure that these structures and service provisions should meet.

The third point to emphasise is that the variability in policy response in this area effectively means variation in citizens' rights and athletes rights, and this has implications for the European Union in terms of interventions that can address such inequalities. The European Commission has shown increasing interest in the protection of athletes' rights in recent years and, for example, in publishing the findings of its most recently commissioned study in this area (INEUM Consulting, 2008) it has declared that:

Although they do not constitute the Commission's official position, the Commission considers these results as useful input for the cooperation it intends to pursue with governmental and non-governmental stakeholders to promote the quality of sports training in the EU and to protect the moral and physical integrity of young sportspeople in the European Union. (European Commission, 2008b)

4.6.2. Explaining the Emergent Policy Pattern in individual nation states

Bergsgard et al., (2007:4) and Houlihan and Green (2008) have debated to some degree the extent to which sport policy is said to be shaped in a way that 'reflects the broader welfare regime' of that particular nation. These observations were based on the analysis of welfare states put forward by Esping-Andersen (1990) who identified three types of welfare regimes: liberal, conservative and social democratic. The hypothesis driving this analysis indicates that the socio-economic and cultural foundations of a country collectively referred to as 'welfare regime' influence the way policy is shaped.

In his typology of welfare states 'types' as illustrated in table 1 below, Esping-Andersen classified the UK as a liberal state. Such welfare regimes which also include countries like the United States of America, Canada and Australia are characterised by the central role that the market plays with as little intervention from the state as possible. Some of the basic principles underpinning liberal states are freedom of thought, the rule of law, individual's rights and a transparent system of government. The general premise is that economic systems based on free markets are more efficient and generate more wealth for the country. Rose (1992:142) has argued that under advanced liberalism the state has a limited role to 'provide for and answer society's needs, and individuals, organizations, companies, sport organisations must take increasing responsibility for their own well-being and welfare' (cited in Green, 2004:378). As Green further argues under such conditions the notion of the 'active responsible self' is reinforced and therefore individuals are increasingly being expected to take responsibility to fulfil their needs. In the context of this research study this argument can be extended to the student-athletes interviewed in the UK who may be expected to assume full responsibility in relation to their educational and sporting career development.

France, the second comparative state in this research study was classified by Esping-Andersen as conservative corporatist regime type, an approach

typical of continental Europe and include countries such as Belgium, Germany and Italy. This type of regime is driven by the central role of the family (familialism) and the subsidiary role of the state. The emphasis is strongly on 'compulsory social insurance' which suggests that private market provision of welfare remains marginal.

Houlihan and Green (2008:18) point out that social security systems in this type of approach are based on occupational schemes and corporatist status divisions which privileges the treatment of public civil service. In relation to elite athletes there are a number of ways in which the French government continues to demonstrate its commitment towards providing social insurance cover. Bayle, Durand, Nikonoff, (2008:153) noted how the French state has created a number of contracts to ensure that elite athletes gain access to the labour market. Such contracts which are signed by the athlete, his/her sport federation and the employer are intended to facilitate the demands of a dual career while the athlete is still actively engaged in elite sport and to then provide an opportunity for a post-athletic career following retirement from sport. "In 2007, 643 elite athletes took advantage of this type of contract which benefited their employer to the tune of €1,389 of state aid. In 70 per cent of the cases, the employer is a state (national level) or local authority". In addition the government is also in a process of discussion over plans to offer salaried athletes access to various public pension saving schemes and benefits.

Finland is representative of the third regime type – social democratic corporatist, which encompasses mostly the Nordic countries. This type is characterised by the central role that the state plays in financing and organising the welfare benefits available to the public such as free education, healthcare, and childcare. All the Finnish student-athletes who were interviewed for this research study pointed out that they did benefit from free university education easing their financial burden to some extent. However they also added that living costs were particularly high and therefore they had to find alternative means to support themselves financially. Such welfare benefits are compensated for by a high taxation system resulting in income

distribution. Due to the high state intervention in all public matters in such societies there is only a limited role for the individual.

Esping-Andersen account while referring to the welfare states and welfare rights in the 1980s, nevertheless provides a description of the role of the state in social policy which is complementary to the description of the approaches to the promotion of athletes' rights to education in the 2000s. The French welfare state having been described as conservative and corporatist chimes with the description of the state-centric approach from the researcher's own typology (as illustrated in Table 4.1 below). The Finnish case described as a social democratic corporate state is one which relates well to the state having a facilitator role. The UK's case as a liberal welfare state is consistent with the notion of the state leaving action to the third sector wherever possible.

Table 4.1 – Types of Approaches to Educational Services for Elite Athletes in Higher Education and Welfare state 'regime' typology

Type of Approach	Welfare state 'regime type'	Examples of countries	Characteristics of 'welfare regime'
State Centric Regulation	Conservative corporatist	Continental Europe including Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands	Central role of family (familiarism) and subsidiary role of state; privileged treatment of public civil service with social security systems; marginalised private market provision of welfare
State as Sponsor / Facilitator	Social Democratic Corporatist	Nordic countries	Central role of state; egalitarianism, de-commodified welfare, minimising or abolishing market dependency; generous benefit levels, comprehensive socialisation of risks
National Sporting Federations / Institutes as Intermediary	Liberal	USA, Canada, Australia, UK, New Zealand	Central role of market: minimise state, individualise risks, promote market solutions; prioritise unregulated labour markets

Adapted from Esping-Andersen, 1990 and Amara et al., 2004

This chapter has provided an overview of the various policies regarding the combination of elite sport and education which have been adopted by the three nation states investigated: Finland, France and the UK to facilitate the dual career path of student-athletes. The objective was to provide insight into how elite sport and higher education policies are affected by the characteristics of the national political system, the welfare regime type and to an extent the impact of the European Union. However, one needs to take into consideration that there may also be potential wider global forces such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) and international sporting federations such as FIFA (*Fédération Internationale de Football Association*) which are all influencing the way that policies in this particular research area are shaped.

A further elaboration on the emerging policy patterns evident in these three countries will ensue in the discussion chapter of this thesis as the roles, rights and responsibilities of key stakeholders that include: the athlete; the university; the elite training centre; and the European Union will be discussed, following the findings and analysis chapters of this thesis.

Chapter 5 - Data Findings and Analysis:

the Student-Athletes' Life Stories

5.1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to outline how the student-athlete interviewees had negotiated their academic and sporting careers to date highlighting some of the critical moments / transitions encountered within each career path. In order to gain a more holistic view of how these transitional periods intertwined with other aspects of the interviewees' lives, Wylleman and Lavalée's (2003) developmental model on transitions faced by athletes was utilised to situate and analyse these transitional experiences. As it has already been argued (in the systematic review chapter), this model takes into consideration four levels of development: academic, athletic, individual and psycho-social as illustrated in Figure 5.1 below.

Figure 5.1 - A Developmental perspective on transitions faced by athletes at athletic, individual, psychosocial, and academic/vocational levels

AGE	10	15	20	25	30	35
Athletic Level	Initiation Development		Mastery		Discontinuation	
Psychological Level	Childhood Adolescence		Adulthood			
Psycho-social Level	Parents Siblings Peers	Peers Coach Parents	Partner Coach		Family (Coach)	
Academic Vocational Level	Primary Education	Secondary Education	Higher Education	Vocational Training Professional Occupation		
Note: A dotted line indicates that the age at which the transition occurs is an approximation						

Figure taken from Wylleman & Lavalée (2003:516)

The rationale underpinning this model is that if the individual manages to cope effectively with these transitional periods across these four levels, this will have a positive impact in the overall development of the student-athlete. There are two types of transitions that have been identified in the literature (Wylleman and Lavalée, 2003), normative, which relate to those transitions that can be anticipated and predictable such as moving from primary to

secondary schooling and non-normative ones. The latter imply that such transitions are unexpected, unforeseen and involuntary. Although the developmental model on transitions faced by athletes only encompassed normative transitions, this research study explored a number of non-normative transitional experiences as discussed in the subsequent sections of this chapter. Keeping in mind the research questions guiding the empirical stage of this study, it must be reiterated that the researcher explored in more detail the academic and athletic components of the student-athletes' lives although some insight into the psychological and psycho-social elements will be provided as these have been the subject of some discussion during the interviews.

Having conducted 18 life-story interviews with elite athletes who have also experience of university education in the three European contexts of France, Finland and the UK, the raw data amounted to over 200 pages of transcribed text. A total of 18 student-athletes agreed to take part in the research study, nine females and nine males, with their ages ranging between 20 and 42 years at the time of the interview drawn from across 13 sports. As Table 5.1 below illustrates, 16 of these student-athletes were active in their sport and two had retired, while 12 were still registered as students and six had graduated. In order to protect the anonymity of the participants involved in this research study, hereafter they will only be identified by country and letter for example (FIN A).

The next step of the research process was to structure and analyse this data in a way which would allow the researcher to depict as accurately as possible these student-athletes' life experiences. The Nvivo software package was utilised to carry out the first level of the data analysis identifying the key thematic findings that emerged from the first readings of these transcripts. The researcher found it useful to build a system of emergent themes as it not only helped to identify the main characteristics of these student-athletes' academic and sporting careers but also facilitated the uncovering of a set of inductive themes for example transitions, skills, and decision-making, that linked the two careers. Many of these themes had been already discussed at

a conceptual level to some degree within the systematic review literature, which continued to inform the observations on empirical data in this study.

Table 5.1 – An overview of the 18 student-athletes that were interviewed in this study

Sport / Interviewees	Age	Gender	Student status	Athlete status
<i>FINLAND</i>				
<i>Athletics</i> <i>(interviewee FIN A)</i>	32	M	Student	Active
<i>Basketball</i> <i>(interviewee FIN B)</i>	28	F	Graduate	Active
<i>Football</i> <i>(interviewee FIN C)</i>	42	M	Graduate	Retired
<i>Gymnastics</i> <i>(interviewee FIN D)</i>	32	M	Student	Active
<i>Ice-hockey</i> <i>(interviewee FIN E)</i>	20	F	Student	Active
<i>Judo</i> <i>(interviewee FIN F)</i>	22	F	Student	Active
<i>FRANCE</i>				
<i>Athletics</i> <i>(Interviewee FRA A)</i>	28	F	Graduate	Active
<i>Badminton</i> <i>(Interviewee FRA B)</i>	31	M	Student	Active
<i>Handball</i> <i>(interviewee FRA C)</i>	21	M	Student	Active
<i>Judo</i> <i>(interviewee FRA D)</i>	27	F	Graduate	Retired
<i>Swimming</i> <i>(interviewee FRA E)</i>	22	M	Student	Active
<i>Synchronised Swimming</i> <i>(interviewee FRA F)</i>	20	F	Student	Active
<i>UNITED KINGDOM</i>				
<i>Athletics</i> <i>(interviewee UK A)</i>	23	F	Graduate	Active
<i>Athletics</i> <i>(interviewee UK B)</i>	23	F	Student	Active
<i>Gymnastics</i> <i>interviewee (UK C)</i>	22	M	Student	Active
<i>Golf</i> <i>(interviewee UK D)</i>	22	M	Student	Active
<i>Rugby</i> <i>(interviewee UK E)</i>	26	M	Graduate	Active
<i>Triathlon</i> <i>(interviewee UK F)</i>	23	F	Student	Active

5.2. Negotiating an academic career path

Based on the model put forward by Wylleman and Lavalée (2003) the first level that was taken into consideration for the analysis of this data was the academic / vocational one. As is illustrated in Figure 5.2 below, this level was divided into the following four stages: primary education, secondary education, higher education and professional occupation / vocational training. These within-career transitional periods were marked on the model by dotted lines and seemed to suggest that major transitions tend to occur as the student goes from primary to secondary schooling, then from compulsory to post-compulsory schooling (higher education) and finally from formal education to entering the job market. However it is important to keep in mind that both the age range and the number of transitions indicated on the model are only an approximation and therefore there may be instances when an individual might go through fewer or more transitional periods at different ages.

Figure 5.2 - A Developmental perspective on transitions faced by athletes at academic / vocational levels

AGE	10	15	20	25	30	35
Academic Vocational Level	Primary Education	Secondary Education	Higher Education		Vocational Training Professional Occupation	

Note: A dotted line indicates that the age at which the transition occurs is an approximation.

Figure adapted from Wylleman & Lavalée (2003:516)

5.2.1. Stage I - Compulsory Schooling (5 – 16 years)

The first phase of schooling identified in the data was the primary school stage, which though few of the student-athletes could remember any specific details about this, 16 out of the 18 interviewees agreed that they had thoroughly enjoyed this period. Feelings of enthusiasm were expressed as four of the student-athletes described how they had still insisted on going to school even when they were ill or they had holidays, while the rest recalled enjoying the learning and social aspects of it:

I have good memories of my first years at school, I used to enjoy going to school and my mum used to say that whenever I had a little bit of flu or high temperature I still wanted to go, didn't want to stay at home! (FIN C)

It was a good time because we were all of kids from the neighbourhood who went to the same school and ended up in the same class. (FIN D)

In contrast two other student-athletes described how they did not enjoy going to school at this stage. They both explained how although they did not have any specific reason not to like school when they were young, it was only later in their lives when that they started viewing school differently:

When I was in primary school I didn't like studying much, I just did the homework that I had to do but I didn't learn much. It was only when I grew a little bit older and I decided that I wanted to go to high school, that I decided to study and got quite good results. (FIN F)

For one of the British athletes her primary schooling years proved to be frustrating at times because in spite of her positive attitude and commitment in class, she still felt that her teachers were prejudiced against her. She explained how from an early age she had demonstrated an aptitude for sports and art while at school which her teachers interpreted wrongly and simply assumed that therefore she was not very competent academically. She described how she saw this as a challenge and how in fact this motivated her to work much harder on her school work which eventually earned her a place at a grammar school:

I quite enjoyed school, I liked all the sports that we were allowed to do and interacting with the other kids. I started getting into art as well during my second year in junior school and realising that it is something that I really love and that I was good at. So I automatically started being seen as the artist and therefore not very clever. I was sporty and an artist therefore I was almost written off almost from the start and automatically thought of as the middle set, which really annoyed me! (UK F)

Two participants had to overcome another type of challenge while at school due to very similar family circumstances. In both instances the parents of one

of the British and one of the French athletes had both decided to emigrate with their families for a couple of years and consequently on returning both student-athletes found it quite hard to re-integrate into their former schools:

When I went to Holland I really enjoyed school over there and in fact found it quite hard to adjust on coming back. I went back to the same school but my friends had changed a bit, I guess everything changes a little bit in two years. (UK B)

Because of the two years that we lived in Tahiti, it was a bit difficult to integrate again within the school system in France. (FRA E)

Despite the challenges outlined during the primary stage above, twelve of the student-athletes reported that their positive attitude towards school lasted through their secondary schooling years. However for the remaining six participants, three admitted to some feelings of dissatisfaction with some of the teaching approaches / content adopted by their school and therefore they had to find ways of continuing to progress smoothly without getting into trouble with the teaching staff:

In secondary school things were a bit similar, I mean the teachers still didn't like me there because I kind of went with the flow and did my thing and they thought I was messing about, but my grades were still good enough for them not to have a reason to complain. It was one of those things that as long as I was getting the work in to a good enough standard, I was getting by. I just liked to express my feelings, get things done, didn't like to sit at the back of the class, wanted to be involved in the lessons...So some of the teachers didn't really like me because they thought I was being disruptive but I think it was more a case of I wasn't being pushed hard enough maybe because of the school that I went to maybe it was something else. (UK D)

I never got into trouble or anything like that but the teachers sometimes were not too happy with my work because if I thought that this is not useful for me, I wouldn't do the work or do it badly. So I wasn't in trouble for discipline reasons but sometimes I had problems with the content of the lessons. (FRA D)

The other three student-athletes described how their secondary schooling years coincided with their early teenage years, a relatively stressful period in their life which eventually impacted negatively on their education. All three of the interviewees insisted that the problems

that they faced academically were not sport-related but simply ‘teenage problems’ but which they were reluctant to talk about in detail. Two of the French athletes explained how as a consequence to these issues they had to repeat their school year in order to get better grades but in the end all three students managed to get their academic career back on track to progress to the next academic stage:

I remember in secondary school I had to repeat a year but that was not because of the sport it was just that I was going through some teenage problems! (FRA F)

When I was fourteen I started having some problems at school, nothing major but my dad had to put a bit of pressure for me to do well. I soon caught up although I had to repeat a year so I can get better grades. (FRA E)

5.2.2. Stage II - Sport high-school / Lycée / College years (16 – 19 years)

One of the French athletes interviewed had opted to go to a sport *lycee*. As it was described in more detail in the previous chapter, within the French context there is a concept known as *sports et etudes*, where students have the opportunity to practice two hours of sports every day after school. The French professional handball player interviewed was part of this system, having the full support of his parents as he explained:

I was in a system what they call here as *sports et etude* which meant that every day after school I had handball training for two hours. So usually I had classes till 5pm and then I used to go to handball. My parents always allowed me to go since I never had problems doing my homework and passing exams. Obviously it was important for me to get a good education but it was always understood since both my parents are teachers. (FRA C)

In Finland there was a sports high school system established where sport training took place on three mornings per week so student-athletes usually joined a particular training group (depending on their sport) within their school but then in the evening trained with their respective clubs. Sports high

schools tended to specialise in a number of sports. However they usually also supported a set of 'minority' sports so they still managed to bring together a small group of people. Regular high school years usually lasted three years, however elite athletes had the option to extend this period to either four or five years in some cases. Two out of the four Finnish athletes interviewed who went to a sports high school took the four-year option, which proved to be beneficial for one but not the other, who in hindsight would have decided against extending her study programme. As she explained in the first two years of her high-school she was practising two sports simultaneously which put increasing demands on her time at school. However, after dropping one sport she could manage her school more effectively and therefore she felt that she had not really needed to extend her study programme to four years:

If I look back on it I should have graduated in three years. Four years was too long and the last year I basically had only a few courses and I feel like I wasted a year but back then I didn't think about but if I could change it I would. (FIN B)

Another type of high school which the Finnish gymnast attended was one which resembled more the regular high school system but which had an additional two hours of general sports practice per week.

Three of the French athletes had already been invited or had qualified to join INSEP (the National Institute of Sport and Physical Education) by the age of 15-16, and therefore they completed their Baccalaureate diploma (equivalent to 'A' level standard in the UK and the National Matriculation Exam in Finland) in this institution. In this particular system, teachers came to the sports centre and taught the student-athletes depending on their level and subjects of choice. For those pursuing a scientific diploma it was necessary to attend a local, neighbouring school one day per week to make use of the scientific laboratories for practical sessions:

Everything was very well organised, I had all my lectures here, the teachers used to come and give us lessons here other than on Friday

because I needed to go to the school for the practical sessions. I was doing chemistry and there weren't any labs at INSEP. (FRA E)

The rest of the student-athletes, including all the British athletes, attended a general high-school (in Finland) or school / college (in the United Kingdom), where they finished their studies within the regular time period and passed all their exams in preparation for their prospective university career.

Figure 5.3 – Academic career pathways chosen by the student-athletes interviewed

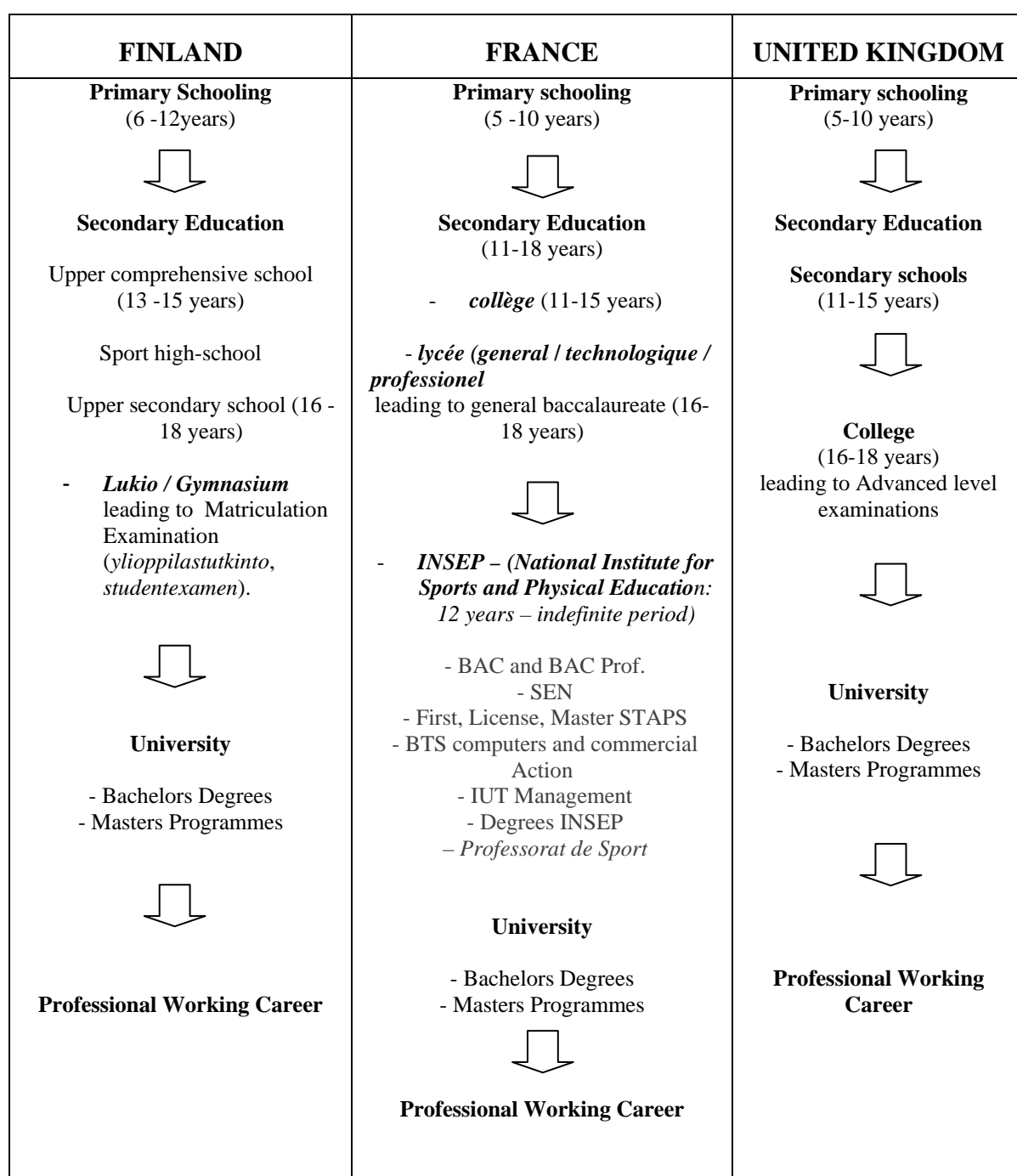


Figure 5.3 above illustrates the academic career pathways as chosen by the eighteen student-athletes interviewed, starting from primary schooling leading on to University level education in Finland, France and the UK. It should be noted at this point that alternative academic pathways are available within each State (for example a student could opt to go to a vocational college or technical institute) but these options were not taken up by the student-athletes.

5.2.3. Stage III - Experience of University Education

Choosing to go to University

Making the decision to go to university was always part of the wider life plan for ten of the student-athletes interviewed who argued that it was never an issue of discussion within their families since they were expected to progress their academic development at university. The general argument underlying this decision was that having a university degree eventually would lead to better employment opportunities and therefore it was only a matter of getting the best grades possible to improve their chances:

It was always important for me to get good results although I didn't think that much about it. But it was never an option not to go to university after high school. It was just a natural progression. My parents are both educated but they never put any pressure on me. (FIN B)

It was pretty much taken for granted that I would go to university. It was what everybody in our family had always done. So my brother went first and then I followed, then my two step brothers, followed by my sister and then my step sister. (UK E)

In my head it was always you do well at school, you go to university and get a job so there was never a point where I thought I am going to stop school at 16 and find a job...It was always the case of getting your head down and doing what needed to be done to get to university. So I never had any pressure or anything like to do well because it was kind of expected. (UK A)

For another five student-athletes making the decision to register as a university student was something that required more time and consideration for a variety of reasons. Although they had all gained the necessary qualifications to go to university, four did not have a well-thought out plan in which direction they wanted their academic career to develop, and one Finnish athlete lacked the confidence to pursue a university career due to some learning difficulties she had been experiencing:

Well I really wanted to do something with mathematics and physics because those were my favourite subject but I also wanted to do something practical but there was not anything specific that I wanted to do. So when I was in the army I started sending applications to universities and their engineering departments and also to some technical colleges. I got accepted in both so I chose to go to university. (FIN A)

When I was in high school I did some tests and I found out that I was dyslexic. Of course I can read and I can write but sometimes it's very slow and maybe because of that I was thinking that I'm not good enough to go to university. So I guess for me it was hard to convince myself that I can read those thick text books. Before I entered university I had never read in my life, not even a novel. So you can imagine how surprised I was after last year after I finished all that reading, that gave me great confidence and I could see that a university degree was possible after all. (FIN F)

Prior to enrolling at their respective universities in their home country, five athletes (two runners, golfer, basketball and ice-hockey players) had given serious consideration to furthering their education in the United States. Four out of these five athletes (three British, one Finnish) had been contacted and offered sport scholarships at a number of colleges / universities and the golfer was even flown out to review the facilities and discuss the training programme in person. A sport scholarship meant that the college / university would cover all the accommodation, sport related expenses and provide a living allowance but in some cases the academic institutions were even willing to cover the tuition fees. In the end none of these athletes decided to take up these scholarships for a variety of reasons. Some of the athletes had some reservations with regard to the long distances, being by themselves for the first time in their life away from family and friends and in the Finnish

athlete's case speaking a different language. There were also concerns about the uncertainty of the value and quality of the academic qualification that they would be gaining and also the apparent lack of autonomy when it came to choosing which competitions to compete in:

I mean I know in the U.S. you get more money and they cover your accommodation for you and all that but then their demands are much higher than here. You don't have to compete all the time for the university here whereas in the US you cannot choose to do that. With my coach here, he's able to coach me and I am the priority and not the university, whereas in America it's not the case! They give you more but they expect more out of you as well and I'd rather have it this way! (UK A)

I could have gone to the States and got a 100% scholarship which basically would have cost my mum and dad nothing. But it wasn't going to be at a good school so yes I would have been able to play golf for a number of years but I wouldn't have been able to get anything out of the academic side of things. I would have not got any academic achievements to speak of. (UK D)

I definitely had some concerns with the American scholarships, thinking what's use is it if I get a degree that I cannot use over here. I knew that it might not benefit me too much to find a job over here. I definitely do not want to give the impression that all I seem to do is run! I concentrated very hard on my degree... (UK B)

Scholarships and other funding initiatives at university

Having turned down the scholarships from the American colleges, two of the British athletes applied for a sport scholarship at their university of choice; Loughborough University, which offered two types of scholarships; the Loughborough University Sport Scholar and the 2012 scholarship. In addition the university also supported a Government funded initiative called the Talented Athletes Scholarship Scheme (TASS). The first criterion to qualify for the university's sport scholar scholarships required that all athletes must have been accepted by the university as students first. The second criterion was that these student-athletes had to have some experience of competing at junior or senior international level in one of a number of sports that the university considers its performance sports. The 2012 scholarships were

restricted to Olympic sport only. The Talented Athlete Scholarship Scheme (TASS) on the other hand is a Government funded initiative, and the student-athlete had to be recommended by his / her national Governing Body to be eligible for consideration. Four out of the six athletes interviewed in the UK had qualified and got TASS funding for the duration of at least one year, (this type of scholarship is reviewed yearly and athletes can apply for a maximum of three years). However, the student-athletes could hold a TASS scholarship in conjunction with other types of scholarship such as a university scholarship as in the case of the golfer and the runner. Other types of funding and specialist services such as strength and conditioning coaching or physiotherapy were sometimes provided by the respective sport federations or even UK Sport through its various National Institutes of Sport as the rugby player described. Other athletes were also able to apply for a small fund from their Local Education Authority to help them cover tuition costs:

I'm on two scholarships, I get a Loughborough University scholarship which pays for all my golfing needs and one from BOA (British Olympic Association) TASS (Talented Athlete Scholarship scheme) which is in conjunction with the golfing union which covers my expenses and fees up to £3000 which helps a lot. (UK D)

I didn't get a scholarship to start off with in Loughborough because I missed out on the ones at the start of the year. But then around May time of the first year they had found two scholarships that had not been actually used so they gave me one to cover the first year. It was about £500, then £750 in 2nd year and £1,000 in the third year. But now they've changed the system and they have the 2012 scholarship which I've just been awarded. So you get £1000 to cover any expenses and then they will pay up to £3000 in tuition fees. (UK A)

I did not apply for any scholarships because when I was 17 I was signed up by the Scottish Institute of Sport, which it has changed its role now but back then it used to be a tool to try and help young players become the best they could be so they would help them gain professional contracts and ultimately play for Scottish National team. So because of that I had all the Sports science backing I needed and they also used to give us a little bit of money I think, around £1,000 per year. In Scotland we don't have tuition fees. So between that, my student loan and some money from my parents I managed. (UK E)

In Finland, university students did not have to pay any tuition fees but still had to cover accommodation, living, (and in these student-athletes cases) sport-related expenses. There were two types of funding initiative currently available for elite athletes who were in higher education. There was a sum of up to 6,000 Euros per annum that was awarded by the Finnish Olympic Committee and that athletes could apply for this for a maximum of three years. Then there was a more substantial sum of money (approximately 12,000 Euros) which was awarded by the Government and was reserved for those student- athletes who have qualified for a major sporting event such as the Olympic Games as in the case of the judoka:

By being in the sport and combining it with education I am in a safe place because I get a little money from the government that helps me support myself. Otherwise I don't have any money at all but in Finland we have a good support system for sportspeople who are studying. (FIN F)

I get a bit of money from the Finnish Olympic Committee because I am combining my education and sport, which covers some of my accommodation and living expenses. You can apply for this grant for a maximum of three years and this is my third year. But then you can apply to get some money from the government, it's not a lot but it helps you. Studying at university is free in Finland although we do have very high taxes. (FIN E)

In the French system, those student-athletes who wanted, and were qualified, to go to INSEP (the National Institute of sport and Physical Education), had to pay some money to cover their training, accommodation and living expenses. However, for most athletes these fees tended to be partially or fully covered by either their club or their sporting federation or both but a few were still dependent on their parents' generosity or having to work part-time to support themselves. For those high profile athletes who managed to secure a sponsorship deal like the swimmer interviewed, they may have been able to enjoy a comfortable living allowance:

My mum was a little bit afraid to send me to live all by myself and was not sure if they could financially support me. At the time (10 years ago) I needed 30,000 FF which are equivalent to 4,500 Euros for a year at INSEP but then I got a 50% subsidisation from the National Federation

so money was not a problem. It is less expensive now and the Federation pays 75% of my fees. (FRA A)

The federation pays 80% of my fees at the moment and the club covers the rest. When I had arrived at INSEP I had to change the club so that it could cover the costs for me. The club I started with is too small and it does not generate a lot of money...Yes for the moment I can live off swimming but I have to start working as soon as I stop. This is my second year of my four year contract. (FRA E)

Reasons for choosing a particular university in their home country

Loughborough University was the first choice for five out of the six athletes interviewed in Britain for a variety of reasons. Being one of the top sport universities in the UK it was an attractive prospect for these aspiring athletes, especially since, in the case of the runners, they had already been invited to compete at an annual running event hosted at Loughborough University when they were younger. However there were also other factors that influenced their decision to choose this particular university such as talking to older student-athletes who already had experience of university life at Loughborough and also having a highly visible media profile especially when it came to major national and international events:

Because I have always been a sporty person I had always heard of Loughborough! I don't know how but if you're watching the national championships or the Olympics on television the commentator is always saying 'oh it's a Loughborough graduate or a Loughborough student'. So you always hear about it and associate it with these big events and people. But also I remember another runner who came here and she was about 4-5 years older than me so I must have been about 14/15 and she just loved it. So I remember thinking this is what I wanted to do. At the back of my head that was always what I wanted to do but then it kind of came to life when I came to compete here when I was about 15/16. There was the Loughborough International which happens every year and I was invited to compete. As soon as you see the facilities I knew I just wanted to come here and run. So from a young age it was in my consciousness and then with all the people that I knew coming here and finally coming here myself, it just felt like it is the right place to be! (UK A)

I always wanted to come to Loughborough because you always hear about how good a place it is for sports and running. So I guess the idea to come to Loughborough originated around Year 10 when we started to think of universities a bit. Some of the older girls at my club had come to Loughborough and my coach told me 'Loughborough is brilliant!' so I picked Loughborough as my first choice and then I thought I'll pick the degree after though I actually liked the courses... I came a few times to Loughborough to an event called Loughborough International when I was still at school, and I remember one year in the Athletics Weekly there were only Loughborough people on the cover and I was thinking 'Wow I want to do that!'. (UK B)

Loughborough University also featured strongly from an academic point of view, and gave some of these athletes confidence that enrolling for a degree there will not only allow them to focus on their elite sporting career but also be able to secure them a better job in the future in case their sport did not work out or perhaps decide that it was time to pursue a professional working career:

So I did a little bit of research around Loughborough because yes everybody knows that it is a fantastic sporting university but it is even great for business and engineering and stuff like that. I wanted to come to a university where I could still pursue golf but also got a good degree that put me in good stead as a contingency plan in case the golf did not work out. It's got everything for me Loughborough, I really enjoy it...It did tick all the boxes so to speak when I was looking for a university. (UK D)

Loughborough was the only place that attracted me. I didn't apply for anywhere else, one of the main reasons being that I had known the coach here for 13 years...I thought it would be a good opportunity. So gymnastics was first and education came second. I've been training in a different environment, new coach so I'd be learning new things but alongside I would still be getting a good education. (UK C)

The choice of university that Finnish athletes finally decided on also depended heavily on the requirements of their sport and therefore typically athletes chose the university in proximity to either their home or training centre / club. As the athletes playing team sports (basketball, football and ice-hockey) explained, their clubs were all based in Helsinki, since most of the top teams were located in the capital city and therefore their choice of university was restricted to University of Helsinki. On discussing this issue

with the student-athletes they did not feel that their choice was compromised in any way since the University of Helsinki happened to be the largest university in Finland and offered a wide range of degrees:

Well since I live here and my club is here, and I knew I wanted to study at university, University of Helsinki was my only choice. But I was happy with the range of degrees on offer. I had many options..
(FIN E)

Similarly, two other Finnish athletes chose their particular university since it was situated close to their national training centre. In fact for one of the athletes, the University itself served as the National Training Centre for his particular sport and therefore it was very convenient from his point of view to attend the lectures on site. For the other athlete the town where her University was located was the same as where her National training facilities and club were based and therefore she could manage more easily to meet the time demands placed by both her training and lectures:

I chose the University of Jyväskylä because the training was good there so that had a great impact on my choice of university. The facilities were good, the coach was there, there were a lot of top gymnasts from the National team training there so it was a good place to be. But I also wanted to stay there because they had a field of study that I was interested in so it was an easy decision to apply. (FIN D)

It is perhaps useful to note at this stage that at the time of the interviews, the University of Jyväskylä was the only university in Finland which offered sport-related degrees.

Four of the French athletes, who at the time of interview were located at INSEP in Paris, had made the decision to relocate to their training centre following a selection process. In order to get accepted at INSEP most athletes are subject to selection criteria depending on the sport although in some cases athletes could qualify automatically if they already formed part of the French National Junior team or had been invited personally by one of the talent scouts / coaches, as one of the French athletes explained:

During one Winter Athletics Championships there was a National team trainer who came to talk to me and invited me to come to INSEP. I was reluctant at first, I don't like Paris at all, I prefer the countryside like where I am from and hate Paris St Germain. But in the end I was convinced by the trainer back home, that coming to INSEP should help me get better results. Both my club and regional trainers thought that I should come. I was 17 years old. (FRA A)

As has been explained in detail in the previous chapter, INSEP was essentially an elite sport training centre which also provided a wide range of educational initiatives from formal schooling up to Baccalaureate level and also university degrees whether on site or in partnership with neighbouring universities.

From the approaches illustrated above in the three European countries what could be concluded from the student-athletes' comments was that most of the decisions made in relation to their choice of university / training centre and therefore academic development and future professional career prospects were influenced to a significant degree by their sport and the corresponding elite training structures that were provided nationally. However, keeping in mind that most of the athletes across the three countries agreed that they had chosen a particular university / training centre first, depending on their sporting needs and then looked into the possible academic choices that were provided, the general consensus was that they were still generally satisfied with the range of academic opportunities on offer and the quality of their degrees as will be illustrated in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

Department and Academic Degree of Choice

In Finland, the choice of academic degree for four of the athletes was based on those core subjects in which they excelled, for example mathematics for the footballer, gymnast and athlete, and chemistry for the ice-hockey player. Having gained the matriculation certificate to be allowed to apply to a particular university, the student-athletes explained that the second step in the 'regular' process to be fully accepted for a specific degree was to sit a

departmental exam. However, given exceptionally good grades out of high school, as was the case for the elite gymnast, a department may decide to accept a student unconditionally. Both the footballer and the athlete admitted that prior to enrolling at university they did not have a specific degree in mind and therefore they applied to a number of departments and had to wait to see which department accepted them:

I just knew I liked doing mathematics and physics so I based my decision solely on that. I just went to the department there without having any idea of what I wanted to become and started this degree. I did look up the different points required to enter different departments at university so I thought I would match the points I had with a department. It was a bit bad but I didn't have a specific interest in a particular area, I just wanted the education...in the end I ended up in an engineering department but specialising in printing technology which later became known as Media Technology (FIN C)

Similarly the judoka also explained how she did not have a specific department to apply to as she had never envisaged that she would eventually pursue an academic career at University. However, following discussions with both her boyfriend and his mother and some other background research on her part she described how she came to the decision to apply to the Department of Education, where she was accepted for a Masters degree specialising in Adult Education:

After the matriculation exam when I was searching for opportunities, I had no idea what I wanted to study or what I wanted to do but then my boyfriend's mum was studying education and gave me some books to read. I got interested so I bought the exam books to read more and then I went to sit the exam because here in Finland you have to pass a university exam in order to get accepted by the department. I passed the exam and got accepted and then I decided to focus more on adult education. (FIN F)

One other Finnish athlete described how applying to a Marketing Department had been unsuccessful in her first attempt to pass the departmental exam. As she explained, in hindsight this proved to be a positive outcome as she later realised that marketing was not quite her area of interest and therefore the second time round opted to apply to a different department. Eventually she

was accepted in the Department of Agriculture and Forestry where she specialised in Environmental Economics:

After high school I took a year off. I tried to get into this marketing department of one university right after high school but I didn't pass the exam so I waited and then in Spring took another exam for the University that I eventually went to but it was a different department. Later when I thought about it I was really grateful that I didn't make it first time round because marketing was not something I really wanted to do and I would have not been interested. I made it to University of Helsinki in the Department of Agriculture and Forestry and I studied Environmental Economics. I was doing marketing and economics at first but then changed my major to economics. (FIN B)

The Finnish gymnast was not intending to go to university immediately after he graduated from high-school and although he did submit some applications, he was not prepared to follow them through. Instead he opted to do his army duty (compulsory for all Finnish men) first and then perhaps concentrate exclusively on his athletic career for a few years. However, after completing his army training he was also aware that the World University Games were scheduled for the following year but realised he needed to be registered as a university student in order to qualify. As he explained during the course of the interview he had always wanted to take part in these games, not only because of the unique opportunity to be part of this world-wide multi-sport event but also because he knew that very high profile gymnasts competed there. Therefore, he applied to the Department of Mathematics and was immediately accepted:

The first one I applied to was University of Helsinki Technological Dept. but I didn't take that too seriously, my plan was to go to the army for a year then apply to a different university. So I spent 11 months in the army, there's a special section for athletes...After I finished the army, I was thinking first to spend a year or two and concentrate on see how gymnastics develops but then there were the World University Games coming up but of course you need to have a university in order to get in the games so that's when I applied for the University of Jyväskylä to study mathematics. Actually I didn't even have to take the exam because I had such good grades in high school they took me straight in. (FIN D)

However, as he explained following excellent performances at the World University Games and the World Championships, his athletic career simply engulfed his whole life leaving him with no other choice than to discontinue his degree. Eventually, after a couple of years he returned to University education by applying to the Department of Sport and Health Sciences where he specialised in Sports Sociology.

As Table 5.2 below illustrates, all of the Finnish student-athletes enrolled for Masters qualifications (five years) as opposed to Bachelors Degrees (three years) while at University. It was unanimously agreed by all the Finnish students that the demands of the job market in Finland are such that university students are required to graduate with a Masters degree in order to better their chances of finding a job. Therefore, although students may want to graduate after three years the general trend is that they would still need some sort of specialisation in order to be able to enter the job market.

Similar views were voiced by the French student-athletes who argued that hardly any students manage to find jobs if they graduate after three years and the few who do are not very well paid. Therefore as will be argued in the subsequent sections of this chapter, three out of the six interviewees had already opted to further their university studies in order to better their chances of finding a good job.

In France and the UK, seven out of the twelve student-athletes interviewed had decided to opt for a sport-related degree including Bachelors in Sports Sciences (5), Physical Education (2) and Sports Management (1). The initial rationale underpinning this decision was that since they had already established themselves as elite athletes, this experience gave them confidence that they could perform just as well academically. Moreover, as the British rugby player argued he was hoping that the knowledge gained from pursuing such a degree could in effect help him improve his performance as an athlete:

I wanted to do a Sports science degree which was easy for me to get because I was already an athlete. (FRA D)

My main thought before choosing the degree was that I was good in sciences, I had 3As and I enjoyed sports, and I guess at that stage my thinking was that I could probably apply some of those things I learnt to my sport and hopefully it would benefit me. (UK E)

Two French athletes opted to specialise in Physical Education and therefore applied to STAPS (*Sciences et Techniques des Activites Physiques et Sportive*) department. However, as will be explained in more detail in the following chapter although they were initially accepted in this programme, they did not continue with this degree. One opted to specialise in coaching and the other redirected his studies and chose Business and Management instead.

The remaining five athletes all chose a range of other degrees that were not related to sport in content including Information Technology, Business Studies, Fine Arts, English and Publishing and Psychology. However, as two British athletes argued, their final degree choice did depend on the time demands imposed by their sport and they therefore tried to find a degree that was flexible enough to allow them ample time to train during the day:

I am lucky in a way that I do psychology which does not have a lot of fixed hours that you need to be in lectures. The maximum I had were 12 hours a week, which I know there are other courses that have 24-30 hours per week because they have lab work for example. (UK A)

Table 5.2 –Sport, Gender, Age, University degree of choice and stage of study for the 18 student-athletes interviewed

SPORT	GENDER	AGE	DEGREE / OTHER QUALIFICATIONS	STAGE OF STUDY
FINLAND				
Athletics <i>Active</i>	M	32	Masters in Engineering	Ongoing
Basketball <i>Active</i>	F	28	Masters in Environmental Economics	Obtained
Football <i>Retired</i>	M	42	Masters in Media Technology (Engineering)	Obtained
Gymnastics <i>Active</i>	M	32	Masters in Sports Sociology	Ongoing
Ice-hockey <i>Active</i>	F	20	Masters in Food Technology-Chemistry	Ongoing
Judo <i>Active</i>	F	22	Masters in Adult Education	Ongoing
FRANCE				
Athletics <i>Active</i>	F	28	Bachelors in Sports Science	Obtained
			Masters in Coaching	Obtained
			<i>Professorat de Sport</i>	Obtained
Badminton <i>Active</i>	M	31	Bachelors in Sports Science	Obtained
			<i>Professorat de Sport</i>	Ongoing
Handball <i>Active</i>	M	21	Bachelors in Business and Management	Ongoing
Judo <i>Retired</i>	F	27	Bachelors in Sports Science	Obtained
			FIFA Masters	Obtained
			Masters in Sport Management	Obtained
Swimming <i>Active</i>	M	22	Information Technology Diploma	Discontinued after two years
			Coaching diploma	Ongoing
Synchronised Swimming <i>Active</i>	F	20	Bachelors in Sports Management	Ongoing

UNITED KINGDOM				
Athletics Active	F	23	Bachelors in Psychology	Ongoing
Athletics Active	F	23	Bachelors in English and Publishing	Obtained
Golf Active	M	22	Bachelors in Business studies	Ongoing
Gymnastics Active	M	22	Foundation degree in Sports Science	Ongoing
Rugby Active	M	26	Bachelors Degree in Sports Science (Hons.)	Obtained
Triathlon Active	F	23	Bachelors in Fine Arts	Ongoing

Meeting expectations

Having finally made the decision to follow a particular university degree, most of the student-athletes felt that university life matched their initial expectations (and at times exceeded them) and that it has provided them with the ideal medium to combine their sport and education smoothly:

Education is fantastic, I couldn't ask for more. If you need any help it's there and the facilities on campus are as good as they get really. (UK D)

I started this *Diplome Universitaire Technologie* which is equivalent to the *licence* in France (equivalent to a bachelor's degree) specialising in business studies like management, economics and marketing. I am very happy I made this decision! I am really enjoying myself and doing well. (FRA C)

Loughborough has definitely lived up to my expectations and more. I never knew I could be so happy! I had such a hard time doing my A levels I guess that coming here was such a relief. I am around people who are similar to me...for example in my first year I was with three swimmers, they've been to the Commonwealth Games and international championships so they had similar attitudes about going out. And then I am very lucky with the training group that I have, I improved so much running wise. Then I also met my boyfriend here in the first year, he's a runner as well. I couldn't have imagined it to be better than it is actually. (UK A)

Academic commitments at University

When student-athletes were asked during the interview to describe a typical day in their lives while they were at University they all commented that they did not have a 'typical' day as such, since both academic and sporting demands tended to change almost on a weekly basis and therefore they had to adapt their schedules accordingly:

There isn't really a typical day, for example this week I have 8 hours of lectures but in two weeks time I have no school and then I'm sitting one exam so it varies a lot. (FIN F)

Normally I go to practice from 8.00-10.00am then I go to school, (so sometimes I miss the first lessons because of training) I stay at school till 4pm then I go home and have evening practice from 5-8 or 6-9pm. I train in the mornings three times a week and then we usually have a game at the weekend. (FIN E)

On further discussions with the student-athlete it was immediately evident that schedules had to be carefully planned as there were increasing demands being placed on their time by their sport. Special consideration had to be given for those athletes who were training at INSEP as they tended to follow very strict training times and therefore academic commitments had to be fitted around these periods as the two quotes below illustrated:

A typical day like today for example, I came here at 8am and I had 2 hours of lectures then straight after I went to the badminton hall, started training at 10.30 for an hour and a half. Then I went to have lunch. At 2 o'clock I have another course, then from 4.30 -6.30pm I have training again. Then I go back home and I'm coaching from 8.00-10.30pm. (FRA B)

Typical day was 8-10am going to lectures if I had any, then training at 11.00 -1.30pm to be back at university from 2.00-4.00pm then going back to training at 4.30 till 6.30pm. Sometimes in the middle of that you had to incorporate running twice a day for an hour each time to lose weight so I used to run before going to lecture and then after training. I was completely independent, I was preparing my meals because I had a special diet. (FRA D)

Some other distinctions were drawn in relation to the academic work load for example between the first and final year at university when during the former the academic demands tended to be lighter than the rest of their university years as one British athlete argued:

I mean my first year it was pretty light, I was playing in the National team Under 19s, my home club's first and second team but I was also going out a lot! ...The most intense year was my fourth year because I was doing my dissertation, the busiest period was the Summer term of my fourth year while I was playing and captaining my home team. I was training for the National sevens team and I was also pooled in occasionally to play for a regional professional team so sometimes I had to go down to train with them. So I used to go to university at 9am work till about 3pm and then I used to leave and do all my rugby. So it was full-on. I didn't have time to sit about. (UK E)

In contrast to the rugby player, another British athlete described how it was much more easier for her to manage her academic workload and especially the demands of writing a dissertation as she had decided to split her final year over a period of two years:

A typical day in my final year was not very busy, so for example on Monday I would go for a run, do my drills, then go to a lecture at 9am. Then I used to have another weights session and then an afternoon lecture. I only had lectures on Monday and Friday however I spent a lot of time working on my dissertation in between but obviously I could still afford to go for a 2-hour run. I used to train twice a day four times a week then I used to have Friday off and then Saturday I used to go for a long run. (UK B)

From the descriptions that were provided by all the student-athletes it was clear that as they progressed in both their academic and sporting careers simultaneously, the demands placed upon them in terms of time kept increasing. This often meant that student-athletes had to find alternative ways of continuing to cope with these demands in such a way that neither their educational nor their sporting development would be compromised.

Flexible measures offered to student-athletes at University

It was generally acknowledged across the three countries by all the student-athletes that proximity of training venues and teaching classes / lecture halls helped them manage their time more efficiently. Furthermore having a well-structured schedule planned in advance, outlining both their sporting and academic commitments on a daily basis, kept the athletes aware of what is expected of them, eliminating unnecessary stress. Therefore careful planning was necessary and the support of academic staff was deemed critical in order for these student-athletes to be able to fulfil both their sporting and academic commitments:

I think it is possible to combine education and sport successfully especially if you are at a place such as INSEP. You do not have to travel, everything you need is around you. All of your studies are organised and scheduled in such a way that they will fit around your training sessions and competitions. It is a good environment to learn more as well because there are fewer students at the classes (maximum 15) so you can progress quicker. You always have the opportunity of individual tutoring if you are having difficulty understanding anything in class or if you have missed an important lesson because of training or competition. You can also lengthen your study programme as well over a number of years which I think is a good thing. (FRA A)

Extending the number of years of the degree as it is possible in some university contexts in France and Finland or splitting a year as is possible in some universities in the UK, were examples of the more helpful measures adopted by some of the student-athletes interviewed to facilitate particularly stressful times. For example in the UK three of the athletes had experienced difficulties during their second year at University as their academic workload had increased considerably at the same time as they were training for a major championship. In order to avoid a negative impact on their academic grades two negotiated alternative arrangements with their respective Heads of Department and decided to split their final year while the other postponed her final year for two years. This opportunity to extend the number of

university years is not only available in the UK but in France and Finland as well:

But I did struggle a little bit in the second year because the work load increased and then I was away in South Africa training during Easter for three to four weeks and I came back I had competitions and course work and everything needed to be done at the same time. So for the third year they have allowed me to stretch my final year over two years so I can have a lesser workload and then I can work on my dissertation the following year, which has helped me a lot. So that has been very good from the university's part. (UK A)

I think it is possible to combine education and sport successfully if the university structure is flexible enough to allow you to do so. I think it is the only solution to do it well. I am lucky, I study in Paris but I am not sure if other universities in the rest of France work this way. The good thing about high level sport is that if you have time, you don't have a problem because you can lengthen the number of years to finish your diploma. (FRA C)

Other flexible measures that had been identified by the athletes interviewed included the postponing of coursework deadlines and exams if these happened to coincide with major sporting competitions. Another positive initiative (albeit not restricted to student-athletes) adopted by one of the French universities was to grade its students through continuous assessment thereby easing the pressure of having to sit all the exams in one specific period. Similarly the university system in Finland had also proved to be very compatible with student-athletes requirements as the system was generally flexible to accommodate different individuals' needs. Although it did not distinguish between the different student groups, it worked to the advantage of the student-athletes as all students were allowed to compile their own time-tables:

No I always met the deadlines and sat for exams with the others. I never asked if they could make any special arrangements for me. I didn't expect anything from the university because here you can choose the courses you want so you can look at the schedules in advance and see if they fit with your commitments. You don't get a set schedule from the university, they of course advise you which courses you should take but then you make up your own time-table. So usually it was easily managed. (FIN B)

Also at Tampere they allow you to pick modules from other departments for example I am doing some modules with the business department although specialising in adult education. Not all universities allow you to do that so I liked this system better. There is a points system and as long as you pass the exam and collect the points then you can continue. (FIN F)

What was useful to note at this stage was that although some of the departments within a university may be willing to negotiate flexible arrangements with the student-athlete, some others within the same university might prove to be more problematic depending on the type of degree that had been chosen and lecturers' disposition in relation to athletes' needs. For example a degree in engineering required students to spend up to 30 hours per week either in lectures or lab sessions, and whereas lecture notes were usually made available online, practical sessions were mandatory. This was the situation facing three of the Finnish athletes pursuing engineering and other scientific degrees and thus they either had to negotiate alternative dates and times with their lecturers each time they missed a lab session due to training camps or competitions abroad:

Yes I ask for special permission quite often actually but usually I talk to the teachers and professors who are very understanding and then we make special arrangements as long as they know what I'm doing and where I'm going to be...I have a little calendar which I don't go without, I have all my courses there and all my training camps away so I can tell my teachers from the beginning when I won't be able to come in. It's good to know in advance ...so I can explain everything and then we come up with an agreement. (FIN E)

However with the introduction of sport academies in various regions of Finland, as two of the more experienced Finnish athletes explained, younger student-athletes can benefit from a range of services and support to help them schedule their time well especially while they are in higher education. Older athletes who previously enjoyed unlimited student status unfortunately often found themselves wasting a number of years as the Finnish gymnast attested rather than using the time efficiently. However, with the recent curb on the number of years that a student can spend at university, (from unlimited student status to a maximum of seven or eight years to complete a

Masters programme) coupled with the introduction of support services at the sport academies, some student-athletes may now even manage to finish in the regular time period of five years:

I think one good thing that is in place now and wasn't there when I started was this system of sport academies. They started when I had already spent five years in university so it wasn't relevant for me. But the athletes that are starting some type of higher education now, they are helping them from the start. For example I know that with some athletes like myself who are away a lot they have arranged for them to take exams while they are away but I never got to use that help (although lately that's my fault). (FIN A)

Well back then when I started university we did not have any restrictions unlike today on how long you spend at university, some stayed for five years others for twenty years. In the end it took me 14 years to graduate but that included one year at the army (which is compulsory in Finland) and I was at the top of my game between the ages of 27-31. So there were about 3 or 4 years that I had not done anything about school, I had finished all my courses but still had the Masters thesis left behind. That is why in the end it turned out to be a long time but if you take out those 4-5 years it wasn't bad at all! (FIN D)

Graduating from University

Five of the student-athletes interviewed had already completed their Bachelors Degree, four of whom had opted to further their studies. The Finnish basketball and football players had in fact completed their Masters degrees in Environmental Economics and Engineering respectively while the French judoka had completed her second Masters in Sport Management. The other two French athletes had opted for the *Professorat de Sport*, a diploma specifically required if one wants to become a civil servant in the sporting sector in France (refer to Chapter 4 for a comprehensive overview of this qualification).

One of the French athletes had already obtained this diploma (in April 2006) but she had opted to work at INSEP for the time being as she was still currently registered as a full-time athlete. However, her long-term plan was to

secure a permanent post within the sporting context but at a more local / departmental level in France.

The badminton player on the other hand who was currently half way through his diploma and planned to sit examinations in 2009, would have preferred to go on to work within the elite sporting context. However, he was very well aware that opportunities in this sector are limited but fortunately the *Professorat de sport* would allow him to work in other sporting areas such as sport development and therefore he was able to keep his options open until he graduated.

The French judoka had opted to further her studies through a Masters degree in Sports Management but as she argued at the time when she had enrolled for the programme, this degree had only just started to be offered to students and therefore she was not entirely sure of the kinds of jobs to which it might lead. From her knowledge of the academic sport management programmes in France, she knew that the most esteemed Masters programmes by the professional market were being offered by Lyon and Limoges Universities. She eventually opted for the one at Lyon University which was being co-ordinated on a part-time basis at INSEP, her former training centre. This made it quite convenient to attend as it took the form of blocks of one-week of intensive lecturing per month, and working for the rest of the time for various sport organisations putting 'theory into practice'. However on graduating, despite having established some contacts within the sport industry, she still did not have a clear career plan:

I didn't really have a plan as soon as I finished but if you are in sports management at least in France usually your big dream is to organise this big event so either the Olympic Games, the Football World Cup, the Rugby World Cup, Rolland Garros or Formula One Grand Prix so I guess my thinking followed this but then when you look at the opportunities available, it's different! (FRA D)

A determining factor in her life however was that while she was completing this Masters programme, she suffered serious injury for the first time and because of a complication with her injury, she soon started to realise that the

end of her sporting career might be nearer than anticipated. The two elements put together, her injury and graduating from her Masters degree made her give serious consideration to her pending professional career. While studying in France she had come across an international Masters programme co-ordinated by F.I.F.A. (International Federation of Association Football) that caught her attention for a number of reasons:

What attracted me to this Masters was not really the content because everyone knows that the theory is theory and it is the same wherever you go but I really liked the international network. France is a very closed environment and not quite open to exchange with other countries and that's why I wanted to do it. I wanted to go abroad and the recognition of the diploma. This Masters lasted a year. (FRA D)

However, before she could go ahead and apply for this F.I.F.A Masters programme, there was one difficulty because the programme clearly stipulated that all candidates must be proficient in English and the French athlete did not feel confident that her level of English was adequate. After discussions with one of her academic tutors at INSEP, she made a decision to take a gap-year and go to work in an English-speaking country to master the language. Going to England seemed to be the most obvious choice, and through contacts of her academic tutor she also managed to undertake a comparative research project between a French and a British sport federation. After one year she made a successful application to enrol for the F.I.F.A. Masters which she completed in Summer 2006.

Post-athletic careers and Professional career planning

When the student-athletes were asked what they envisaged their own professional career to be, the range of responses they gave were summarised in Table 5.3 below. Seven of the student-athletes interviewed replied that they would like to first further their studies in order to enable them to get to the professional career of their choice.

Three of the French athletes had already invested more in their academic career, with two student-athletes opting to specialise through the *Professorat de sport* and another who opted to do two Masters in sports management. Four of the student-athletes had already completed all their studies and were now in either full-time or part-time employment (including the two retired athletes).

From the rest of the 14 active student-athletes, four explained how ideally they would be able to find a job within the elite sporting market as they hoped to be involved in some capacity whether as an elite coach, administrator or in event management:

I've got a few friends who work in the business side of golf. Golf can be used quite a bit as a business tool...I'd like to go into something like event management like the PGA. So I would really like to do something around golf because the idea of being in an office from nine to five does not excite me at all. I like to be outdoors so I think golf has really shaped me even in the way I think and even if I am not playing professionally I think I would still be playing a lot for the rest of my life. I definitely say that in 20 years time if I'm not still playing I would definitely be somewhere in the industry. (UK C)

By contrast the remaining 10 student-athletes described how having the opportunity to go to university had opened many more options in the job market for them to choose from. As will be discussed in more detail in the athletic career section of this chapter the set of student-athletes interviewed tended to fall into two categories; one set that truly believed that being able to stay within the elite sporting context was something to aspire to, and the second set who firmly believed that athletes who stayed within the sport are the ones that had limited options / qualifications and who had failed to prepare properly for their post-athletic career. Such strong views were voiced for example by one British athlete as she drew comparisons between two sports; athletics and football, and explained how two elite athletes may end up with very different occupational career options depending on the sport they were competing in:

I feel safe in the knowledge that at least I'm going to have a degree and that I will get a career after. I am glad that I am in a sport that allows me to do this as well unlike a footballer for example who cannot go to university. I am glad that I have the qualifications. (UK A)

Similar arguments were presented by another two of the student-athletes as they reflected on their own sports' practices and general disposition towards the educational development of the athletes. The Finnish athlete argued how stereotypically there were fewer athletes within combat sports who pursued third-level education while the French handball player described how the professional nature of the sport was discouraging a lot of the players from continuing their education, which ultimately had an impact on their post-athletic career options:

I think most judokas to be honest do not go to university...It has been a little hard to explain to our national coaches that I'm playing judo and also studying because the head coach he's a fireman so he didn't continue studying and he doesn't really understand. He also wants me to stop studying now and then perhaps continue after. (FIN F)

Not a lot of professional handball players are in education, most of them prefer to go back to education after their handball career is over, usually they are about 30 years old. But I was afraid that at 30 I would not want to go back to school so I was determined to get my certificate now. This is what real life is about, real life is work not sport! Yes we do earn quite a bit of money now but it will not last you for long after your career is over. (FRA C)

Table 5.3 – Summary of the range of responses that student-athletes gave with regard to their current occupation or future professional career direction

Sport	Degree / Qualification	Stage of study	Current Occupation	Future Professional Career Plans
FINLAND				
Athletics Active	Masters in Engineering	Ongoing		Research based work in chemical plant
Basketball Active	Masters in Environmental Economics	Obtained	Research Consultant on developmental issues with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs	
Football Retired	Masters in Media Technology (Engineering)	Obtained	Full-time coach of professional football team	
Gymnastics Active	Masters in Sports Sociology	Ongoing		Elite Sport administration e.g. with Finnish Olympic Committee or Lottery Funding body
Ice-hockey Active	Masters in Food Technology (chemistry)	Ongoing		Chemistry –based job
Judo Active	Masters in Adult Education	Ongoing		Adults teacher / Human Resource Manager / Consultancy
FRANCE				
Athletics Active	Bachelors in Sports Science	Obtained	Student-placement administrator	Civil servant in France
	Masters in Coaching	Obtained		
	<i>Professorat de Sport</i>	Obtained		
Badminton Active	Bachelors in Sports Science	Obtained		Elite coach
	<i>Professorat de Sport</i>	Ongoing		
Handball Active	Bachelors in Business and Management	Ongoing	Professional handball player	Human Resource management / sports events
Judo Retired	Bachelors in Sports Science	Obtained	Programme Manager – Athlete Learning	

	FIFA Masters Masters in Sport Management	Obtained Obtained		
Swimming Active	Coaching diploma	Ongoing		Further studies in Communications and work in the media
Synchronised Swimming Active	Bachelors in Sports management	Ongoing		Further studies in marketing and public relations
UNITED KINGDOM				
Athletics Active	Bachelors in Psychology	Ongoing		Further studies in clinical or behavioural psychology
Athletics Active	Bachelors in English and publishing	Obtained		Further studies by doing a PGCE and becoming a primary school teacher
Golf Active	Bachelors in Business studies	Ongoing		Turn into a professional golfer / event management
Gymnastics Active	Foundation degree in Sports Science	Ongoing		Further studies in an engineering –related degree
Rugby Active	Bachelors Degree in Sports Science	Obtained	Professional rugby player	Further studies in physiotherapy
Triathlon Active	Bachelors in Fine Arts	Ongoing		Further studies in Fine Arts and become a full-time artist / launch own designer line collaborating with Fairtrade

5.2.4. Stage IV - Professional Occupation

Dual career – Elite sport and employment

Two of the active student-athletes who had already completed their university studies were now combining full-time employment with an elite sporting career. The French athlete, who was working at INSEP explained that this was only a temporary job while she still trained there. There were a number of administrative jobs that were specifically reserved for high-level athletes at the training centre and in her current role she had to help other student-athletes to co-ordinate their academic time-tables. Her long-term plan after retirement from elite sport was however to work as a civil servant (having

obtained her *professorat de sport*) within sports but at a more grass-roots level for example in sports development:

But for now I am working in INSEP, I started this job last November and it is one of the placements that are reserved for high level athletes. I help with the administrative side of student placements. I help those students who are doing a French diploma to co-ordinate between their job and class placement. I also co-ordinate their academic programme and classes. Then obviously I do other things but it usually depends on the need. It has very flexible hours so it can fit within your training and competition schedule. As with all these types of jobs your training is still the most important part of your schedule. (FRA A)

The Finnish basketball player who had graduated with a Masters degree in Environmental Economics in 2005 had worked on a number of short-term contracts with the Ministry for Environment before going to play professionally for a year in Spain. On her return she has secured another short-term contract, this time with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where she worked as part of a consultancy team on developmental issues in Africa. This line of work she described was one which she would like to gain more experience in as she would like to explore the opportunity of working in a developing country at some point in the future:

I just started my new job this Tuesday in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and I'm working with the Tanzania team on development issues. And this is something that I'm really interested in...(FIN B)

Professional Career

Having completed her F.I.F.A Masters, the retired French judoka had planned to try and capitalise on her newly established network of colleagues and apply for a number of jobs with international federations one of which was the International Olympic Committee but this did not materialise. Instead by chance she was offered a job by the Swiss government to work on a research project within sports policy which comprised of 12 countries among which there were Austria, Australia, Canada, France, Germany and Italy:

The Swiss government, Ministry of Sport came to me and sent me a job. I mean I did not even send a CV or anything like that but through the IOC (and because we went there one day, we had this long table discussion about the sports system in our country) they needed a French and English speaking candidate, and they knew that I knew a little bit about the sport systems in Europe (FRA D)

However, this was only a short-term research project (four months) and although they did offer to extend her contract, this again was going to be on a temporary basis. She decided not to accept their offer and instead started sending job applications for a more permanent post, which is how she managed to secure her current employment as a programme manager for athlete learning. Although the job description stipulated that her role required her to work on making online degrees accessible to athletes, she explained there were other elements that she had to attend to which made it more engaging:

The job description said that I was supposed to co-ordinate an international Baccalaureate online, develop relationship with universities and liaise with international federations. Then I had a couple of marketing aspects but not much, more communication with the international job department but in the end it was much broader than that so it's a little bit of everything. I have been doing this for seven months now. I had six months trial period but now I've passed that and the contract is open-ended. (FRA D)

Having made the decision to retire from professional sport due to injury, the Finnish footballer had initially made arrangements with his supervisor at University to work on a short-term engineering research project in order to enable him to establish some contacts within the engineering world. However, in the interim period just after he had submitted his Masters dissertation and before he started his research work, he was invited to do some football coaching for juniors at his former club and as he explained in the interview he really felt that his future belonged on the football pitch. He was fully aware that choosing to dedicate himself professionally to football might turn out to be a risky decision as he might completely lose out on the one opportunity to having a career in engineering but as he explained it was worth a try:

In the summer time I did some coaching at my home club and helped coach the juniors and I got this feeling that I was at home on the football pitch. This is what I wanted to do! I still started this research job but after three weeks I got an opportunity to coach at my former club junior team. Also there was this very interesting school which offers coaching qualifications and I went there instead so I changed my whole life around and I apologised to my professor and told him that football was my future. I took a great risk because maybe I lost the only chance I had to get a career in engineering. (FIN C)

Having completely redirected his professional career and channelled his time and effort into football coaching, he immediately made plans to retrain and therefore enrolled himself for a football diploma and some other coaching courses offered by the Finnish Football Association. He eventually completed all of these, he was able to coach at any level, in any club, anywhere in Europe. The insurance company which was going to cover his wages at the university also accepted his change of plan and financially supported him through his first year of coaching junior football.

By the end of this first year, he was approached by a group of University friends who had just bought one of the professional football clubs in the Finnish league and offered him a full-time opportunity to become an assistant coach for their senior team, while also taking up the role of head coach for their junior section. He accepted this offer and undertook this role for six months. Subsequent to a managerial decision, he was then offered the job as first team manager which he accepted, and he had been undertaking this role for two and a half years prior to the interview.

5.2.5 Summary to section

This section has provided an overview of the four normative transitions at the academic level as outlined by Wylleman and Lavallee's (2003) developmental perspective on transitions faced by athletes model beginning with primary education and moving on to secondary schooling, higher education and eventually employment. It has also discussed a number of non-normative transitions that were highlighted by the student-athletes. This included instances such as when two interviewees emigrated to a different

country with their parents which impacted on their school experience, another two participants who had to repeat an academic year during secondary schooling as their grades had suffered considerably due to some 'teenage' problems, and another five student-athletes who had to consider full scholarship proposals by American colleges which if accepted could have been a major turning-point in their lives. Therefore, having considered the first major level of analysis comprising of the academic/ vocational stage, the chapter will continue to address the second main level relating to athletic development.

5.3. Negotiating a Sporting Career Path

Bloom (1985) conceptualised athletic talent in the following three stages: initiation, development and perfection / mastery, which are delineated by specific transitions. The initiation stage related to the period when athletes are introduced to organised sports, the developmental stage referred to the time when athletes started to commit more time to their sport (specialisation) and the mastery stage marked the highest levels of athletic proficiency as athletes strived for perfection.

More recently, Stambulova (2000) outlined six stages of athletic development and normative transitions including: sports specialisation, transition to intensive training, transition to high achievement sport and senior competition, transition from amateur to professional sport, transition from the highest level of sport to the end of sporting career and retirement from elite sport.

The second level of analysis utilised for this research based on Wylleman and Lavallee's (2003) developmental model on transitions faced by athletes comprised of the following four athletic stages: initiation, development, mastery and discontinuation.

Figure 5.4 - A Developmental perspective on transitions faced by athletes at an athletic level

AGE	10	15	20	25	30	35
Athletic Level	Initiation Development		Mastery		Discontinuation	

Note: A dotted line indicates that the age at which the transition occurs is an approximation

Figure taken from Wylleman & Lavalée (2003:516)

5.3.1. Stage I - Initiation

In order to begin to trace the student-athletes' sporting career, the interviewees were asked to describe their first experiences of sports. All of the student-athletes interviewed commented that they had all been very active from when they were young having experimented with a number of sports when they were as young as five years old but then joined teams or clubs by the time they were seven or eight. The difference between this particular set of student -athletes was that there were seven athletes who from this young age were already involved in the sport they later chose to specialise in and the rest who were still practising a variety of other sports:

I started gymnastics because of my brother, I followed him to the gym one day and stayed there. I was seven years old. Ever since I've been a gymnast. (FIN D)

I was four when I started playing rugby, there's a cup event down where I used to live and all the small villages used to field in a team. So I remember I played for this small village and that's where it all started. Then when I was seven I started playing for my home team right up until colts level and then I went to the seconds and then the first team. I captained the firsts there. (UK E)

When I was little, my mum was quite good actually at giving us lots of opportunities so I started doing ballet which I wasn't very good at so I stopped doing that after a while, and did tap dancing instead. Then I did tennis but was not good at it, so I started swimming but we had this instructor who had a whip and used to whip the ground so I was scared! I had started running in the meantime but there came a time when I couldn't do both, and since running was taking off a little bit I stuck by it. I used to gymnastics as well when I was little but wasn't good at that either. But it was good for me to get a taste of all the sports, I got to find out what I am good at, I don't have very good co-

ordination for sport like hockey or tennis and I'm much better at individual sports so I could be doing swimming now but running I was better at! (UK B)

Two of the female athletes encountered some obstacles when they were young since they started practising what was considered in their town / country as a stereotypically male sport and therefore were unable to find girls' teams to join. In the case of the French athlete, this meant that she had to give up football as her sport and try out something new, which is how she was introduced to athletics. In the case of the Finnish ice-hockey player she had to join an ice-hockey club with women of a much older age group when she was just ten years old:

I started playing football when I was seven or eight years of age and played till the age of 14 always with boys but then I had to stop because of the rules. I was the only girl on the squad and they didn't allow girls to play in the official games. It was a real pity because I really liked football! Then my coach told me to try out athletics. (FRA A)

I used to train with the boys of course because there were not any clubs for girls. It was only after I was 10 years old that I could join a women's club but the girls there were much older than me. (FIN E)

Two other athletes started practising two sports simultaneously and continued to do so until their late teenage years. However, a decision to choose between the two sports had to be made as it was practically impossible to keep competing in both while still being in school. The Finnish basketball player and the French judoka described their dilemma:

I used to do track and field as well as basketball up until I was 18. So at the beginning I used to do athletics in high school and then do basketball in the evening but then in my third year I switched to basketball and dropped athletics. (FIN B)

I was still doing two sport at competitive level so it wasn't easy to manage in terms of the time schedule. My two sports were judo and equestrian. Equestrian I was practicing twice a week and then having competitions on Saturday and Sunday and judo three times a week so when you combine them both I had something every evening. (FRA D)

The British tri-athlete started swimming at a club when she was nine years old, improved rapidly over the subsequent five years to reach a national level standard by the time she was fourteen. However, she had to stop swimming because she felt that she could not cope with the demands of her school work as she was preparing for her GCSEs examinations (General Certificate of Secondary Education) combined with having to practise nine times a week. As the interview progressed it became clear that this was not only an issue of time management as she later continued to explain, but she had felt burnt-out (a condition commonly linked to over training in athletes) and decided to give it up:

I swam up until GCSEs but then I had to stop because I couldn't cope with having to wake up so early and studying for my exams and I just wasn't enjoying it. I probably could have done less training but I didn't want to do it that way because I wanted to be the best and then I was thinking what if I do continue after the exams at the same level do I really want to go back to those endless sessions at the pool? And then I realised that I did not love swimming enough to do that. (UK F)

It was only when she entered university that she was introduced to triathlon and therefore could hone in on her swimming skills once again together with her running and eventually cycling.

In a similar scenario, the British golfer had initiated his sporting career as a young promising football player, trained and competed for one of the Centres of Sporting Excellence in England for five years, however after the fifth season did not get his contract renewed. After several failed attempts of trying to find a football team at the level that he still wanted to compete in, one day he joined his father (a former professional football player himself) to play golf and did not look back.

When student-athletes were asked who were the key people who influenced their decisions to start practising their particular sport their responses were divided into three main categories. The first was family influence including parent and siblings, the second were teachers most prominently physical education teachers and the third category included a variety of explanations

such as the influence of watching a particular sport on television or joining a neighbour for an activity.

Nine of the student-athletes described how their first experiences of sport revolved around their family members' activities, whether they joined their parents to practise a sport or whether they followed a sibling:

My father introduced me to swimming, he was a swimming instructor so I feel like I have always swam. In France we have this expression when we call someone 'baby swimmer' and that's what I am. I don't remember at a time when I didn't swim. (FRA E)

It was probably my dad but also the place that I was from it was very rugby daft basically! It's changed a bit now but historically it has always been very rugby based. (UK E)

There were also three athletes who were encouraged by their school teachers to take up a particular sport and who were introduced to local clubs. For one Finnish athlete his teacher happened to also coach at one of the athletics clubs in his neighbourhood so he invited him to start practising outside school hours. Similarly the British gymnast and runner were both introduced to their respective sports by their physical education teacher who also helped to establish contacts with their local clubs.

5.3.2. Stage II – Development

Specialisation

Having established that this group of student-athletes had played a variety of sports from a very young age, they were subsequently asked to discuss at what age did they start to specialise in their particular sport. The responses were grouped as follows; those who had decide to specialise at a relatively young age and for the purpose of this study this age related to pre-teen years (between eight to 12 years). The second group consisted of those athletes who specialised in their discipline or sport during their teenage years and this was taken to be between the ages of 13 and 17. The third group included

those athletes who had a relative late age of specialisation ranging from their late teens (18 /19) to their early twenties.

‘Early’ Age of Specialisation

Four out of the eighteen athletes interviewed considered that they started specialising in their sport at a relatively young age, which for the two gymnasts was around the ages of eight and nine and for the ice-hockey and rugby players was around the age of 10:

I decided that I wanted to do gymnastics when I was about eight years of age and was training four times a week, three hours at a time. I knew I was quite good and that I had potential. (UK C)

Another nine of the athletes regarded their teenage years (13 -17) as having been the period when they started to dedicate more time and commitment towards their sport. For four of these athletes this decision followed their relative degree of success either by winning National Championships with their team / club or having been selected for the junior national team training camps or competitions:

Yes because when I was 14 I won my first Finnish National title for the U/14 and then when I was 15/16 I was doing pretty well in my sports so it was quite natural that I wanted to be the best at my sports. (FIN A)

‘Late’ age of specialisation

In this category five of the student-athletes considered their late teenage years (18/19) and in one case their twenties to be their chosen age of specialisation in their sport. Two of the British athletes attributed this focus with their decision to come to a top sports university, where they got the chance to follow an elite training programme for the first time in their sporting career. The French judoka, who until the age of 18 continued to practise equestrian events decided to focus exclusively on judo. In the case of the Finnish football player, although he had played his sport from a very young age, it was only after he was 20 years old, coming back from a series of

injuries that he decided to concentrate almost exclusively on his athletic career:

It was also the time when I met this coach whose craziness I got the energy from. I met him because I got loaned from my club to this other club in the lower division so that I could get some game practice because I wasn't good enough yet. But this guy inspired me to start training hard again and I trained very hard, I trained a lot between the ages of 21-23 and my development progressed immensely. After that I rejoined my club and was a key player and eventually captain for the next 10 years. I also played for the Finnish National team. (FIN C)

Training Commitments

The training commitment required by these student-athletes to compete at the highest level in sports tended to vary depending on the individual's sporting goals but also on the time of the year. By the latter they meant that they had different requirements depending on the stage of the sporting season and /or whether they were preparing themselves for a major sporting event.

Asked to describe a 'typical' day in their life when they had to combine both their university classes and their sporting commitments there were a range of responses given. Most student-athletes had to train twice a day and then fit their classes and coursework in between:

In winter I normally meet a few people at 8am and go for a run together. On a week day our longest one will be an hour and the shortest maybe for half an hour. Then go back home have breakfast, come in for treatment at some point in the morning, have a massage then have lunch. I usually have a lecture in the afternoon and then in the evening I usually have a training session or circuits or weights. I normally get back around 8pm. So I normally train twice a day and then physiotherapy, lectures, and studying fit in between. (UK A)

Usually on Monday and Tuesday mornings I have lectures so I only train once in the evening but then I train twice from Wednesday to Friday. Each training session lasts approximately two hours. Then we usually have a game per week. (FRA C)

The British rugby player described how he used to have to commute to training sessions and games on a weekly basis, as he was still playing for

his home club but had re-located for University. Since his University was also a sports university he described how it was possible to incorporate individual training sessions into his fitness programme as he had access to all the sports facilities he needed:

I was still playing for my home club which was a 40 mile drive from my university so I used to have to drive there all the time. During my first and second years I used to go down twice a week and then play on Saturday. Then during my third and fourth year of University I used to drive there three times a week because I became captain of the team. So I used to have to go down quite a lot more. (UK E)

Most athletes insisted that they do not have a 'typical' day plan that they follow since academic requirements tended to change every day and usually revolved around the sporting requirements as the Finnish gymnast explained:

I am not sure if I have a typical day because one day you are in a training camp and all you're thinking about is gymnastics and even though I am at home where I train there is never a day where I only do school. For the past year I have cut back on my training a little bit but before that I used to wake up in the morning go to the gym for a couple of hours, then in the afternoon I would have four to five hours between training sessions so I used to go to classes or study at home. Then in the afternoon I would go to the gym around 4-5pm. If I had exams I would read again later at home. (FIN D)

Other than the daily commitments with the club or university, some athletes also had monthly commitments with the National team. As the Finnish athlete described some of these training camps might be organised in their home country but there were also times when they had to travel abroad for a period of time that could range from one to three weeks:

We have the National team camps, when we have those I'll be away from home for a whole week. They're usually once a month and they can be either in Finland or in Sweden or even Canada. The longest period we stay away is when we have the World Championships because we stay away from home and school for three weeks. (FIN E)

On a longer time-frame some of these student-athletes' training and competition commitments were such that they were actually committed to

their sport all year round, whether this was as a result of the International Sport Federation competition planner as in the case of badminton or whether it was as a consequence of a more personal decision to compete in two events as in the case of the British runner:

In badminton you do not have a season as such, you just play all year. They have moved the World Champs to August now which didn't use to be this way but since the International federation relocated to Malaysia, that's the way it's got to be. The Asians control everything. There's no break now so the season keeps going on. There are no World Champs this year because of the Olympics. Five years ago it used to be in May so we used to have a break for preparation during the Summer but now you have to keep going. It is up to you to select which tournaments you are going to participate in and when to have the rests. (FRA B)

Before Christmas it's more about preparation and getting the right base for the season. The cross-country nationals and World championships usually take place till about March and then after we usually go weather training, we're going to South Africa this year which is really good because you really feel that you're there to train. That's really good! Then BUSA starts quite early as well and then you have the championships from about May to August so it is quite a long season. We're quite lucky that we can run all year because if you're just a track athlete, you only have the summer really but because I do the cross-county runs as well, that keeps me busy all year. (UK B)

5.3.3. Stage III - Mastery

Becoming a professional athlete

Five of the interviewees had experience of competing in what was considered to be a professional sport in their respective countries; specifically handball in France, football and ice-hockey in Finland and golf and rugby in the UK. However there were also another four athletes who considered themselves to be professional athletes as they had either secured sponsorship deals that allowed them to make a living out of their sport (at least for a period of time during their sporting career) in basketball, swimming and triathlon, or they competed on the professional circuit as was the case of the badminton player. The British golfer also had plans to turn professional

as soon as he graduated from university and had already taken measures to obtain a sponsorship deal:

I'm definitely going to turn professional and both my family and friends support that and know that it's what I will be doing full-time. I have already got myself some sponsors to support myself so I'm looking forward to being a pro golfer not a part-time golfer. Because the thing with golf if you are going to do it you have to be almost obsessed, you have to do it all the time! One of my goals is to really make a living out of the game. (UK D)

In a similar manner the Finnish footballer who competed for more than ten years as a professional player believed that this 'obsession' with the sport and a willingness to commit wholeheartedly at all times were qualities that were required to be successful. As he explained being a professional player was a choice of lifestyle and this attitude had transferred into his working life as an elite coach as well:

It was a lifestyle being a professional player like being a coach now I don't look at my watch and say 'oh it's Sunday today I'm not going to think about work or it's 10pm I'm not going to answer this call!' If you decide to be part of all this you have to be in it all the way. I don't think of it as a job it's a lifestyle so I'm always there. Playing was the same way. (FIN C)

The British rugby player argued in a similar manner as he observed that the structure of his sport has changed over the last few years, and therefore with the increasing professionalization of the game players are now having to commit full-time to their sport from a relatively young age:

Yes especially now because the structure has changed so you find guys turning professional at seventeen/eighteen now. (UK E)

A different perspective was contributed by the French handball player who was just five months into his professional contract at the time of interview and therefore was still coming to grips with his new lifestyle. As he commented, he did not feel that his lifestyle had changed much yet during this period as he still had the opportunity to continue his university studies and to visit his family and friends back home regularly.

Signing a Professional Contract

The French handball player explained how he was scouted and offered a full-time contract by one of the top professional clubs in the French league two years before when he was seventeen years old. At the time he was the best player in his position in the second division league. However, he did not accept immediately as after discussions with his family he decided that he wanted to wait a little bit longer before agreeing to a professional contract. Eventually he was nineteen years old when he signed his first contract. However, having signed up to this club and moving to Paris he was adamant that he should continue his university education and therefore instead of tying himself under contract to the club for three to four years as had initially been proposed he decided to limit the contract to two years such that the end of the contract period, would coincide with the time when he graduated from his degree. This would give him the opportunity to re-assess his situation, look for a part-time job and if necessary re-locate and join another club:

My club initially offered me a three to four- year contract but I only signed up for two years because that's when I finish this diploma I am doing. I didn't want to be restricted by the contract after I graduate because I would like to find a part-time job immediately after I finish. If the club agrees then I'll sign up for a few more years but if they don't I would like to have the freedom to look at other opportunities. (FRA C)

Marketing yourself as an athlete

Two of the student-athletes interviewed, the French swimmer and the British tri-athlete considered themselves as professional athletes as they could, at the time of the interview, make a living out of their sport through sponsorship deals. Following his best sporting performance at the Olympic Games in 2004, the French swimmer was approached by a number of sponsors who wanted to sign him up to market their products. He eventually signed a four-year contract with a sports wear company but confesses that he would have benefited from some guidance in how to co-ordinate such deals without affecting or indeed changing his lifestyle completely:

I would definitely consider 2005 as being the year when I truly became a professional swimmer. After the success we had in Athens Olympic

Games, contracts starting coming in, and I became a very high profile athlete. I didn't even have time to train because I was so busy doing other things. (FRA E)

In the British tri-athlete's case, she was approached during the World Championships by a couple of managers, one who was self-employed and the other who was representing a managing company to discuss with her the prospect of being managed professionally. After giving some consideration to their proposals she decided that it was worthwhile trying it but as she readily admitted she had very little knowledge about how such contracts worked. She eventually chose to sign a contract with the self-employed manager since she thought that she would be able to relate to him on a more personal level. He exclusively managed tri-athletes and worked with only a few athletes so the interviewee was very satisfied with the overall service that had been provided to date:

I have a manager in fact who is very good. He gets 20% (which is a lot!) from the sponsorship deals that we make. So I am always getting into magazines such as *Men's Fitness* and triathlon ones. I have just been in a Chinese triathlon magazine and some other underground magazines such as *Sport Mag*... he used to manage quite a number of tri-athletes actually but he did lose a few lately because he had way too many and he preferred to focus on just a few. But obviously he works with the people he can get more money for so for example with me I have a very good deal with sportswear so it works well for me. (UK F)

Playing abroad as a professional athlete

Two of the Finnish athletes in basketball and football also had experience of playing professionally abroad. Although women's basketball in Finland was not considered as a professional sport the basketball player had always planned to try and play professionally abroad at some point in her sporting career. However, as she explained she first wanted to graduate from university before she made any concrete plans of playing and living abroad since she was afraid that she might never be able to complete her studies if she were to have become involved with other things in life away from home

and university. Eventually, following graduation, and with the help of an agent she managed to secure a professional contract in Spain but simultaneously she was also offered a job in her area of expertise so she decided to gain some more work experience first and delay her plans to go abroad by another year:

I had an agent at the time and he was looking out and negotiating with clubs himself on my behalf. The plan was to graduate and then leave immediately after. I had an offer which I almost accepted but at the same time they offered me the job at the place where I was working during the summer so I decided not to leave and work for a little bit so I stayed here. So then it was the next season when I left and I joined a different club. (FIN B)

She eventually signed a contract with a second division club in Spain and lived there for a year. Asked what her general experience of playing and living abroad was she replied with mixed feelings as she thoroughly enjoyed living in a foreign country and mastering the language but then was disappointed by the level and quality of basketball she was playing. Although by the end of the season she had been offered a number of better contracts she decided to go back to Finland for a number of reasons, primarily because she did not want to risk another 'bad' season but also due to some other personal circumstances:

My experience playing there was half good and half bad! Spain I really liked, I was in Mallorca so it was really nice! My boyfriend came along with me and he was working from there for a Finnish company so that was one of the reasons we could go because if he couldn't leave then we would have stayed here. So that was quite convenient. But in basketball terms it was not that good, it was really different from what I was used to here. Sometimes I used to think it's a different sport! (FIN B)

On the contrary the Finnish footballer, who had the opportunity to play and live in Italy for half a season considered this time as one of his sporting career highlights as he recounted during the interview. He was only on loan from his club as the Finnish football league was played predominantly during the Summer months so he decided to join one of the clubs in the top division in Italy for the duration of five months. Other than having the satisfaction of being the first Finnish footballer who had featured for a total of twelve games

during his time there, from a personal point of view it was also a very rewarding experience as he immersed himself fully in the Italian culture and lifestyle:

Playing in Italy was a great achievement as well, I played about 12 games for this Seria A side and it was a great experience. I stayed there from January till the end of Spring. I was the first Finnish guy who played so many games in Italy. I love their culture, the food and the lifestyle. They don't have so many time-tables over there. And they are crazy about football, you don't feel like you are doing a job! (FIN C)

The British rugby player also described how he had also thought of gaining some experience in playing professional rugby abroad. Although he explained that he did not know of any other rugby players that had done this he was confident that with the right contacts it could be arranged. He also observed that as he would be nearing the end of his athletic career he would appreciate having a much better climate to train and compete in and a better quality of life in general:

My current contract will last for another season and a half then I would like to move somewhere else try somewhere new possibly France. They have a pretty good standard of rugby and it's hotter climate and then perhaps I could finish off crossing Italy or something like that which is not quite as good a standard but a much better climate. South of France would be nice, Biarritz would be a great place! (UK E)

Qualification for major sporting events

All of the student-athletes interviewed had competed in either European and /or World elite sport competitions and therefore during the interview they were asked to describe the criteria by which they qualified to compete in such events. There were various distinctions between the sports themselves for example depending whether they were an Olympic or professional sport or both but it was also revealed that there were also different approaches adopted by the various Nation states as the athletes commented.

The following quotes by the French student-athletes were illustrative examples of how athletes in France get selected to compete and qualify in the two Olympic sports of badminton and judo. As the badminton player

observed this was a complex process as the qualifying period begins a year in advance. As the French judoka attested this was not only based on good performances at the European and International competitions but it was obligatory for National team athletes to perform just as successfully in the French National championships before they can be guaranteed a place at a major sporting event:

In order to qualify for the Olympics in judo, athletes qualify their country in the weight category so in the year prior to the Olympics you have a number of tournaments which give you points. There is also a ranking system in each continent and also a world championships a year before and the first five in each category qualify automatically. In Europe we also have the European championships usually in April/May sometimes and the first two athletes in each category qualify automatically. However, what happens in France is that you might qualify the country in one of these tournaments but it does not necessarily mean that you will go, you still had to do the French nationals and then they will choose from there. (FRA D)

In order to qualify for the Olympics, I play doubles and mixed doubles we have to be in the top 13 of the World so it's very difficult since there are all the Asians. Only 2 pairs from each country can qualify. The qualifying period is for one year so it started in May 2007 and will finish in May 2008 so during this period you have to play as many tournaments as possible. We have tournaments almost every week so the best 10 results count for the Olympics so you can play 20 tournaments, 10 or 15 if you choose to. But the reality is that you end up playing all the time because if you stop you know that all the others are competing and they can beat you to the qualifications. It's complicated the whole system. All these tournaments are on an international level, we hardly play any National tournaments other than the National Championships and the French Open. Most of these big, international tournaments are in Asia as well so it's even more complicated because of all the travelling and the time difference. The Ministry through the Federation funds the travelling expenses, it's not the same system in England. (FRA B)

For the professional sport of handball there was also an opportunity at club level to qualify for a major European event similar to the UEFA Champions League in football where professional clubs in the top tier in their respective country compete against each other. The European Handball Federation (EHF) has 51 affiliated Nation states amongst which is France:

We would like to qualify for the European Champions League of handball. The two clubs that finish in top two places from every professional league in Europe qualify for this tournament which is held every year like the one for football. (FRA C)

In the case of another two Olympic sports, athletics and gymnastics the criteria for selection again varied depending on the sport and country. As the Finnish athlete described in field events in athletics there were two levels of qualifications, the A standard which is the highest level of competition and the B standard which is slightly below so in order to qualify an athlete must perform at least at the B standard. However, the final selection of the National team athletes in Finland usually was done at the discretion of the National team coaches and Olympic Committee members:

In athletics you have two sets of qualifications the 'A' standard which for high jumping is 2"30 and 'B' standard which is 2"27 I think. But it's the Olympic Committee who makes the final decision on who gets to go so sometimes they might judge on different criteria but I think if I jump 2"30 or even a bit less I should be chosen. (FIN A)

The Finnish gymnast explained how in gymnastics qualification to the Olympic Games can be achieved either as part of a National team but if for example a country is unable to have a number of high-level gymnasts to make up a team, there was an opportunity for individuals to qualify by finishing in the top nine places of the all-round gymnastic competition at the World Championships:

In gymnastics usually you qualify the team first and the individuals get picked up but because in Finland we never had such a good team to qualify within the team ranks, it was all about individual all-round competitions. And I think it's the top 9 of the top all-round gymnasts outside the strong teams that qualify get to go. It has been quite hard.(FIN D)

In athletics similar to the field events, qualification for the track competitions is based on two levels as well. However in the United Kingdom there is an additional Olympic trial that takes place a short period prior to the Olympic Games where the final selections are made. This was to guarantee that all

the athletes chosen to compete at the Games were at the peak of their performance around the same period that the Games were being hosted:

In order to qualify for the Olympics you have to make the set time but there are two levels, the A and B standard. There is also an Olympic trial and if you finish in the top two you get an automatic selection, if you come third it's up to their discretion. This would take place about a month before the Olympics, in other countries it might be done differently but the idea here is that you are in form for the Olympics and then you don't have to wait too long to compete.(UK A)

Contrastingly in golf, it was usually the England Golf Union that determined which golfers get to compete in which fixtures as they tended to be the main financiers of the tournaments. As an amateur athlete, each golfer had a standing in the National and /or World Ranking system and that was one of the criteria that was taken into consideration when choosing the international events to compete in:

For the international events usually when you have a standing with your golf union they have a list of all the players and where they going to send them. So the if the English Golf union is going to pay for you they basically decide where you go. It is like a fixture list really but in golf it is mostly up to you to choose which ones you want to play not like a team sport where you have a list of games that you must compete in. In golf you can be more selective, you can choose the places that you are more familiar with and you don't have to play all the time. Especially just before the big events come up you can take some time off to focus on them. (UK D)

Career Highlights

During the course of the interview the student-athletes were asked which particular sporting performances did they consider as being their personal sport career highlights. All of the athletes interviewed were considered at some stage among the very top athletes in their country, winning several junior and senior titles / championships to date. Being among the best in their sport allowed them to be selected to represent their countries in international tournaments with a relative degree of success, proving that they were or still are (at the time of the interview) among the world best. Table 5.4 below illustrates a number of large-scale competitions, ranging from European-

based events to world championships and the Olympic Games and how these student-athletes placed in such events.

The feelings of pride and emotion expressed by some of the interviewees while recounting their most memorable moments could hardly be described as they fondly remembered these events:

We played the group stages of the Champions league in 1998. It was the first and only time that a Finnish team made to this stage. I was captain of that team and maybe one of the most memorable moments was when I was leading my team to the Olympic stadium and 35,000 people had showed up in five degrees Celsius. At football matches here we usually get four to five thousand people on average... We managed to get five points and I scored two goals in those six games, (FIN C)

It was amazing, being on the podium, with the flags and hearing the National anthem. Wow! that was definitely the highlight! Before we went the aim was a medal and if not to place in the top 4 or 5. But in that championship everything felt right so it was a very good experience! (UK B)

Table 5.4 - Personal highest achievements as ranked by student-athletes

Competition	Medals won by the time of interview			Other
	Gold	Silver	Bronze	
European Junior Championships U/20	1, 1	1,1,1,	1, 1	4 th place – 1 8 th place -1
European Junior Championships U/23	1,1,1			4 th place – 1
World University Games	1	1		
World Junior Championships				7 th – 1
Golf open Tournaments				Qualification for the final round of the British open as an amateur athlete
European Senior Championships			1	4 th -1, 5 th -1, 1, 6 th – 1, 1
UEFA European Champions League				Qualification to the final group stages
World Senior Championships	1		1, 1	4 th – 1, 5 th -securing a spot at the Beijing Olympic Games 7 th -1, 8 th -1, 10 th -1, 11 th – 1
Rugby World Cup				Reaching Quarter final stage
Summer Olympic Games				Last 16s, Final qualification for relay
Winter Olympic Games				4 th place -1

Short and Long-term goals in sport

Since all of the interviews were conducted during the year 2007 and beginning of 2008, the Beijing Olympic Games featured very strongly in the short-term plans of a number of athletes who were competing in Olympic sports. One of the five athletes that had a realistic potential to be selected for her respective National team had already qualified and therefore a medal at the games was her short-term goal. For the other four athletes, they had still to compete in the national championships for the final selections to be made and therefore their goals depended on their qualification and subsequent selection:

In three months we have the European Championship and because I don't have any medals from senior competitions I would like to get a medal in that but of course without losing sight of the bigger picture which is the Olympics so we're building my shape for that. An Olympic medal is the most important target. (FIN F)

My short term goal is to qualify for the Beijing Olympics, I have to compete in the French Championships in April. It is the only opportunity to get chosen for the Olympic French team. I am second at the moment in the standings in France and only the top two get chosen to go. However, you still have to qualify during the championships. (FRA E)

Other types of short-term goals included being selected and competing well in other major sporting events such as the World Championships and the World University Games. For those athletes playing team sports such as basketball, rugby and handball, the target was for their club to better their standing from the previous year and perhaps win the National league. For other athletes who were either injured or had just come back from injury, their short term plans were to work hard on recovering fully from their injuries in order to be able to train and compete well again.

In terms of long-term planning those student-athletes active in Olympic sports again commented that the Winter Olympics in 2010 and the Summer Olympics in 2012 were their main target. With particular reference to four of the British athletes, the Games in London in 2012 have taken an added significance since not only will they theoretically be at the peak of their

athletic career but there would also be the additional incentive of having the Olympic Games hosted by their home nation:

In five years time I want to be at the London Olympics! In 2008 I'd like to make the final but I won't be good enough in a year's time to win a medal. I mean if everything goes amazingly well I could hope for a place in the top 8 but no more than that. So 2012 I should have enough time to get there. I mean I do feel I have the potential but there is such a big difference between having the potential and then making it at the level. (UK A)

I've always had this figure in my head around 25, because that's how old I'd be at London 2012. If I hadn't made it to the Olympics by then I definitely would not make it by the next one so I don't think I'd go much past that really, maybe a year or two. (UK C)

My long-term goal is to win gold at London 2012! (UK F)

Five out of the sixteen active athletes commented that they did not really have a long-term plan as they were all keeping their athletic plans on hold for the time being and they would re-assess their situation either after the Beijing Olympic Games or later in 2008. Three of these athletes had already made the decision to retire from elite sports during 2008 but for another two it would all depend on their athletic performance at the Olympic Games.

5.3.4. Stage IV - Discontinuation

Retirement from elite sport

When student-athletes were asked whether they had given any consideration to the end stage of their elite sporting career, seven out of the 16 active athletes agreed that they had. One had planned to retire after the Athens Olympic Games but had somehow changed his decision and had stayed on for another four years within the sport. However, at the time of the interview he was determined that 2008 would mark the end of his sporting career as was the case for one of the Finnish athletes. For one other athlete who had a very good chance of competing once again in the Olympic Games, retirement from elite sport depended mostly on his athletic performances and whether

he felt he had accomplished his sporting goal, that of finishing in the top eight:

I think it's because I'm 32 years old now and I'm only planning a year at most ahead. Last year before the World Championships in Helsinki, I thought I'd stop after that but then I decided to wait till Beijing Olympics so now I have to see how I'm feeling after that. I will decide whether I will continue or retire. If I'm in the top eight I would not retire, I would give myself another one or two years to see where it leads me but if I'm not jumping so well or I get some injuries I'd make this decision earlier. (FIN A)

Similar views were expressed by one of the French athletes who also had a chance of competing in the Beijing Olympics. Although she did not have a specific idea of the age when she wanted to stop competing, she believed that her decision to retire would depend mostly on her body and whether it could sustain more injuries. However, as she suggested during the course of the interview there might be other factors that would contribute to her retirement, such as having to constantly mediate in a conflicting relationship between her coach and federation, which, coupled with injuries, seemed to be dampening the pleasure and satisfaction of being involved in elite sport which she deemed important.

The British rugby player described how he had also given some thought to the prospect of retiring from professional sport albeit he hoped that he would be able to continue playing into his thirties. From the comments derived from the interviews it was clear that one aspect that athletes gave consideration to during their athletic career was whether they should leave the sport on a 'high' or whether they should gradually 'fade' away by playing at a lower level:

I have thought a little bit about this how I would want to finish off my career so I was thinking that I could perhaps go back to my old club back home and play for them again. But now I am not too sure, the facilities are not that good and I was thinking how I would have to start training at night again so I am not sure I fancy that too much. But I'm really not sure whether I want to gradually fade away as opposed to just leaving the sport while I am at the top. (UK E)

If I decide to retire from the elite level it would be all over...I just dedicated the last twenty years to gymnastics so I need to do other things for myself. (FIN D)

Contrastingly there were also a number of athletes who had not given any thought at all to the end stage of their sporting career because in their own words they believed that 'in many ways their elite sporting career is only just starting'. The reasons justifying such a response could be related to these athletes' relative young age but it might even be tied to the sport that they practised. In golf for example athletes tended to compete for much longer before retiring, with some elite golfers playing well into their fifties. Similarly one of the track athletes had already envisaged that she would switch to marathon running eventually and therefore that would allow her to carry on running for a relatively longer period of time:

All the things that I think about golf are related to the start of my professional career, I've never even given it a second thought about the idea of not playing golf anymore. The only time I will stop playing golf is when my body cannot take it anymore so not in the near future. (UK D)

I reckon in 10 years time I'll be running the marathon by then (my dad was about that age when he started) ...I like to start running the marathon from when I'm 30 like Paula (Radcliffe) did, I think at 30 you would be getting a bit old for the track events so it's a good transition. (UK B)

For another four of the athletes who were considering the London Olympic Games in 2012 as their long-term sporting target, they also attributed this period as a milestone for their retirement from elite sports. This decision would obviously depend on how successful they were at these Games but for most the period after the Olympic Games in 2012 was deemed the appropriate time to retire from sport. Some of the reasons given for choosing this particular period to retire were firstly that they thought they would be at the right age to peak athletically in 2012 but then considered themselves too old to compete at the following Olympics. Secondly, athletes described how they would like to concentrate their time and effort on other aspects of their lives such as their professional careers:

2012 is my target, if I continue beyond that it would probably be for a year, maybe two years but then I will retire from triathlon. I do know that there are athletes who keep going and going but I think it's because they don't have something else to do or which direction they want to go but I definitely know where I want to go! (UK F)

In a similar manner one of the Finnish athletes who was planning to retire in 2008, had already made plans of what she wanted to do with her life after retiring from elite sport, not only in terms of a professional career but also on a more personal level. She was therefore well aware and psychologically prepared so that when the time to retire comes she would have the confidence to follow her decision:

For me it's a bit different because I just want to do other things with my life so I do not have any fears about leaving basketball. I am not afraid to let go. (FIN B)

'Early' Retirement

In a contrasting scenario two of the interviewees who had to retire from elite sport in the recent past considered themselves far from being psychologically prepared to make this kind of decision especially since they had both been at the peak of their athletic performance when they were struck down by injury. As one would anticipate retiring from elite sport was not the kind of decision that was taken hastily. As both the Finnish football player and the French judoka described, despite their best efforts to recover fully from injury both were unfortunate in suffering repetitive injuries. In the case of the footballer he had to endure four major knee operations in four years and the judoka sustained two major shoulder injuries in two years before they decided to retire.

When they were asked about how they went about making this difficult decision in the end, they replied in two different ways. In the judoka's case it was her personal decision to retire and although she did consult her club coach on the matter it was more a case of him acknowledging the fact that she had already made up her mind about it. The main difference between her and the football player was that in her mind she knew that she had a choice

whether to retire or not but opted for the former because she was not willing to spend another prolonged period of time trying to recover from the second injury without having the assurance of making a full recovery. Furthermore, this happened to coincide with some promising prospects within her professional career so she decided to move on in a different direction in life:

After I got injured the second time, I made the decision to retire. I think today I definitely have not achieved the dream of every single kid, that of being an Olympian but to be honest with you I don't know if I had stayed if I would have been able to make it for various reasons. So I absolutely don't regret anything that I stopped my career when I did... and by that time I started to understand a little bit more of my professional side so I just decided let's move on! (FRA D)

In the footballer's case the decision to retire from professional sport was one the he admittedly says was not one he had to make himself as his doctor informed him that he would never be able to play football again:

The doctor woke me up from the fourth surgery and simply told me that it's over. I had the same doctor throughout my four surgeries so he had looked at my knee again and again trying to salvage something but that was it, this time round he was sure that I could not play anymore. We got quite close by that time because I had gone to him about one hundred times in the process, so I had learnt to trust his words and judgement. (FIN C)

Contrary to the judoka, in the football player's mind he did not have an option this time round whether to retire or not and this fact affected him very negatively psychologically. He felt cheated out of the game and predominantly his life; as he lost control over his athletic career at a time when he felt he still had so much to give to the sport. As he painfully described during the interview he had difficulty coping with the feelings of disappointment and sadness that overpowered him when only a short period before his whole attitude and motivation levels towards his sports could not have been higher. He was one of the first Finnish footballers who had secured a successful transfer to one of the top football leagues in Europe and his sporting plan was to go abroad once more but this of course never materialised as he remained plagued with injuries:

What I am disappointed most about is that I was at the top of my career and I could still feel myself going up, it wasn't like I didn't have anything more to give. That fact gets me every time, that's why I feel a little bit sad when I think of it. My motivation towards my training and my games was higher than ever, my whole attitude towards football was great which is why it pisses me off every time I think of it. I could have had the opportunity to go abroad again because coming back from Italy I played the best season ever here, I scored many goals but then I had to have four surgeries in four years. And I tried to play some games of course in the middle of it all but the movement was restricted, I couldn't do the things I was doing before and it did not feel right anyway. (FIN C)

Soon after he realised that the decision to retire from professional sport was inevitable his first reaction was to agonise over the rest of his life. He had just completed a Masters in Engineering but he was still not convinced that this was the line of work that he would like to get into:

It was also a little bit fear of what on earth am I going to do in the future. There was this whole engineering business but was this my kind of thing or what?! I did feel like I'm losing a very big part of me (FIN C)

As he continued to explain his main concern with pursuing engineering was that up until that moment he had failed to do any of the practical (job placement) experience since such placements tended to take place in Summer and usually he was busy playing football at this time of year. Unlike other engineering students who had gained experience in industry during their university career and therefore developed some understanding of the job market requests, he had remained oblivious. He therefore thought that it would be best if he talked to the professor who was his academic supervisor at university and see whether there were any ways in which he could start networking within the engineering industry. Together they came up with a plan to start working on a research project and fortunately because he used to be on a professional contract with his club he had a good insurance cover, which was going to pay his salary (up to 80% of his football contract) for one to two years until he secured permanent employment:

At the time I had quite good insurance in football in Finland, if you get injured and can't play anymore they pay you for some time to go back to school and graduate so you will be able to find alternative

employment. So our agreement was that they pay my salary for one to two years while I do this research job (in engineering) to get the experience that I needed. So we had a deal between the university, myself and the insurance. I was going to start after the summer in three or four months. (FIN C)

In the French judoka's case, the transition out of elite sport took a different form as she did not receive any kind of support from her federation or club when she retired. The only type of support that she could have accessed as she explained was one based at a National level and provided by the Sports Ministry which provided guidance for elite athletes who wished to resume education or finish their studies to help them gain better opportunities in the job market. However, this initiative did not provide any type of financial help to support the retired athletes to complete their studies and therefore the judoka who had already invested a substantial amount of time in her education having graduated from a Masters degree in Sports Management did not have any use for it:

We don't get any support from the federation when you retire. The only thing you have from the Sport Ministry in France, when you used to be on the senior elite list (there are various types but one was for those with Olympic medal potential and another was for those who representing the country in other top-level competitions on a regular basis) when you retire you can move on to a career transition list for two years. This will give you some opportunities to finish your diploma and then try to make the transition into the working world. But because I had managed my education well from beforehand I didn't need to go on it and especially because there isn't any financial help when you're there, so it's more for the legal aspect. They make your life easier to get the diploma but that's about it. (FRA D)

Post-athletic career planning and support

When active student-athletes were asked whether they knew about any support services that were available to them should they wish to retire in the near future, three athletes replied that they were aware of some initiatives available in their country. One British athlete had heard that there was advice available to help elite athletes cope with their retirement from elite sport and help them find employment. She knew about partnerships that existed with

commercial companies like Coca-Cola, that would take into consideration a prior career in elite sport and the type of skills that an athlete might have developed that could be transferred to the workplace. One of the French athlete was also aware of such initiatives and in fact had already made use of a department that was based at her training centre INSEP, which helped retiring athletes plan for their post-athletic career:

We have a department here at INSEP where you can go and get advice on post-athletic careers. They help retiring athletes to make decisions about their professional careers and propose options for further education and training. I went to talk to them and looked at ways on how I can apply to the business school after I finish my diploma. The demand for places is very high and there is a point system that they use to get students a place. Being a high level athlete should help me get a few more points so I have a better chance of being accepted (FRA F)

During the interview student-athletes were also asked whether they knew of any retired athletes within their sport and whether they knew what these former athletes had chosen to pursue as a post-athletic career. All of the interviewees replied that they knew of retired athletes, whether these were former sporting peers or simply 'famous' high profile athletes that everybody simply knew about. In terms of the post-athletic careers pursued according to the student-athletes, retired athletes seem to fall into two categories, those who went into coaching and stayed predominantly within the sport and those others who had pursued a completely different profession away from sports.

The student-athletes' own reaction to these former athletes' choice of post-athletic career were varied. For example there were some of the interviewees who thought that choosing to stay in the sport, for example as a coach, would be ideal not only because they were familiar with the sporting environment and felt 'at home' on the pitch / court but also because it gave them an opportunity to 'give something back' to the sport which they deemed to be an important aspect for the development of the sport:

Coaching is something I really like, I like being on court being part of the sport. I would really like to work for the National team, can be

juniors, can be seniors I don't mind but I want to work with elite athletes. I would like to coach, stay on the court for the moment. (FRA B)

Looking at this post-athletic prospect from a slightly different angle, one of the French athletes observed that becoming a coach is not an option for all elite athletes as she truly believes that you have to have a vocation in order to do this job. She readily admitted that she would never be able to become a coach herself as she clearly had no inclination to do so and would perceive it more as a 'punishment' rather than an opportunity:

I definitely do not want to work for the track and field federation and definitely do not want to coach. Again I think to be a coach you need to have the vocation to do it and I don't have it! It would almost be like a punishment for me rather than a job! (FRA A)

However, a majority of the athletes felt that most athletes who go on to become coaches are the ones who have very few alternative options when it comes to a professional job after their retirement from elite sport. A series of explanations were given to justify this claim such as whether this was because these particular group of athletes had not made any post-athletic plans prior to retiring or failed to continue their education to be able to secure alternative employment in the job market. As the French handball player argued this could leave the individual in a very vulnerable position since most of the time coaching posts are based on short-term contracts and therefore have relatively lower or no job security. He added that ideally he would rather follow in the transition path of one of his friends who had started working part-time while still in the sport for a number of years and then simply switched to a full-time basis on retiring from sport:

I do know a few retired handball players. Usually they fall into two types, the ones that go into coaching because they are familiar with the environment, they know the people but you have no job security and usually they have no qualifications either. One of my friends who is 35 years old now and retired two years ago has done an engineering diploma and started working part time at 28. I would prefer to follow this way myself. (FRA C)

Such views were reiterated by a number of other athletes including all the British athletes interviewed who believed strongly in investing in education in order to be able to pursue the professional career of their choice in the future.

By contrast there were a number of other post-athletic careers chosen by retired athletes away from the world of sports the student-athletes knew about. In no particular order these included professional careers in information technology, finance, engineering, farming, marketing, media, chiropractics, fire departments and the leisure industry.

5.3.5. Critical moments during athletic career

Non-normative transitions

Negotiating a sporting career path during the life-course of these student-athletes was not always smooth because there were a number of critical moments that needed to be addressed. All student-athletes interviewed readily conceded that they had encountered some challenging moments during their sporting career and their responses ranged across a number of issues and concerns. These included coping with injuries, poor relationships with coaches, not qualifying for a major tournament, inability to deal with unprecedented sporting success, performing below initial expectations in a competition, having issues with respective national federations, needing a career 'break', outgrowing their training centre and coach, changing citizenship and competing for another country, dual career incompatibility and considering giving up the sport altogether.

Injuries

From all of the interviews conducted it appeared that an almost inevitable yet distressing part of any elite sporting career was the occurrence of injuries. All of the student-athletes interviewed regardless of their age or sport had already encountered a number of mild to serious injuries, with damaging consequences for two of the athletes (the Finnish footballer and the French

judoka whose cases are discussed above) who were forced to retire prematurely from their elite sporting career.

Three of the remaining active athletes who had been through a similar experience to that of the French judoka who had to cope with repetitive injuries. This period of injury and rehabilitation seemed to have been prolonged to such an extent that there was a time when they were all doubting whether they would ever be able to make a full recovery. This feeling of uncertainty about their physical well-being and future in elite sports was so strong that two of the student-athletes admitted that they had problems accepting and coping with their injuries psychologically:

In 2006, I had a sternum injury which kept me out of all the major competitions, then during all of the following months I seemed to have something. I was going mad! At one point I was seriously thinking that there was someone doing voodoo on me and it was working! very bad year! Now luckily this year I recuperated a bit and only stopped for 24 days due to injury. (FRA A)

Massive disappointments getting injured straight after the good results in 2006, so that dragged on for the next 15 months...I was going a bit mental with all those injuries... I kept trying to get fit for a race and then getting injured again and then I got knocked off my bike by a van, which was alright, I just got a concussion so it took me a while to get back on the bike. So it wasn't up until last December/January that I was able to train properly. (UK F)

The British athlete who was also having trouble coming to terms with her numerous injuries was encouraged by her own federation to seek professional help from a psychologist to deal with her circumstances in a positive manner. She admitted that for a period of time her whole life was consumed with battling injuries which left a very negative impact on her to the extent that she had resolved to anti-depressants. Eventually she came to realise that speaking to a psychologist helped her immensely albeit she insisted that athletes must make sure that they find the right psychologist to talk to or the one with a more compatible approach:

My federation encouraged me in the first place to talk to a sports psychologist but then I really needed her when I was going a bit mental with all those injuries. She's really good! At first I used to go

this other one who just used to sit there and let me talk for hours on end but I didn't like that method a lot so then I started seeing this new one and she has been really helpful (UK F)

When another French athlete was asked to comment retrospectively on her challenging moments with injury and whether there was anything she would have done differently she also mentioned that she probably would have benefited from seeing a psychologist. However, at the time when she was at INSEP, there was not a psychologist as a permanent member of staff yet and therefore she was not sure whether her federation would have covered the costs for her to see one independently or perhaps have similar views like those of the athletics federation and discourage her from doing so. Ultimately although she had already acquired some knowledge in sports psychology through her university degree she did not pursue this option:

I think 2002 was my lowest point and I didn't make the weight was because psychologically I wasn't able to juggle everything anymore by then and the expectation of people. I was losing 4 kg a week which was quite important so by this stage every day was challenging so I had to face all these external people without any psychological support behind. Yes, there were always my parents and my coach but I never had a psychologist to work with me. I mean then again I'm saying this now but I wasn't thinking this at that time. So everyday it was a challenge to go to training to produce a good performance. I knew about sport psychology because I had done a little bit at university but you know how it is, when you're successful at some stage I was a bit like I don't really need anybody else, which was wrong. Again I'm thinking that now. (FRA D)

Other ways of coping with injury and subsequent retirement from elite sport were sought through the help of family as the Finnish footballer recounted. Although he readily admitted that this was the hardest period he had ever had to face in his athletic career, he knew that with the support of his immediate family he would in time come to terms with his 'forced' retirement from sport:

I couldn't even bring myself to go near a football pitch for three to four months, I didn't even want to hear about it. Then the following season I went to watch the first game of my former club and it was very painful

and difficult to watch....But I knew that with the help and support of my immediate family I could get through it. (FIN C)

Two Finnish and one British athletes also complained about the untimely occurrence of some of their injuries since they happened just before a major international competition or in fact during the crucial stages of a competition. The Finnish gymnast recounted with some regret on the time when he was the defending world title holder but had to withdraw from competition during the final round, depriving him of his only chance to qualify for the Olympic Games the following year:

For the Sydney Games in 1999 we had the qualification World Championships in China where I went as the defending champion but I fell on the high bar and injured my shoulder so I had to abort the competition, couldn't do floor anymore. (FIN D)

My other only main setback was that when I was 16 I broke my collar bone while I was playing, which happened to be six weeks before the U/18 tour in New Zealand. So I kept training and then about three days before we left I did a fitness test and re -fractured it so I couldn't go so that was a down point. (UK E)

Relationship with coaches

Another type of challenge that some of the student-athletes interviewed had to manage was the kind of relationship they had with their coach. In a number of cases the student-athletes voiced their frustration relating to issues around the style of coaching, the general attitude of the coaching staff, being caught in the internal politics between National team coaches and National federations and also coaches' views on education.

One of the British athletes who had trained with her coach since she was a teenager, described her relationship as initially being a close one but over the years she started having problems accepting his coaching method which she describes as being the 'mothering type'. Her main concern was that as she grew older she wanted to have an input in the way she trained and in the kind of decisions they were taken around competition schedules. This however

never materialised despite her many attempts to resolve this issue and her coach's futile promises that he would try to adapt his coaching style to allow her to be more involved and in control of the decisions taken on her behalf. She became increasingly unhappy about this situation as she explained:

His method was of coaching me as if I was still a little girl and obviously I wasn't. I was 18/19 I was my own person and I didn't need that mothering coaching style which became really suppressive and horrible...Basically he wanted to control everything himself and I was coming to that age where I wanted to take control over my sport and I felt very strongly about that. (UK A)

The second coach-related challenge that was expressed by a Finnish athlete was one where there was a clash of views on the type of lifestyle the athlete should lead when it came to being a high performance athlete. In this particular case being a student-athlete by having a university career alongside that of elite sport was met with some criticism by the national team coach over a number of years. Although the athlete had attempted many times to explain why she had to have both careers in her life, she finally resigned herself to the fact that they would always hold different point of views about this matter but that she would still continue to study.

In relation to a different type of issue, one French athlete had encountered many problems with a number of individuals (who made up part of the National team coaching staff) and their attitude towards their National team athletes. Their relationship was so fraught as a result of consistently "humiliating" comments and disrespect from the coaches' side, that all the team members had now lost all trust in their leaders. The situation had been aggravated to such an extent over the past few years that the athlete interviewed had lost all hope that a realistic solution could be found in the near future:

The atmosphere at the training sessions is very tense. They always talk down to us and without respect. It is horrible and very degrading. The thing is that they do not have the guts to talk to us face-to-face. They just gossip behind your back so you know that things are being said about you but you have no way of defending yourself. (FRA F)

Another French athlete's dilemma was that although she had a good relationship with both her coach and her federation, between them these two other parties had a number of issues that were unlikely to be resolved. Although this type of strained relationship did not involve the athlete directly, she found herself many times caught up in the internal politics of the National federation and its National team structures leaving her in an awkward position on how to deal with the situation. As she explained she was not only wary of how she should react in order not to disrespect either her coach or her federation but what was bothering her more was that this ultimately was having an effect on her sporting performance:

The national federation is under new organisation and unfortunately my coach does not have a good relationship with them. It's a very hypocritical relationship that they have and most of the time I seem to be caught in the middle. I have a good relationship with both but it is not helping me to focus being caught up like this. For example every time the federation organises a meeting the coach does not come, another coach comes in his place, they would agree on something but then my coach will not agree and we usually have a clash of goals. The situation is getting worse and worse to the point that now I am not even sure if I will have a coach for the Olympic Games! It is ridiculous and I do not like all these conflicts. (FRA A)

A number of athletes who had coach-related issues to deal with reacted in a range of manners from not doing anything at all to improve their training conditions, to taking control of the situation, which in one case meant ultimately changing the coach. In the case of the French swimmer, despite being very unhappy with his poor performances in the pool which eventually cost him a place at the world championships, he decided not take any action:

I considered changing the coach after such a bad performance... I could have changed coaches, there are some clubs who wanted me to swim for them, they sent me some proposals but in the end I decided to stay here a bit longer. (FRA E)

On the other hand, the British athlete who could not accept her coach's style of training anymore decided eventually that it was better for both to break the relationship. It was not a smooth journey and the athlete admitted having had difficulty coming to terms with the situation as her coach reacted in a manner

that was both unexpected and shocking. She regretted that this was the way they had resolved their situation after so many years but by that stage their relationship was strained to such an extent that she refused to meet him in person to talk things through:

I don't think he knew what he was saying that I'd ever react the way I did and tell him that I didn't want to be coached by him anymore. He wanted to make all the decisions and even though at one point he started saying that he wanted me to be involved, he didn't really mean it. By that time I was already training with my new coach and his group and he clearly was not comfortable with that either but he didn't know how to say it so it just came out in other ways...it became this really big thing, it just couldn't work out. (UK A)

Retrospectively the French athlete reflected on how she would have wanted to find courage and wait for the right opportunity to speak to her coach about her concerns but she was unable to do so and therefore hoped that issues between her and the coach would eventually resolve themselves. This approach did not work as she felt more helpless and depressed at finding herself in this situation prior to a major sporting tournament. Eventually she opted for a different approach and turned to another member of staff, a sports psychologist whom she found increasingly helpful to deal with her situation:

Yes there are some things that I would have liked to do differently in my sporting career for example I really wanted to be able to talk to my coach when things were going really badly to see how we could have tried to solve the situation. Instead I kept all my feelings inside which did not help. Obviously, it did not help either that most of the time the problem was the coach himself. In any case it all became a little bit too much last year and I decided to go and speak to the psychologist based at INSEP. (It is a free service). It took a very big effort to go but I was at such a low point that I did not know what else to do. I was depressed, I had been battling with injury all year, training was not going well and to make matters worse my coach decided to take his holidays two weeks before the World Championships! I could not take it any longer, I just felt alone and deserted (FRA A)

Asked whether she would recommend other athletes to use the services of a sport psychologist, she replied in the affirmative but warned that in some sporting cultures e.g. athletics in France, that this might be regarded as a

weakness on behalf of the athlete and some people including coaches might look down on the athlete for doing it:

I would definitely recommend using the psychologist to other athletes although unfortunately the coaches at least the ones in athletics tend to look down on you if you do. In my head I had always thought of it as being a bad thing, as if you are going mad or something like that! Obviously it was nothing like that and the psychologist here was very good. (FRA A)

Issues with National Federations

Issues with National sporting federations were voiced for example by the athlete who had already commented on the critical situation her National team was facing because of the coaching staff in place. When the athletes tried to take matters in their own hands and approach their federation for support to improve their relationship and conditions of training, they did not find the guidance they needed as the athlete explained:

We have tried talking to National Federation but it is so big and unless you are getting the results they are not going to pay too much attention to what is happening. They will only support you if they think you are going to get the result and everyone knows that our team is in shambles at the moment! (FRA F)

A different type of challenge that might affect a smaller number of athletes was when they decide to start representing a different nation than the one in which they were born. For one of the French athletes this was not an easy decision to make especially since he was already a high-level athlete with a relatively successful record in his home country but since there were issues with the national federation, he eventually made up his mind to come live and train permanently in France. This transition was a little problematic in the beginning but as he explained things became easier the more time he spent in France. As he began learning and became fluent in the language, he finally began to regard himself as a French athlete:

It was a bit problematic at the beginning to represent a different country and it was a bit strange for me but I've been living here for so

long now that I consider myself a French athlete. I did have a few problems with the national federation back home but there were issues before I decided to switch national teams so this was not the main reason. I didn't have problems with my team mates back home, in fact they are still good friends.(FRA B)

Other disappointments with national federations were expressed by another French athlete who felt that the national junior team was given far less importance than it deserved despite the fact that the sport he was competing in was one of the most popular and successful sports in the country. He recalled feeling let down by the federation in relation to the inadequate preparation they had scheduled for their national team athletes before a major world tournament and how this consequently influenced the results they achieved:

The World Championship was a major disappointment because we had a very good team but had only one week to prepare before we went for competition. In France the junior national team is not regarded as highly as the senior team. For the Federation, first comes the senior national team; then the clubs and then the junior teams. You would think that the national team would be more important than the club but it's not at that age. (FRA C)

Not qualifying for a competition / major tournament

The next type of challenge highlighted by these student-athletes during their athletic career was when they had failed to qualify or be selected for their respective national teams prior to a major tournament, in spite of their best efforts. The experience of having trained consistently to the highest of levels, dedicated all the required time and effort but then failed to be selected on the grounds of a fraction of a point, as in the cases of the two gymnasts interviewed, left them both dejected as they recounted:

Probably the biggest disappointment was last year, I was training for the Commonwealth Games was trying to get into the England team and I did really well in the first 2 trials out of the 3. I dedicated and put in everything into the last 3 months to try to go and then the third trial went really well but I didn't get a chosen for less than a mark (0.4). I was devastated, I thought I deserved to go. So close yet so far! I was quite low, didn't go to the gym for a week. I was depressed! (UK C)

I never made it to the Olympics and that's my biggest disappointment...In 2003 qualifying for Athens, I was second reserve to go to the Olympics, I made a good competition in 2003 in the qualification stage so I cannot complain, the result could have been a little different but it was a disappointment. (FIN D)

De-selection

The British professional rugby player commented on how the toughest challenge he was currently (at the time of the interview) facing in his athletic career was the decision taken by the National team coaching staff to de-select him from the senior team. He explained how he had trained hard to fulfil his dream of playing for the national rugby team, and had succeeded in accomplishing for a period of time, making an impressive debut by scoring during his very first game. However he but was now finding it very difficult to come to terms with de-selection considering it as his lowest point to date:

It was only that in the last three games that the national team competed in, I was not asked to be involved. So that's been quite tough! (UK E)

Dealing with unprecedented success

Other feelings of disappointment were described by two of the French athletes who failed to get into the championships in which they wanted to compete only a year after they had achieved their best performances in their sporting careers. For the French judoka, going from achieving her best international result in a World tournament to not qualifying for the French National Championships had serious consequences on her athletic career not only for her international season prospects but more importantly her psychological well-being :

My lowest point was in 2002 for the French Championships because I didn't make the weight so I couldn't compete and I had to go back to second division and you could more or less forget the international season. In France if you want to be selected for the internationals, it doesn't matter if you are world champion or Olympic champion you still have to compete in the French nationals. It's not everywhere like

this but in France they're very strict. So you can imagine how difficult psychologically it was for me. (FRA D)

In the French swimmer's case he explained how following his highest sporting achievement during the Athens Olympic Games, on returning back to France, his life had changed completely. He suddenly had to cope with a high media profile, sponsors wanted to contract him and for almost a year he found himself constantly away from his training pool. This extraordinary situation had immediate implications on his athletic career as he struggled to train and prepare himself properly which consequently cost him a place at the World Championships. On reflecting on his athletic career to date he commented that although this unprecedented success was in a way something that all elite athletes dreamt about, he also observed that athletes should be given some guidance on how to deal with this critical moment as it could still have negative repercussions:

I would definitely consider 2005 as being the year when I truly became a professional swimmer. After the success we had in Athens Olympic Games, contracts starting coming in, and I became a very high profile athlete. I didn't even have time to train because I was so busy doing other things. Looking back I probably needed some guidance on how to manage everything a little bit better. It was a bit difficult to co-ordinate everything. Maybe there was something else to do but I don't know because I was not prepared for it...My biggest disappointment was also in 2005 when I did not qualify for the World Championships. (FRA E)

Performing below initial expectations at major competitions

The next set of dissatisfactions were articulated by those student-athletes who had qualified for a major tournament such as the Olympic Games but then did not perform as well as initially anticipated. In the case of the French badminton player, he was disappointed because he did not have any control over the situation as his badminton partner decided to retire from elite sports only months prior to the Olympics. He described how it was one of the hardest decisions to accept in his athletic career. In the end three months was too short a period to prepare and restore the team dynamic again and

although he still competed with a new partner, that one opportunity to excel had been lost:

Just before the Athens Olympics, we had qualified for the doubles. I had a very good partner and I think he could have done really well but for some reason he decided to stop just three months before the qualifying period was up. He had a lot of things on his mind, he was doing his *Professorat de sport* as well, he had just had a baby and put together he just cracked mentally. It was very unfortunate for me because it was the two of us not just myself who needed to compete. I did find another partner but he wasn't as good so it was disappointing in the end. (FRA B)

For one of the Finnish athletes, her Olympic Games debut with the National team was disappointing as they had aimed for a bronze medal but finished in fourth place instead. She described how during the semi-finals there was a surprise result obtained by their archrival nation (Sweden) and therefore they had to face a different opponent than previously anticipated. Unfortunately due to the lack of adequate tactical preparation to play this different team, they were unable to win the last crucial game that cost them the medal:

The Olympic Games were a bit of disappointment because we knew we could win the Bronze medal, we thought we were going to play Sweden in that game but they went on to beat the U.S so we had to play them instead. And we were not really prepared to play them and we had never beaten them. With Sweden it would have been different because we know them more and we've played them before. (FIN E)

Outgrowing the training centre and coaching staff

A critical period that one of the athletes was going through specifically at the time of interview related to whether he should change his training centre and coach and move to either a different training centre or club. Having trained and lived within the premises of INSEP in Paris for the past eight years, this athlete felt that a change of environment might benefit his athletic performance but obviously he also understood that it was a great risk since the move might not work out in the way he anticipated. It was a tough decision to make because he was a highly successful athlete but on a

personal level he did feel that he had outgrown this particular training facility and coaching staff:

I am not sure if I should change training centres, the coach, perhaps relocate to the south of France and join a club there. I have been here for eight years and I am starting to feel that I have taken all there is to take from here. Being in the same sport with the same people I feel that I cannot progress as well as I might. (FRA E)

Sport career 'breaks'

Another tricky period was articulated by a Finnish athlete as she expressed her inclination to take a career 'break' after the Beijing Olympic Games and then perhaps come back to elite sport at some point in the future. This was considered particularly challenging by the athlete as she explained how she was at the peak of her sporting career and still relatively young and therefore she understood that few people in performance sport would understand her decision to have a break from high-level competition. She had given a lot of thought to this eventuality, and was fully aware that having made the decision to stop it might prove to be more difficult than she had anticipated to come back to the sport and to retain her current standard of performance in training and competition. However, weighing all this against her desire to live a 'normal' life she decided in favour of the latter:

I have decided that I need to take a little break from judo for my body and my mind and just live a 'normal' life for a while. I'll make the decision whether I will continue with judo after that. (FIN F)

Risk of choosing to play professionally abroad

During the course of an elite sporting career some athletes were offered or, sought opportunities themselves to go to train and compete in a foreign country. As the Finnish basketball player explained during the interview this had been a sporting goal of hers from when she was a young player but she wanted to graduate from university first before embarking on this new adventure. Unfortunately for her, things did not turn as planned as she struggled to keep herself motivated, as she was accustomed to train and

compete at a much higher level, and there were other issues with the club that marred the whole experience:

In basketball terms it was not that good, it was really different from what I was used to here. Sometimes I used to think it's a different sport! But I started to manage it and looking at the bigger picture the season was not good but it wasn't bad. There was a time when I really wanted to leave and try and join the top league, the level really did not suit me and the second thing was that I didn't get paid in time so that was another an issue. (FIN B)

Considering giving up elite sport

There were other times in a student-athlete's life where the challenge becomes so hard that it seemed that there was no other alternative but to give up elite sport for a variety of reasons. As one of the French athletes explained, sometimes when a number of negative aspects such as long-term injury, problems with coaches and lack of support from the elite sporting system culminate at one specific period of time in an athlete's life this made one seriously re-evaluate the reasons for being involved in elite sport. Evidently this was not a matter that was taken lightly by the athletes to clarify especially when they sincerely believed that they had further potential that had not yet been exploited. However, sometimes despite their very best intentions athletes might feel that giving up elite sport was their only and last resort:

I am seriously considering stopping in 2008 and just competing at club level, if the coaching programme does not change together with the coaches. I think everything put together my injury, the present coaching situation and the system itself are slowly convincing me to quit the national team...I would be very disappointed if I had to leave my high level sport at this stage, because of this situation, but there's nothing I can do to change that and it's a pity! There is so much more I want to accomplish and I am still very young. (FRA F)

For other high-level athletes such as the British gymnast, there were other reasons why student-athletes might consider stepping down from the elite sporting stage. As he described there were always periods in any athlete's sporting career when they will seriously question their involvement in elite

sport especially if they have been training and competing for a number of years. These were usually periods when elite athletes compared themselves to their peers outside the sporting environment and therefore might experience a feeling of 'missing out' on the every day activities of their friends:

I went through one stage though (I guess every gymnast does or every sportsman I guess) where I didn't enjoy it so much. When I was 12 and 13 I was thinking why am I doing this? I'd rather be out playing with my mates doing the 'normal' thing. I felt like I'm missing out a bit. (UK C)

This thought of 'losing out' on other aspects in life was not only a feeling that was associated with young teenage athletes. As one of the Finnish athletes commented, the older she got the more she started looking at the bigger picture of life and what she had to miss out on because she was constantly training or competing. In her situation the value of this 'loss' as she termed it had started to far outweigh the satisfaction she derived from her sport and therefore she had made the decision that she would stop competing at an elite level in 2008:

Well yes as I said I love the sport but it takes up a lot of your time and as you get older you start thinking about other things so the things I get from basketball sort of to the things I 'lose' because I'm playing have started to get bigger and bigger. (FIN B)

Dual career incompatibility

While some of the athletes felt that they benefited athletically from being involved in sport all year round, there were a number of other athletes who voiced concerns about such demanding schedules. As one of the Finnish athletes explained it was getting increasingly harder for the older athletes who had completed their education and were now in full-time employment (in order to be able to support themselves financially) to manage such time-schedules:

You have the regular season with the club which is all Winter and then as you finish with that you start all the commitments with the National team during the Summer so you never stop. You do not have a weekend off, you cannot plan anything to do for yourself. And here you don't get paid to participate in the national team and the schedule is really hard, we train as much as the professionals but without the money so you still have to combine it with work and that I found pretty hard. (FIN B)

5.3.6. Summary to section

Pummell, Harwood and Lavallee (2008:429) highlighted a number of limitations to the model advocated by Wylleman and Lavallee (2003) since they argued that 'it does not make any predictions regarding the transition experience between any of the stages of development, and athletes will also experience other normative and non-normative transitions within a stage'. Therefore, this section aimed to provide insight into the student-athletes' personal experiences who had to deal with a number of transitional periods within their athletic development. It also included a more comprehensive outline of those normative transitions within a sporting career such as moving from the initiation stage to developmental stage, leading on to mastery and in the case of two athletes, retirement from elite sport.

The non-normative transitions experienced by the student-athlete interviewees at this level included coping with injury, loss of personal coaches, changing citizenship to compete for a different country and dealing with unexpected success among other examples.

Having discussed the second major level of analysis characterising the sporting career development of the participants, the chapter will move on to the relatively limited third level of analysis concerning the psychological development of the individual.

5.4. Psychological development

The third level of analysis that was taken into consideration was the psychological development of these student-athletes. In psychology there have been a number of conceptual frameworks developed to identify the key psychological stages experienced throughout the life-span, most notably Erikson's (1963) developmental stages, Piaget's (1971) stages of cognitive development and Havighurst's (1973) developmental tasks over the lifespan (cited in Wylleman and Lavalée, 2003). However, as Lavalée and Andersen (2000) argued the applicability of such frameworks to the entire athletic career of elite athletes may be limited and therefore research to date has tended to focus more on the stages of childhood and adolescence.

Wylleman and Lavalée's (2003) developmental model on transitions faced by athletes encompasses three stages of psychological development and transition: childhood, adolescence and adulthood as illustrated in Figure 5.5 below.

Figure 5.5- A Developmental perspective on transitions faced by athletes at the psychological level

AGE	10	15	20	25	30	35
Psychological Level	Childhood Adolescence			Adulthood		

Note: A dotted line indicates that the age at which the transition occurs is an approximation

Figure taken from Wylleman & Lavalée (2003:516)

It has been argued by Wylleman and Lavalée (2003:507) that in order for young athletes to progress in elite sport during the childhood years, they have to be cognitively and motivationally mature. By motivationally mature the authors imply that the child has to demonstrate a certain 'readiness' to participate in the sport of his/her own free will rather than reflecting a decision made by someone else such as parents or friends. Cognitive maturation refers to the child's ability to understand the 'roles, responsibilities and relational characteristics' that are inherent in a competitive sporting context. This usually occurs between the ages 10-14.

Adolescence is a period defined by many changes for an individual at the biological, educational, psychological and social levels. Erikson (1963) identified this period as the time for the formation of self-identity as well as developing emotional independence, 'with the social focus shifting to the peer group and adults outside the family' (Eccles, 1999 cited in Pummell et al., 2008:430). If at this period young athletes are still involved in highly competitive sport this can impact significantly on whether these individuals will develop an athletic identity. As has already been discussed within the systematic review chapter, athletic identity has both positive and negative consequences. There is some evidence to suggest that if an individual identifies strongly with his / her athletic identity, this may have a positive impact on sport performance (Danish, 1983, Wethner and Orlick, 1986 cited in Brewer et al., 2000). On the other hand, Brewer, Van Raalte and Petitpas (2000) have concluded that over dependence by the athletes on their athletic identity creates a number of challenges related to coping and adjusting to transitions especially during retirement. This argument was consolidated by other researchers (Balague, 1999; Miller and Kerr, 2000) who contended that athletes who identified themselves strongly with their athletic career ran the risk of developing a uni-dimensional identity which made them reluctant to explore new roles and identities, and also hindered their post-athletic career planning (Grove et al., 1997).

In the context of this research study the psychological level of analysis was restricted to the degree to which these student-athletes were identifying themselves with their dual role (as a University student and as an elite athlete) and whether this had any bearing on their post-athletic career planning. During the course of the interview, student-athletes were asked to define what being an elite athlete and a University student signified from their own personal experience, and to identify the characteristics which were required to be successful in combining these roles. Other questions revolved around how they perceived themselves as elite athletes and students, whether it was important to them to be identified as such by different members of society and for which reasons.

5.4.1 Athletic Identity

All interviewees unanimously agreed that being an elite athlete required a high level of discipline, commitment and motivation to stay focussed on the goals set. Training and competing to the best of one's ability in a consistent manner requires copious amounts of time and effort which all student-athletes were willing to invest in their athletic career at different stages of their lives, even if it was at the expense of other aspects. The rationale justifying this decision, which at times meant that these individuals were putting the rest of their life 'on hold' is that one may have only one opportunity in a lifetime to be part of a prestigious international event such as the Olympic Games and win a medal:

Of course it means something personally (to be an elite athlete) because every single time I have practiced judo it meant that I was achieving something. Now I have this opportunity to go to the Olympics and compete for a potential Olympic medal! I know when I am older I can look back and say to myself that I was a good judoka and I tried my best. (FIN F)

Being an elite athlete means a lot really because it means that I'm following my dream. It means that I believe in myself and that I'm disciplined and that I'm going to try my best at being an elite athlete. I like the status that it gives you as well because of the funding bodies. It's not the little money that you get really but the medical support which means a lot, because it means that there are people who believe in me and are backing me. It means that I can do something I love every day and get some benefits out of it. I'm putting my life on hold for a bit I guess but it's what I want to do. (UK A)

As the British athlete commented, the status of being an elite athlete brought with it recognition by other members of their club, National sporting federations and at times wider society. Asked whether athletes minded being recognised by the general public, there were a number of conflicting responses. One French athlete recounted that she found it quite amusing that random people would want to come and speak to her about athletics, while two Finnish athletes indicated that they would rather have a low public profile:

Yes you do get the recognition and sometimes it is quite funny when you are in the metro in the middle of Paris and people come up to speak to you. (FRA A)

I do not really mind having my face on the newspaper but it's not necessarily nice to go round the city and do the shopping and see people staring at you. You lose your privacy then. I have had some experience of that so I'm definitely not going to miss seeing my face on the newspaper when I retire. (FIN D)

I try to avoid as much as possible to let people know what I do. When I qualified for the Beijing Olympics some reporters came to me and did some interviews but that only lasted for a little time and they moved on. (FIN F)

However both the Finnish football player and the British golfer argued that it was important for the general public to start recognising their profession as elite athletes and more importantly demonstrate a better appreciation of the hard work that goes into their training on a daily basis. As the British runner reported the media could contribute significantly in this matter as it is their responsibility to inform the public but unfortunately at times the facts and figures get twisted and as a consequence the public are misled:

It is important to get the recognition as a professional football player because in Finland for a long time it was the case of people asking 'Ok, but what's your real job?' when you tell them you play football. It has only changed in the last five years or so that people understand that you can get a salary from football and accept it as a profession. It's really important as well if you're a football player that you get the appreciation for what you do. (FIN C)

It is very important to me to be identified as a golfer because not many people today see golfers, and understand how much hard work it involves to become a good quality golfer because team sport you can hide behind a great performance of someone else but in golf the scores show for themselves. If you don't shoot well, it is reflected in the score and it is not because of the rain or you slipped someone's shot. It's always on you. It is always important for me to be seen as an athlete. Because the amount of hard work that you put in to be at the gym every day, with your mental coach and especially on the range, it is the same like the swimmers who have to get up at 4am before lectures to go for training or the rugby guys who spend so much time in the gym and reading the game. (UK C)

I really would like other people who think sportspeople have got this easy life to understand more how hard we really have to work. Like people in the media for example. People just talk about athletics for two weeks of the year whenever there's an international championship on but they talk with such authority and they talk a lot of rubbish. They simple have got no idea what they are talking about. I'm proud that people know I am a runner but I really would like them to know the facts as well. Like last year I got a £1,000 from lottery funding and that was it! Then you listen to them on television and they quoted that the average salary for a runner is £19,000! And I'm thinking to be honest I'm a student and I got a £1000. (UK A)

When the student-athletes were asked whether they wanted their National sporting federation and other institutions such as the National Olympic Committee to recognise their talent and achievement, all of the athletes agreed that they would, for a series of reasons. Apart from the obvious reason that these were the bodies in charge of final selection for international sporting competitions, there were a number of other insights provided by the interviewees. One of the more experienced French athletes argued that by being recognised as a high level athlete he gained a level of respect both from his sporting and academic institutions, which motivated him to train harder:

It's difficult to say what it means to me to be a professional athlete here in France. I've been the top badminton player here for so long that it's difficult to explain. You get a lot of respect from different people which means a lot to me, here at INSEP and also in the badminton world. You get the recognition. The way the see me is very important to me because they see me as someone who is quite successful and getting good results so they expect a lot from me. They kind of put pressure on me as well but I like that, I think I need it to push myself forward. I get a lot of respect from the federation. (FRA B)

Two French and one Finnish athlete acknowledged that it was important for them to be recognised as National level athletes by their federation since it facilitated both managing their dual career at present but also gave them better opportunities at securing the post-athletic job of choice in the future. Having a high athletic profile made it easier to network with a whole range of people involved at all levels of the sport and therefore these athletes were

more confident that this would lead to better opportunities for their prospective occupational careers:

It is important to get some recognition from the National Handball Federation especially when I was younger because then they can get you on to the list that the Ministry of Sport keeps with all those athletes doing high level sports. I got on the list for the first time when I was playing for the French Handball junior team. You do get some privileges especially to help you out with your education. (FRA C)

It is more important for me to be recognised by the Ministry of Sport, to be on the list of high level athletes because I truly believe that it can open doors for you when it comes to getting employed in the future. (FRA A)

On a more personal note eight of these student-athletes wanted to be recognised as elite athletes because it was a reflection of their sporting achievements to date and therefore there was an element of personal pride:

Within the gymnastics community it's nice that you get that recognition for your achievements and also for the person that you are. It is nice to go to international competitions and meet friends or even people who you don't know but who recognise you. (FIN D)

Four of these athletes extended this personal sense of achievement to national pride as they recalled the opportunity to represent their country whether at club or national competition:

It was amazing, being on the podium, with the flags and hearing the National anthem...Wow! that was definitely the highlight! (UK B)

I think you should be proud to represent your country in the international world. And when you win or have a result at least, I think it is something special. Not everyone can wear the French kit and be on the podium and listen to the national anthem. Yes, I think it's quite special! (FRA D)

It was the first and only time that a Finnish team made to this stage (Champions League Group Stages). I was captain of that team and maybe one of the most memorable moments was when I was leading my team to the Olympic stadium and 35,000 people had showed up in 5 degrees Celsius! At football matches here we usually get 4 - 5,000

people on average!...I played the best football of my life I think! (FIN C).

There is a sense of pride in representing my country ...I enjoy what I do especially when I play for the national team, I like to think that I'm making my family and my friends proud because they send you texts or phone to tell you they are coming in to watch so that's quite a nice feeling. (UK E)

In contrast to comments provided by the student-athletes above, two British athletes explained that recognition of their elite athlete status was not necessary as long as they could still achieve their personal goals:

It is not important to me to be identified as an elite athlete. The only thing I'm interested in is getting medals and going to the big competitions so I'm not going to be bothered if no one knew who I was as long as the gymnastic world knew who I was. I'm doing it for myself! (UK D)

I think being recognised is important not necessarily because let's say I achieved what I wanted to achieve but no one knows my name, I would still be satisfied. If I went to go on to be world number 1, it's not that I don't want anyone to know about it but as long as I'm achieving the goals that I'm setting myself to achieve I'm happy. (UK C)

Another justification provided by a British athlete for not identifying strongly with her elite athlete status was that she perceived herself more as an artist than an athlete. She explained that despite the demands that her role as an athlete required taking up a substantial share of her time and her life generally, it was her art that gave her a deeper sense of fulfilment and self-worth:

It's not really important for me to be identified as an elite athlete because I think I see myself more as an artist and therefore I'd rather that people see me as an artist who does triathlon rather than an athlete who does art because I think naturally at a more fundamental level I am an artist. (UK F)

One Finnish athlete was cautious about identifying with her athletic role too readily as she was critical of what it sometimes represented. From her experience in competing in elite sport she had come across athletes who were arrogant and at times condescending to other people just because of the fact they were elite athletes. Therefore, in order to ensure that people

she meets in her everyday life do not get any misconceived ideas about her as a person, she simply refrains from acknowledging her athlete status as much as possible:

I hate those kind of people who just because they are elite athletes they think that they are more than they actually are. Nowadays when I'm outside I don't want people to know that I am a judoka so when I meet somebody for the first time I don't want them to know that I'm an elite athlete, I just want them to get to know me as a person. (FIN F)

Similar views were voiced by the professional handball and rugby players, who having acknowledged that they were proud to be recognised as elite athletes, both insisted that in reality this did not change them as people. They described how they both derived some satisfaction knowing that their extended family were following their athletic career:

I am proud that I am a professional handball player because this way my grandma can watch me on television all the way from Bordeaux. But I came from a very modest background and club and they taught me good values. I have only just turned professional earlier this year (5 months) so I am still the same person. I don't think it has changed me much. (FRA C)

I do not really care if people know that I'm a professional athlete. It is a good thing to do and I am proud of it but it's not something to go out and shout about really... but I enjoy what I do especially when I play for the national team... There are even people back home who go up to my granny and sort of chat to her about it, I come from a small community and as I said before all they think about is rugby, rugby, rugby so she quite enjoys being (my) granny so it's quite a nice feeling! (UK E)

This strong belief that in spite of the high athletic profile and the success (or failure!) that it potentially brought with it did not change these individuals' own personality was also voiced by the British runner as she reflected on her own life so far:

I'd like to think that I can win the Olympics but it's not going to change who I am. I don't think it's going to make me happy or give me the sudden sense of fulfilment. I just see it as something that I have done or that I do and if it happens that they call it the Olympics then so be it. It's the same with the World Championships, I thought it would be this

life changing event when I went but it hasn't. My life is still the same, I get happy about things and I get angry just the same. (UK A)

5.4.2. Student Identity

Views expressed by the 18 interviewees about their willingness to identify themselves as students showed a range of responses. During the interview process student-athletes were asked to comment on how they perceived themselves as University students and whether they thought they were successful academically. Ten participants argued that they identified strongly with their student status as they had invested a lot of time and effort in their education and thus were quite satisfied with their academic accomplishments to date:

I did very well from an academic point of view, I had no trouble at all at university. I was with the top ten of the class. My first year of university was probably the easiest one but where I got the worst mark. But each year I was increasing my average. My university was very popular for sports. Of course in the mind of people going to a sports university was considered to be fun but obviously it was so much more than knowing how to run. In fact the practical side was only a very small part of it. We had subjects like anatomy and physiology and biomechanics which you had to study hard. But I still considered that I did very well. (FRA D)

I am on a first (highest degree class) so I guess I am doing pretty well, but I work really hard! I mean the whole point of coming to university I think is to learn how to think critically, and I guess I can do that. My mum had always helped me a lot with that because she can do that, both my parents actually are very intelligent people so you tend to pick up things off them. I am lucky that I can do that, which doesn't mean that I'm better than anyone else but I think it does contribute towards getting high grades. (UK A)

Yes I'm enjoying my degree, I thought it would be more difficult actually but it's not, it's also been quite easy...sometimes I want it to be a little more difficult because sometimes I worry that I'm learning all I have to...so I think I'm quite a good student if you look at my grades. (FIN E)

The second set of student-athletes (7) were those who considered themselves as good students because they were able to progress throughout

their academic career but who perhaps could have achieved better grades if they had more time to dedicate to university studies:

Yes I was a good student I think, I mean I was very good at cramming in a huge amount of knowledge and then forgetting the next day. I was not good at retaining the knowledge but I was good at remembering it when I needed. (UK E)

If you take a look at the grades I've been getting I think I'm about average at the moment. It is difficult to say now because it's difficult to compare. But I still have the feeling that I'm learning things quite easily, I mean I know of students who have to put in a lot more work to get the grades that I get so. (FIN D)

However, there was also one student-athlete who at the time of the interview did not really perceive himself as a student. This was due to his decision to discontinue his degree as he could not cope any longer with the dual demands of his sport and studies. As will be described in more detail in the subsequent chapter a combination of inefficient study schedules coupled with increased training hours made it practically impossible for him to manage his time well and he had therefore decided to concentrate almost exclusively on his sport:

If I had to rate my self as a student, I would not rate myself very highly, maybe a 3 or 4 out of 10. It's just because at the moment I do not see myself much as a student. My day's work is all about swimming. I don't go and open my books after my last training in the evening. (FRA E)

5.4.3. Summary to section

From the findings presented in this section it can be concluded that seventeen out of the eighteen interviewees valued both their athletic and student roles and thus it is unlikely that they will experience identity foreclosure in their immediate future. This was further consolidated as all student-athletes interviewed had already made plans for their post-athletic careers in many cases outside the elite sporting environment. However, for one of the participants who had decided to terminate his university studies prematurely and focus exclusively on his athletic career development, placed

him in a more vulnerable position, increasing his chances of experiencing identity foreclosure. This has immediate implications not only for his current lifestyle but also as Grove et al., (1997) argued for his post-athletic career planning.

The following level of analysis is based on the psycho-social development of elite athletes and looks at the key people who have supported them through critical transitional periods.

5.5. *Psycho-social development*

The fourth and final level of analysis illustrated in Wylleman and Lavalée's (2003) developmental perspective on transitions faced by athletes model is the psycho-social level. This relates to the social relations that athletes built over the years and which are deemed critical for their holistic development. The key people identified in the first stage of this level are parents, siblings and peers as illustrated in Figure 5.6 below. During the second stage the coach becomes a more prominent figure within these athletes' lives, though they still need the support of parents and peers. As athletes move into adulthood, their relationship with their partner gains importance while still maintaining a strong relationship with the coach and in the final stage of development the family relationships regain priority within an athlete's life.

Figure 5.6 - A Developmental perspective on transitions faced by athletes at psycho-social level

AGE	10	15	20	25	30	35
Psycho-social Level	Parents Siblings Peers		Peers Coach Parents		Partner Coach	Family (Coach)
Note: A dotted line indicates that the age at which the transition occurs is an approximation						

Figure taken from Wylleman & Lavalée (2003:516)

5.5.1. Parents

Congruent with the UK Sport (2007) findings most of the student-athletes acknowledged their family's influence in their initial involvement in sport. Six of the student-athletes interviewed followed in their father's footsteps whether these were former athletes themselves as in the case of the British athlete and the French handball player or whether they were coaches / instructors in that particular sport as in the case of the Finnish basketball player and the French swimmer:

I started playing handball when I was about five or six years of age with the local club in my town. When I was 10 I played tennis for a year and then at 11 I did fencing for another year. But both my brother and my dad were in handball so it was the family sport! (FRA C)

My father, he used to play and was also coaching basketball at the club where I started. I was five. (FIN B)

Three other athletes followed their older brothers into a sport even if sometimes as in the case of the Finnish ice-hockey player and the judoka, this particular sport was not one that young girls would have typically chosen for themselves. As the judoka commented, her mother was reluctant at first to let her go to judo practice but she eventually changed her opinion about the sport:

When I was younger I wanted to do everything my brother did, he was my idol! It was very funny sometimes and he always used to tell me 'You really should do things for yourself, don't just copy me!' So that's probably why I went to judo with him. Actually my mother didn't even want me to go because she used to think that judo is not a sport for little girls but since my father let me then I went. She used to think that we used to kick and hit each other all the time, maybe you know that we only do throws but my mum didn't, it was only later that she realised we did not do any of that. But by then she had gotten used to it. (FIN F)

Having parents who were themselves involved in sports was deemed beneficial by these student-athletes because they could understand all facets of the sport and also inculcated rich sporting values in their children:

I think it is important to be a high level athlete, it is an education in itself. It teaches you the values of the sport and I like watching the top athletes perform well on television. I like what they represent, what they stand for. My father has always taught me that, he was in the military and an athlete himself so we were brought up with those values and to be disciplined. (FRA E)

My family has always been there through the ups and downs. Because my dad was a runner as well he is really happy when I do well but he also understands the downs. (UK B)

As the student-athletes got older and they had more complex issues to deal with such as choosing which university to go to, signing their first professional contract or deciding whether to continue competing in elite sport despite the many injuries, parents were always available to discuss and offer advice without putting any pressure on their children. This unconditional support continued to be manifested even in the later stages of these student-athletes athletic career and even if sometimes the latter did make their own decisions in the end, they were still grateful that their parents supported their decision:

'It is a bit important for my family and friends although my mum worries more about the injuries. They never put any pressure on me though to quit or anything like that and I know if eventually I do quit they will still support me in whatever I choose' (FRA F).

It was a personal decision to retire, I talked quite a lot with my club coach and anyway he knew where I was going. It was a personal decision but it was only made because of the injury. I just decided it's better to move on. My parents were supportive of my choice, they never said: 'No, you should continue!' (FRA D)

From an academic point of view parents also contributed substantially to their children's educational development by for example covering living expenses as otherwise student-athletes would have had to work to sustain themselves which could have hindered their athletic preparation significantly:

My family are very supportive, for example before I mentioned the money aspect and I remember when I moved to Tampere (for high school) I had no money at all so my parents had to pay for everything. I never even had a summer job because I was always training so they

have given me a lot of money to make it possible to continue both my judo and my studying and I am immensely grateful. I couldn't have done it without them. They have always kept an interest in all of my competitions and whenever I was competing in Europe they always came to watch and now they are also coming to Beijing including my little brother. (FIN F)

Parents were also identified as being the primary advocates of getting a good education from a very young age in these student-athletes' lives in order to gain better employment opportunities:

My dad was always keen to stress the importance of having an education, to have something to fall back on if I didn't make it as a professional player. But it was always something that I wanted to do. (UK E)

I think it was more my parents who inspired me to get a good education, they were always trying to tell me that I need to get a proper education. (FIN A)

I always thought that it is important to get a good education but I guess it was my environment as well. My parents always told me that getting a good education is important and they sent me to a good school so because of this environment I understood the importance of it. (FRA D)

I was always interested to get the knowledge, I wanted to know things. I learnt that from my father, that kind of attitude. I wanted to know what was happening and secondly I wanted to go to university to get a good job in the future so that was the idea. Because in our family no one continued on to higher education so I was the first... (FIN C)

Asked whether that parents had to intervene at any point during these early schooling years, most of the student-athletes agreed that they did benefit from having their parents' (support as opposed to pressure) in keeping them focussed on their school work and get them the grades they needed:

No definitely not pressure, it was more support. After secondary school, before I went to high school I remember wanting to go to a vocational school where you learn how to become a plumber or something like that but my parents were very determined that I should continue high school. (FIN A)

5.5.2. Coaches

Most of the student-athletes also identified their relationship with their coaches as constituting another critical element in their continued athletic development. This relationship was typified in the following two ways, one which related more to the student-athletes' sporting needs while the other referred to the broader understanding that some coaches have of their athletes' lifestyles.

When it came to their sporting careers, the interviewees have identified the following qualities as being conducive to a good athlete-coach relationship. The first was belief that the coach must have in his athletes at all times. As the student-athletes debated there were many challenging moments within the world of elite sport and therefore it was imperative that the coaches find a way of showing this belief which in turn gave confidence to the athletes to trust in themselves and ultimately their coach. This element of trust was further emphasised by the British gymnast, who among other qualities such as respect for one another, has aided him to make all types of decisions within his sporting career:

My coach has been amazing, you need that from your coach you need them to believe in you and he does so, I couldn't ask for more. (UK A)

Specifically my coach has helped me make decisions, the one back home and even the one now, they're probably the people that influenced me the most. I'd do anything they say. I respect them. I trust them 100% so I always look up to them. (UK C)

The second was when in those instances coaches were willing to discuss matters around sporting careers and come to a decision together with the athlete, the latter felt that they acquired more out of their relationship with their coach. Having control over their own sporting career and the type of decisions that were made gives the athlete an increased feeling of 'ownership' as they negotiated their way through their career:

I have more control over my sporting career and I get to make more decisions. I guess it helps that I'm a bit older. I remember once someone telling me that eventually you become your own coach and the coach is only there for a little bit of advice but I guess that won't happen till I'm a little bit older so at the moment I rely quite heavily on my current coach for support. (UK B)

I trust my coach 100% so he suggests races and then we come to an agreement together. If I'm really opposed to doing any particular race and give him the reason for it he would not force into doing anything I do not want to do. We talk it through and there has not been anything up until now that has been controversial. (UK A)

One of the British athlete continued to explain how being able to discuss sporting issues has helped her to overcome some of the challenges that she had to face during her transition from junior to senior level competition. She described how difficult it was for an athlete (especially those accustomed to getting good results) not to push themselves too hard to try and catch up with the senior athletes after a short period. This can have serious ramifications as some athletes 'burn out' physically and psychologically in their quest of trying to achieve too much too quickly. Therefore, as the student-athlete highlighted it is imperative that coaches understand when their athletes are going through a transitional period so they allow them enough time to adjust to the demands presented by senior competition:

I did try to get some advice about how to go through this transition (junior to senior) more easily but for example you get someone like my coach who will tell you, don't worry, just keep building your momentum, who cares about how you race in the first few years but then there are others who do not quite understand so much and they make their athletes work really hard to try and catch up which makes it really difficult. (UK B)

This mutual understanding between coach and athlete was also highlighted by the British golfer who perceived his relationship with his coach as being more like work colleagues, rather than coach and athlete. Having worked together for five years, they had established a relationship which provided the athlete with a degree of exclusivity as the coach was able to dedicate time specifically to his athletic development, but was also based on informal meetings where other aspects of life may be discussed:

My current coach now is great because he only has two or three other players that he sees and we talk a lot on the phone, he knows exactly what's going on, we are friends but we're also like work colleagues because we do work together. I mean we do all sorts of things, we go out for a drink, go out and play golf and it doesn't have to be about golf all the time either. (UK D)

5.5.3. Peers

Another set of key people who were identified by the student-athletes as having an important role in their life were their own peers. There were two sets of peers, that the interviewees talked about, those friends who they met within the sporting context, and other friends outside the sport, with special reference to other students they met at university. Having generally relative little time left in the day for a student-athlete to socialise outside their sport, many of the interviewees agreed that most of their friends are athletes themselves. In fact in some instances they spent so much time within the sport, while training and competing that the British gymnast admitted that he saw his gym peers so often that at times he felt as if he had a second family at the gym:

It's like I've got my own family at the gym! It's what it used to be like back home, with all the coaches and athletes all gathered in the gym, we only used to go home, just to sleep then back with the gym family. (UK C)

Similar feelings were expressed by another British athlete as she described how by being in high-level sport a special kind of friendship can be attained. She noted that only those individuals who shared that experience of being an elite athlete can truly understand the 'passion' that holds them together which to her goes beyond the boundaries of friendship:

Through sport I have met so many friends and the friendships you make are so close because they are based on shared beliefs and values. It's a passion really and to do what you like which I guess transcends friendship. (UK A)

Having established such close ties with her training group, one British athlete commented that she was even more motivated to go for her training as there was also this socialising aspect to it which she thoroughly enjoyed:

I really enjoy going for training as we have such a good group that I guess I look forward to going to training because of the social part as well. (UK B)

For other student-athletes going to university was seen as an excellent opportunity to make friends also with people from outside the sport. As the Finnish judoka and ice-hockey player commented, they were both used to always being around athletes, having both attended a sports high school and therefore coming to university where student-athletes constituted a small minority of the student population was a welcoming change:

I also enjoy spending time at university, I like seeing my friends and going out for dinner with them. (FIN F)

5.5.4. Partners

For a number of student-athletes their current partners were also regarded as a significant influence in their life. Three of the interviewees had expressed how helpful it was for them to have partners who were also in the sport and who could therefore better understand their lifestyle and moods. They explained how sometimes they trained together but also supported each other when it came to academic work. As the Finnish athlete commented he found it much easier to talk to his girlfriend about aspects of his life, as she had also been a high-level athlete, who combined her sport and education, had now retired and was a successful career woman:

My girlfriend usually because she can understand my situation because she's been there herself. She also combined her sports and studies. (FIN A)

I always train with my club coach but sometimes I do some sessions with my boyfriend as well because he is a judo athlete himself. (FIN F)

For example last year during my second year final exams, my boyfriend was doing his final year exams and he was training as much as I was and I could see how that was tearing him to pieces because he was studying so hard and training really hard and did his finals and got a first. So I decided to split my final year.. (UK A)

However, there were also those student-athletes who although their partner was not part of their sport, they still benefited from their companionship. As the French badminton player commented sometimes it was more beneficial to get away from the people (within sport) and find a place where he could openly discuss any of his sporting issues:

Normally I am a very open person so I tend to talk to a lot of people if I have some issues. But I also speak to my wife a lot. We used to go to the pub and get a couple of drinks and talk. (FRA B)

5.5.5. Summary of section

In a report commissioned by UK Sport, on how lifestyle and environment factors impact on elite athletes' performance, Douglas and Carless (2007) concluded that family relationships were instrumental in getting children initially involved in sport. A number of factors were identified as contributing to this involvement primarily the parents and siblings' positive attitude towards sport, the opportunity for young athletes to be with and participate in activities with their parents and the parents' unconditional support of their sporting endeavours. Extending these observations, Wylleman and Lavallee (2003) contended that parents' involvement in fact has started to be considered as salient throughout the whole life span of these athletes, although it has been acknowledged that the quality and importance placed by athletes on this type of relationship changes over time. These observations reflect the findings of this section and consolidate the arguments put forward by Vanden Auweele and Rzewnicki (2000) who pointed out that the quality of interpersonal relationships depends on factors such as the age, gender and the stage of career of athletes. As elite athletes grow older and their training commitments intensify most start building stronger relationships with people within their sporting context as they spend most of their time with

these people. Of particular significance is the coach's role and the type of relationship that is fostered. Jowett and Cockerill (2003) identified the following three interpersonal constructs; closeness (trust and respect), co-orientation (common goals) and complementarity (complementary roles, tasks and resources) as being critical to a healthy coach-athlete relationship, which are all elements that have been highlighted throughout the student-athletes' accounts presented above.

5.6. Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to provide an in-depth view of the dual career trajectory, of university education and elite sport that the 18 student-athletes interviewed in Finland, France and the UK followed. Wylleman, Alfermann and Lavallee (2003) argued that there has been very little research undertaken to investigate the broad range of transitions that athletes face during their elite sporting career, while the systematic review undertaken for this study revealed that there were even fewer studies exploring the academic paths pursued by elite athletes at both national and European level.

Therefore, the findings of this chapter aimed to fill (in part) this gap providing insights at a number of levels of analysis. First it has allowed for an elaboration on the intra-career stages of both the academic and sporting careers of student-athletes. As has been illustrated by Wylleman and Lavallee's (2003) developmental model on transitions faced by athletes, academic career development has been divided into four major stages but little detail has been provided on the progression that occurs within each stage. Focusing particularly on the Higher Education stage, this chapter has provided a more comprehensive outline of the key factors that were taken into consideration by these student-athletes in deciding to pursue a University degree and the kinds of decisions they have had to make in order to progress, graduate and successfully make the transition into the job market.

In parallel, the athletic career which in the model encompassed four broad stages of development, has been expanded to include more stages as experienced by these student-athletes. Figure 5.7 below outlines eight stages that the interviewees identified as key features of their athletic progression. This data is cognisant to other elite athlete developmental models such as the widely applied Long-term Athlete Development (LTAD) model, which identified 7-stages including: active start, fundamentals, learning to train, training to train, training to compete, training to win, active for life.

Another common observation across Wylleman and Lavalley's (2003) developmental model on transitions faced by athletes, LTAD and the findings of this research study was that age had become a less useful predictor of when transitions within an athletic career occur and therefore the argument that emphasis should be placed on the maturation level of the individual rather than the chronological age was supported.

Figure 5.7 – Athletic Career Development stages as identified by student-athletes interviewed



Second, through the identification of key developmental stages a number of critical transitions were discerned within each career path. This chapter has therefore included both those normative (expected) and non-normative (unexpected) transitional experiences that were discussed by the student-athletes as they negotiated their dual career pathway.

Retirement is a transitional process that has been discussed extensively in the literature. Sussman (1971) conceptualised retirement as a multidimensional process influenced by the following five factors; (i) the individual's motives, goals and level of problem solving skills, (ii) the situation which takes into consideration the circumstances of retirement whether it was forced or planned, (iii) structural factors which include social class, availability of social systems to help cope with such a transition, (iv) social aspects comprising of the support received from family and friends, (v) boundary constraints that are tied to economic cycles and employer attitudes. The findings of a study conducted in the UK by North and Lavalley (2004) on retirement issues in elite sport highlighted the fact that all elite athletes should make preparations while they are still active in sports in order to make a smooth transition into the job market. However, the research also showed that the younger the athletes are the seemingly more reluctant they were to plan for their post-athletic careers. In contrast from the analysis of this study's findings it has emerged that seventeen out of the eighteen student-athletes interviewed, regardless of age, had made concrete plans in relation to their post-athletic career prospects having invested a substantial amount of time in their education.

Third, an added dimension that of decision-making around transitional periods was incorporated which had not been included in Wylleman and Lavalley's (2003) developmental model on transitions faced by athletes. However, further elaboration on the decision-making processes that student-athletes were making use of in order to combine their academic and sporting career successfully will follow in the subsequent chapter.

Having identified the stages and transitions that characterised each of the two careers, the next chapter will seek to reveal student-athletes' own explanations of how they have identified priorities and developed strategies to combine their sport and their academic careers, and how successful such strategies have been. Evidence in support of the costs and benefits in pursuing both careers will be provided and examples of good practice will be identified in the three European contexts to this end. Furthermore, struggles and constraints, such as the hindering of the student-athlete's academic and /or athletic development will also be highlighted and a discussion on the importance of striking a balance between the two careers will follow.

Chapter 6 – Critical Factors in the Student-Athlete Experience

6.1. Introduction

This chapter develops a deeper level of analysis as it narrows the focus to the significant factors and strategies identified by the student-athletes interviewed in order to combine successfully their academic and elite sporting careers. Having drawn on Wylleman and Lavalley's (2003) Developmental model on transitions faced by athletes in the preceding chapter, which sought to provide a detailed overview of the key stages characterising each of the two careers, across four levels of development (academic, athletic, psychological, psycho-social), the aims of this chapter are thus to advance this model by illustrating how the two careers interact in practice. The analysis will first seek to highlight critical factors that student-athletes have identified as being instrumental in how effectively they managed their dual career. These factors were outlined under three dimensions: the personal - relating to the participants' own disposition and skills; the support network of people who provided the opportunity such as parents, coaches, teaching staff and other professionals; and the wider structures encompassing both academic and sporting systems surrounding them. Insight into the strategies adopted by each of the student-athletes in order to help them prioritise between their academic and sporting commitments will also be provided together with a rationale underpinning the evidence in support of the benefits gained in pursuing both careers.

Having discussed examples of good practice the second part of this chapter will identify some of the challenges that need to be addressed in combining elite sport and University education as highlighted in these three specific European contexts as this has immediate implications on how future policy-making can be amended to better reflect student-athletes' needs. Challenges hindering either or both the academic and athletic career development of student-athletes will be discussed as this potentially could inform better the

approach to be adopted by prospective student-athletes intending to go to university in the near future. In conclusion this chapter will explore in detail the notion of striking a 'balance' between the two careers and how this particular set of student-athletes have defined this concept as reflected in their own choice of lifestyle.

6.2. Combining a dual career successfully

During the interview process the student-athletes were asked to reflect on their dual career to date and to evaluate whether their two careers of university education and elite sport had been successfully combined. Sixteen out of the eighteen participants agreed that the effective management of a dual career is possible given a set of conditions addressed at a number of levels:

(This might not sound too modest but) I think a lot of persons would have loved to do what I did in terms of combining both careers, I'm not preferring either one or the other but just having both. Now, I think I'm quite a good example... But you definitely need the right environment, the right people and the right system to fit within your sport. The second thing is that you need to educate the coach and probably the parents at some stage. But definitely not impossible! (FRA D)

It would be difficult if you didn't have the right people around you, the right resources and the right mind-set I think...(UK C)

6.2.1. The right mind-set and skills

At a personal level, the student-athletes argued that they must have a favourable disposition themselves towards their dual career and have to be proactive to progress well. As the British gymnast commented athletes do not only have to be in the right mind-set to want to combine their education and sport but more importantly be capable and skilful enough to organise and manage their life well in order to be able to sustain it in the longer term. For those student-athletes who from a young age had always taken responsibility

of their two careers this was not considered as a challenge as long as they planned it well:

It's hard if you don't plan it well. I didn't find it particularly hard but I was good with time management. When I was at the gym I did what I needed to do and then got home and got on with my homework and studies. (UK C)

The range of transferable skills emphasised by these student-athletes as being key to managing a dual career successfully were predominantly organisational and time management skills but then there were a number of other types (as illustrated in Table 6.1 below) such as leaderships, goal-setting and analytical skills that were also discussed during the course of the interviews. Bolles (1996) defined transferable skills, which can also be termed as life skills, 'as those set of skills that are potentially transferable to any field or career, regardless of where they were first learned or developed' (cited in Mayocchi and Hanrahan, 2000:95). Congruent to this definition student-athletes confirmed that they had developed their set of skills in a number of ways, whether it was through formal learning at school or training in a sporting environment and they tended to consistently draw on these transferable skills to manage their dual careers.

Mastering a skill

The Finnish gymnast eloquently described the process of how being an elite athlete has given him this opportunity to learn how to master a skill within his discipline and the heightened feeling that an athlete gets when she/he knows that they performed it to the best of their ability:

It's like a constant effort to develop yourself, you go day after day to the gym and try to master something you can't quite do, so that's the most profound thing in gymnastics, you try to develop all the time. For me that's the most important because the feeling that you get once you start mastering a skill or the whole exercise, it's the best thing. And when you go to a competition and you manage to perform to the best of your ability and have a perfect dismount and you know you couldn't have done it any better, that is the best feeling! (FIN D)

However, he also noted that what is even more important at this stage of his life (nearing the end of his athletic career), is this ongoing process of learning, mastering and executing a skill to the best of his ability within a sporting context will hopefully transfer to his professional working career:

I sure hope that it will help me in whatever I end up doing as a job. I will set my goals, work towards that goal in the same way I've done in gymnastics and also enjoy developing my personal skills. It's not just about results but it's also the things that I learn along the way. (FIN D)

Time management and organisational Skills

It was unanimously agreed by all student-athletes that in order to be successful in managing their dual career, they had to plan their time meticulously as this was a very scarce resource. Therefore time management and organisational skills were identified as being crucial skills to learn and master from a very young age in order to fulfil both their roles as student and athlete. From the interviews it appeared that individuals had their own way of planning and organising their schedules but commonly student-athletes tended to have both daily and more longer-term planning methods.

When it came to the longer-term planning, some of the student-athletes mentioned that they found it useful to set goals for themselves in consultation with their coaches and sometimes academic staff as this helped them to stay focussed. Goal setting whether within a sporting, academic or personal context or indeed all of the three components has proven to be critical for some interviewees especially if they were going through a particularly difficult time as the British athlete explained:

I find it quite important to have goals, last season I was injured from January to March and I was struggling to get my head around the fact that there was this big thing approaching and I felt like I didn't have a lot of control over it. So I sat down with my coach and we set out a bronze target, a silver and a gold. So there were a number of races that I wanted to run and a certain aspects that I wanted to focus on. It was also helpful to have a personal goal as well, for example I didn't know how to drive so I went for driving lessons and did my test and I wanted to do well in my exams so I did that. I find it helps me a lot to have that kind of structure. (UK A)

When student-athletes did manage to strike the right balance between their academic and sporting demands by using their time well, they did benefit as another British athlete argued. By making the decision to split her academic workload over two years, she was able to be equally successful in her sports and achieve equally well academically:

I concentrated very hard on my degree and that's why I split my year really because I didn't want anything to suffer, I could do well at my work and I could do well at my running. I would definitely recommend doing this to other athletes, I've suggested it to another runner and she has done the same this year. I mean finishing a year later is not going to make such a big difference if you can afford it and it will make all the difference, you'll get the best of two worlds. (UK B)

Analytical skills

A different type of skill that was identified by student-athletes who had completed their Masters degrees were analytical skills. The rationale for this was that since it was a compulsory requirement for Masters students to write a dissertation at the end of their studies, it gave them the opportunity to hone in on their analytical skills to write a good piece of research. As the Finnish footballer commented developing such skills in the context of his engineering degree had helped him to then transfer this analytical ability to the world of sports, which he has found immensely useful as a player and continue to do so as a coach:

It's important because when you are interested in going to school in developing yourself and getting to know new things you develop your analytical ability...What I do use in my current job are the skills that helped me get there (gain a Masters degree) such as now I know how to use computers better and analyse things better. I am much more analytical now because of all the reports I had to write so that gave me a lot of experience in that sort of thing (FIN C)

From the findings of this research study it can be observed that all student-athletes interviewed had identified a variety of skills that they felt they had mastered during the course of their lives. As table 6.1 below illustrates fulfilling the dual demands of being an elite athlete and university student

required that these individuals develop an extensive range of skills in both domains in order to progress well in the longer term. It is important to note at this stage that this list is not exhaustive but it was compiled in order to reflect the 17 employability skills that were identified by Henwood and Stephens (2008 -refer to conclusion section) with the inclusion of three other skills; networking, interpersonal and language skills. This has immediate implications on the post-athletic career plans made by the currently active student-athletes as they will be able to target more rewarding occupations if they continue to develop their set of transferable skills in a consistent manner.

Table 6.1 – Development of transferable skills as identified by the student-athletes

Transferable Skills	Illustrative quotes provided by Interviewees
Planning and Organisation	'My club coach was also my university coach so we planned things almost day by day so this was my framework for the 4-year plan. I had objectives for every year and we revised our objectives at the end of each year. So we planned the national competitions, international meets which were a bit difficult to plan from the previous year but we used to adapt it as we go along' (FRA D).
Time management	<p>'Maybe the most important thing is to remember that when you are doing sport you forget the school and when you're doing school you forget the sport because having both on your mind constantly is very hard. And it's very important to plan your schedule well and in advance not make decisions on the day so you know what needs to be done. Otherwise you just keep going from one thing to another without finishing anything'. (FIN E)</p> <p>'I'm organised generally but as a judoka you need to plan minute by minute your weight, where you have to be whether locally or somewhere else in Europe...' (FRA D)</p>
Goal setting	'I mean if you compare gymnastics to football, everyone knows who David Beckham is and there's so much money in football that he might lose sight of the main goal of performing well. We never had money, we never had publicity or media interest so we just concentrate on our goal and that's what I do. That's what being an elite athlete means to me, to achieve the goal you are set to achieve'. (UK C)

Team Working	<p>'The education has given me a lot of information that I will be able to use in my future life to get a good job and in sports I have learnt to do a lot of things such as from being part of a team. I see that at school I'm very good at group work while there are some people who only know how to do things by themselves. They find it hard to manage in a group'. (FIN E)</p> <p>'You can count on me as an athlete as well, which is the main thing for me, I always play well even when there's a lot of pressure. I always try and get the result for the team'. (FRA B)</p>
Interpersonal skills	<p>'I was also once in a job interview, and I was so scared before I went in. But then I was thinking I had much more difficult situations to deal with in the past, for example a couple of times a year you have to go and talk to the National team coach and he'll ask you very hard questions so I thought to myself it cannot be as hard as this. In the end the interview went really well because some of the questions were very similar because for example the coach asks you what are your three best qualities and then you go to the job interview and they ask you the same exact thing so I had good preparation'. (FIN E)</p>
Able to prioritise	<p>'I have grown so much mentally, I feel like I really know myself a lot more both physically and how I think. Because of the sport career I always had to make a lot of choices and that's been a good thing and it has taught me to prioritise things because I always had to consider what is really important and what's not'. (FIN B)</p> <p>'I think most people who would have my life would go mad. I guess the important thing is to stay focussed on what you have to do each day, writing it down, having a daily timetable to make sure you've got everything in. Then you need to make sure that you do get enough sleep, because I find it really hard myself to get enough sleep and of course prioritising. So for example you do not go out every time someone asks you to go out, make sure that you do not regret staying out late the next day'. (UK F)</p>
Commitment	<p>'I think I've learnt a lot about commitment because as an athlete, at the end you only work for yourself so I think I've learnt that if I work hard enough I will benefit from the work I've done' (FIN B)</p> <p>'I'd like to think that I'd put just as much effort into my next career as I do with gymnastics because you put the effort in and you get the rewards out. I hope I don't get too relaxed and start doing things half-heartedly because it would be a</p>

	pity...I hope I remember that'. (UK C)
Decision-making	<p>'I definitely make decisions for myself. I want to take responsibility for my decisions so yes I do feel totally in control of both my sporting and educational career'. (FRA B)</p> <p>'I'm really decisive and although basketball is a team sport I'm still very self-orientated. I'm also very self-critical and I do expect a lot from the others'. (FIN B)</p>
IT Literacy, Analytical skills, Written communication	'What I do use in my current job are the skills that helped me get there (gain a Masters degree) such as now I know how to use computers better and analyse things better. I am much more analytical now because of all the reports I had to write so that gave me a lot of experience'. (FIN C)
Languages	'Being involved in sport has allowed me to travel all around the world, meet a lot of people and make great friends. It has improved my language skills, my English and my German' (FIN D).
Leadership	<p>'I was mentally strong, a team player, I was captain... I was a key player and eventually captain for the next 10 years'. (FIN C)</p> <p>'I used to play for my school as well and captained that team... played for the National schools U/16s for two seasons, and one season with the U/18s, I captained that team and got player of the year.... during my third and fourth year of University...I became captain of my home team (Seniors). (UK E)</p>
Networking	'I think I got a lot from being involved in sports for so many years, I have formed good, strong relationships that have lasted. It's a great opportunity to network, I still have friends from all over France and Europe from when I used to play with the Junior National team. I got to travel so much which I enjoyed a lot'. (FRA C)
Business Awareness	'Yes I am (trying to market myself more), I have a manager in fact who is very good...So I am always getting into magazines such as Men's fitness and triathlon ones. I have just been in a Chinese triathlon magazine and some other underground magazines such as Sport Mag. I think basically it's because I have a good story with my art and stuff so I guess it's a little bit unusual but I get to be involved in lots of different things... So that does help! but also now with my website, my friend manages my website, he does that for free'. (UK F)

6.2.2. Support Network of people

The second condition instrumental to the effective management of a dual career constituted of the key people surrounding the student -athletes who were considered to be the most influential in their life. This social network of people included the parents, partners, coaches, peers, academic staff and other professional sport staff. Having the support and understanding of these key people has been described by athletes as one of the critical factors in determining how well they coped with specific transitions and transitional periods. This support has been and for some continue to be manifested in a myriad of ways ranging from emotional support to financial assistance and all athletes feel indebted in some way to these people:

All my teachers have been very good with helping me and they understood that I had training commitments...The coach must also understand that you cannot spend 12 hours a day in the gym, that you have other aspects of life and you need to get on with things...the parents have to be very supportive as well. (UK C)

Parents

From a logistical point of view the parents were the ones who actually made it possible for most of these student-athletes to train and compete at an elite level from a very young age, whether it required driving them to and from training centres at all hours or finance their trips abroad for competition. As the interviewees acknowledged it would have been impossible for them to meet the demands of an elite sporting career if their parents had not intervened:

My parents have contributed a lot financially, it has been huge and I really would like to thank them for it. Up until the World Championships they have always been very much on the giving side, financing all my training camps abroad. (FIN D)

The equipment and being able to practice on ice are very expensive. My parents have helped me all the way. They still help me now because I don't get any extra money from the club. (FIN E)

From an academic point of view parents also contributed substantially to their children's educational development by covering tuition fees for example or living expenses as otherwise the student-athletes would have had to work to sustain themselves which would have hindered their athletic preparation significantly:

My family are very supportive, for example before I mentioned the money aspect and I remember when I moved to another town to go to high school, I had no money at all so my parents had to pay for everything. I never even had a summer job because I was always training so they have given me a lot of money to make it possible to continue both my judo and my studying and I am immensely grateful. I couldn't have done it without them. They have always kept an interest in all of my competitions and whenever I was competing in Europe they always came to watch and now they are also coming to Beijing including my little brother. (FIN F)

As the student-athletes got older and they had more complex issues to deal with such as choosing which university to go to, signing their first professional contract or deciding whether to continue competing in elite sport despite the many injuries, parents were available to discuss and offer advice without putting any pressure on their children. As the British golfer explained having been offered a full scholarship by an American college was a very attractive opportunity but then after having had the time to discuss this option with his parents he began to realise that academically the institution was very weak. Therefore, on further deliberation he decided he would remain in the UK after all, so he and his parents narrowed the options down to one University:

I spoke to my parents because my mum and dad really wanted me to go to the United States but it was the money issue really. I mean I could have gone to the States and got a 100% scholarship which basically would have cost my mum and dad nothing. But it wasn't going to be at a good school so yes I would have been able to play golf for a number of couple of years but I wouldn't have been able to get anything out of the academic side of things. I would have not got any academic achievements to speak of. So we kind of decided that the other options (other American colleges) were going to cost far too much so this was the second best option that I had at this stage. So it worked really well. It was definitely a joint decision (to come to this university) but it was my decision on what course I did. (UK C)

The French handball player explained how he had consulted his parents and especially his dad when he was scouted by a professional handball team at the age of 17. Having had time to discuss the conditions of the contract and other lifestyle concerns such as the fact that he needed to relocate to Paris on his own to join this club and find alternative means to complete his Baccalaureate studies he eventually came to the decision to wait a while longer before turning professional:

Obviously I get lots of emotional support from my family when I need to make major decisions such as this one. The club had already approached me two years ago (I was 17) and offered me a contract to be a professional player but my dad convinced me to stay in my club for a little longer. I was the best player in my position for the league I was playing in (Div II) so someone from the professional club had come to speak to me about playing in the top division. But I decided to wait in the end. The second time round my dad didn't have any objections to me signing a contract... (FRA C)

Two of the French athletes who both suffered very serious injuries explained how their parents' unconditional support continued to be manifested throughout the positive and negative experiences of their athletic career. Even if sometimes the student-athletes did make their own decisions in the end, (as in the case of the French judoka who decided to retire), she was still grateful that her parents supported her decision:

'It is a bit important for my family and friends although my mum worries more about the injuries. They never put any pressure on me though to quit or anything like that and I know if eventually I do quit they will still support me in whatever I choose' (FRA F).

It was a personal decision to retire, I talked quite a lot with my club coach and anyway he knew where I was going. It was a personal decision but it was only made because of the injury. I just decided it's better to move on. My parents were supportive of my choice, they never said: 'No, you should continue!' (FRA D)

Coaches

Coaches in particular have been identified as having a critical role to play in ensuring that they provide the support needed by the student-athletes they coach. As the participants noted during the interviews, training and competing at such an elite level often meant that they spent most of their time with their coaches. There were different types of relationships that student-athletes had developed with their coaches but from the findings of this research study, the most effective ones were those where responsibilities such as the organisation and planning of training schedules and decisions over which competitions to compete in were equally shared. By encouraging their student-athletes to discuss issues as it has been illustrated in the preceding chapter and striving towards mutual goals, coaches facilitated the management of a dual career profusely. However, in order for this to be possible the coach must develop certain personal characteristics that will enable him/ her to provide the right support.

The French judoka explained how the coach must be of a certain disposition and philosophy himself /herself to be able to support a student-athlete in combining a dual career. She described how her club coach, being also a university lecturer understood better her concerns and could openly discuss with her various aspects of her two careers as he understood both worlds. In contrast she did not benefit from such a relationship with her National team coach who was very set in his own ways and not willing to discuss much:

If I had a problem my first contact would be my club coach because he was the person that I was most confident with. It wasn't because I knew him for a very long time because he had only been coaching me for a couple of years but he was also my lecturer at university as well so he was more open-minded and thought the same way which was not the same as the National coach. (FRA D)

On a similar note the Finnish judoka reiterated the importance of being able to discuss elements of her dual career as they were both an integral part of her life. She explained how her coach had an active interest in other aspects of her life and this broader understanding helped them facilitate the kind of

decisions that were taken. Having his support in both spheres of life and knowing that he will always put her needs first helped her manage more smoothly her dual career commitments:

I have a very good relationship with my personal coach, we discuss things and he always puts me first. He knows what my needs are and he supports my education. He's always pushing me to study more. (FIN F)

Peers

Two main sets of peers have been identified in the prior chapter, those friends who student-athletes had met through their involvement in elite sport and those who they met while at university:

Actually most of my friends are in badminton anyway so when we go to tournaments we hang out and do things together so they kind of overlap a little bit. It's the same with school. (FRA B)

Other than the social aspect to university life that student-athletes seemed to enjoy, they also found it extremely helpful when their friends gave them lecture notes when they were away on training or competition. By being provided with such support student-athletes were able to continue to progress well through their academic career:

I also have a lot of friends who help me if I miss a class or need some notes they always tell me what they did so it's alright. (FIN E)

Later I have learnt you can also manage that, you just have to go and talk to your teachers and professors and let them know when you are going to be away and whether you could have alternative dates for assignments. But I just took the same exams as everybody else and got all the material from my friends. (FIN D)

Professional staff within sports

The list of people that constituted the professional staff within sports that in some way had been considered to have contributed significantly to the

overall interviewees' well being were mainly the following: doctors, physiotherapists, nutritionists and sports psychologists

As the French judoka explained, in some elite sports an athlete must have a number of professional staff to work with in order to ensure that no unnecessary harm is done to the body while training and competing at such an intensive level. In her sport she had to manage to keep her weight low enough in order to qualify for the weight category of choice, which if not planned well could have negative consequences on both the physical and mental well-being of the athlete:

In terms of support I had a physiotherapist, doctors and nutritionist as I said trying to lose four kilos per week you needed to ask somebody how to do it. When I was about 19/20 years of age I had to go to a gynaecologist as well because I was having problems with my menstrual cycle in consequence of the training. I also had an osteopath. I didn't ask for anything else from my federation because what I wasn't getting from there I was getting from the club other than the psychologist. (FRA D)

In the UK five of the athletes also made use of a number of professional staff on a regular basis as these services were either provided free of charge or were mandatory, either by the university (through a sport scholarship system), federation or National elite sporting body:

As for the support staff, the only thing I have known from EIS (English Institute of Sport) was to use the times at the fitness gym. On the TASS scholarship that I am on, all of the TASS scholars in the country get to see a sports psychologist as part of the programme so everyone gets to see him and that's great! (UK C)

In Finland the situation differed from the other two countries as most athletes other than professional athletes were expected to have their own medical insurance which would cover the costs of such services. As the Finnish gymnast explained it was only recently that his club had started covering his expenses for physiotherapy and massages. He also stressed that within the National team set-up there was not an allowance for such services and these were only available for the duration of international competitions:

On the medical side, it's now my club which is paying for me to go to the physiotherapist or a massage once a week. Before I just used my medical insurance to see my own doctor. It was all up to me. Within the national team we have a doctor but only when we go to the European or World Championships, sometimes we have a masseur as well but not for training camps here or abroad. (FIN D)

Academic Staff

Albeit most of the staff at academic institutions in the three countries were not required to make special provisions for student-athletes, the interviewees observed that in instances when they sought the support and understanding of their teachers / lecturers and these needs were met, it made a significant difference to their lives. By the time they were interviewed all of the student-athletes had already faced one or more critical times within their academic career to date and therefore knowing that there were people at their schools/colleges/ universities who were willing to help in difficult circumstances was an immense relief as the British tri-athlete recounted:

I was really stressed out because I had found it quite hard during my second year to try and fit everything in...The second year was also the time when I starting doing well in triathlon and started to become a little bit well known so I remember there was this little article on *The Sunday Times* and one of my teachers had read it and suggested to take a year out to be able to concentrate fully on my triathlon and that will show them that I am taking it seriously. So I tried to get a year out and they were fine with that and in fact they allowed me two years out because that would take me up to the Olympics 2008, which was great! (UK F)

Everyone in the department seems very approachable and I know the girl in the office and they always try to help you out if people know and you have bothered to go in and tell them about your circumstances. I mean till now I have not asked for any special consideration like extensions of deadlines because the way my season is at the moment fits very well but if for example I wanted to go to the Olympics and it clashed with my final year I know that they would help me. They wouldn't let me suffer! (UK A)

The British rugby player also noted that some members of staff at his university (which offered specialist sports degrees) had a genuine personal sporting interest and therefore did not hesitate to help out student-athletes as

much as possible. However, he also observed that it was probably in their best interests to make efforts to accommodate student-athletes, as they would have the potential to raise the profile of the university which ultimately will benefit the staff:

Yes they were good because it is mainly a sports university they are obviously quite keen to support sports and sports people and it reflects well on them so they were fairly flexible. (UK E)

Another aspect of the academic staff that was appreciated by some of the interviewees was that they took great pride in teaching their student-athletes and although their hours of contact were minimal in some of the cases, they continued to show genuine interest in their students' academic career development. This type of relationship was generally more possible for those French athletes who trained at INSEP since they had the opportunity to study a whole range of options from secondary schooling to Masters programmes / higher diplomas and therefore remain within the same environment over a number of years as the French badminton player described:

Now they see me doing this *Professorat de sport* and it's not easy but even the teaching staff at INSEP are so proud that I've come such a long way from learning the language to doing their highest qualification in nine years. For me it's a good thing but it's not that much because I have a lot of friends who did Masters degrees in different countries but for the French people it means a lot to do a whole degree in another language. It's a bit flattering actually. (FRA B)

The Finnish football player also expressed his gratitude towards his former supervisor at university as he had offered to help him out even after he had graduated from his Masters degree. Having had to make an early exit from the world of elite sport due to injury, the student-athlete found himself in a crisis as he had his degree but had failed to gain any practical experience that would help to lead to potential employment opportunities. His supervisor therefore suggested that he should get involved in one of the research projects at university to gain some of this indispensable experience as it would familiarise him with the industry and therefore would help him to make

a more informed decision in respect of his future professional career direction:

When I graduated I thought I had only one option, I talked to my professor and told him about my situation that I wanted to work but I didn't have any work experience at all. So he decided to help me, we had a plan for me to work at university as a research assistant for a one or two-year period and in the meantime get contacts from the business world. The plan was for me to get to learn a bit more about this printing business and decide in which area I would like to work more. (FIN C)

6.2.3. The right environment / structure

At a wider level, the student-athletes identified also the structure / environment surrounding them as being instrumental in facilitating the way they managed their dual career. Not giving a specific definition of what this 'structure' or 'environment' related to, it appeared from their responses that these terms encompassed both the academic and elite sporting structures established in their home country. Being in a system that supported both their academic and athletic development provided these student-athletes with the 'right environment' not only to help them manage their dual career on a day-to-day basis but also be successful at it in the longer term.

Academic Institutions

As has been highlighted in the third chapter, the roles that some universities have adopted in order to support their student-athletes can be best described in the type of support they are providing. This support related to both academic and sporting opportunities but also had implications for the choice of post-athletic career. Where such academic provision existed student-athletes took advantage of a series of services such as the opportunity to schedule their own time-table as in the case of the Finnish students, extending the final year over two years to ease the academic work load as in the case of the two British runners or having access to individual tutoring like

the French athletes who might have missed an important lecture because of training camps and competitions during term-time.

Some universities, in particular the University of Jyväskylä in Finland and Loughborough and Edinburgh Universities in the UK are also continuing to invest in elite sporting infrastructure to meet the increasing sporting demands of their student-athlete populations. Furthermore, by liaising with National sporting federations such as the Finnish Gymnastics Federation whose national training centre is located at the University of Jyväskylä, or establishing partnerships with National Governing Bodies such as those of netball, cricket, badminton and gymnastics as in the case of Loughborough University, universities are now able to develop a number of initiatives that can benefit the student-athlete. Having both NGBs coaches and administrators based on campus, there is a constant exchange of ideas and knowledge with Loughborough University staff who specialise in key areas of elite sport through their research. Thus, making use of professionals in fields such as physiology, psychology, physiotherapy, nutrition and lifestyle management universities are available to provide quality elite training programmes and support while making it increasingly more manageable for student-athletes to cope with their sporting and academic commitments more efficiently:

I get some vouchers to use the physiotherapists at the performance centre of the University but since I also get some funding from UK Sport I get the medical services for free from the EIS (English Institute of Sport) staff so I use them. They are based on campus as well. I have seen the strength and conditioning coach a little bit, I've seen the doctors, I've also had a one off appointment with the sport psychologist but it's not a regular thing and I have also seen the nutritionist. So that's all through the UK athletics funding. I have to have a blood test every month with the physiologist. (UK A)

Elite Sports Structures

In the UK there is a system of National Institutes of Sport which has been established to provide comprehensive services to athletes with the aim of fostering elite sporting talent. The full range of services includes sports

medicine, physiotherapy, soft tissue therapy, nutrition, psychology, biomechanics, performance analysis, talent identification, strength and conditioning and performance lifestyle. However, as the British athletes explained there is a selection undertaken by UK Sport in order to qualify for such services. Five out of the six British athletes had accessed a range of services available, particularly those to do with sports science and medicine, as the professional rugby player explained:

When I was 17 I was signed up by the Scottish Institute of Sport which it's changed its role now but back then it used to be a tool to try and help young players become the best they could be so they would help them gain professional contracts and ultimately play for Scottish national team. So because of that I had all the Sports Science backing I needed and they also used to give us a little bit of money I think, around £1,000 per year. (UK E)

In the case of those French student-athletes who were based at INSEP - one of their National elite training institutions, it was generally agreed that the training centre offered them an extensive range of opportunities to develop their dual career in the best possible way. Being part of a large student-athlete community, having access to both high performance facilities together with quality academic programmes was considered to be an 'ideal' medium to achieve their athletic and academic potential. Moreover, having a number of flexible measures in place together with access to a support network of academic staff facilitated significantly the student-athletes' lives:

The good thing about INSEP is that you have a lot of options and arrangements that you can have to fit your training schedule. The people coordinating the education programmes are very helpful as well so for example if you are away on competition or training if exams are taking place, you can just report it and you will be allowed to take the exam at a later date. (FRA F)

Club structure

The former professional footballer, who went on to become the first team coach of one of the top football clubs in Finland has addressed the need to

foster ethical and sustainable practices at his club by developing a system which is proving to be both effective in the identification and nurturing of football talent, while respecting the educational / vocational needs of his players. Having the experience of combining a professional football career with a university education himself has helped him gain a far better understanding of how to establish an appropriate football-education balance within his club set-up and this was not only reflected in the club's policy but also on a personal level:

I definitely think that education and sport can be combined. I have one of my players who just graduated from university and three others who are not at university but just one level down who are doing three to four-year courses. They don't have to be in school as much so it's easier to combine. They know about my history a little bit so sometimes we do talk about it and they know I can sympathise if they have been working hard. I always tell them that if it gets too hard they can take one training session off every now and then to manage better, especially when they have exams or something like so there's always a way! It is also the club's policy that we support people who want to continue studying, of course there's a limit on how much you can study but we don't restrict them from studying. (FIN C)

In the case of the French handball player, his professional club went a step further and had become actively involved in his academic development through a type of apprenticeship scheme, set up between the university, the athlete and the club. This negotiation was not the same as other nationwide apprenticeship schemes that are established within professional sporting clubs (e.g. football) in France but was individually negotiated to meet the athlete's specific needs. In France most university students are encouraged, and in some degrees it is even mandatory, to have a work placement in industry to gain practical experience. Since the handball player was currently studying for a degree in business studies, he needed to gain work experience in an environment where he could develop and use his managerial skills. Therefore his handball club gave him the opportunity to work both at an administrative level and will also be looking into how to help market the club better in the near future. This has proved to be such a good partnership that at the time of interview the athlete was currently preparing a detailed

proposal on how this apprenticeship could be converted into a permanent post within the club structure:

At the moment I am part of this apprenticeship scheme as part of my diploma where I have to go to lectures but then I can get the practical experience side of it with the club. The club is in fact a company and it has agreed to provide me with jobs in the marketing/management area to gain experience. All students doing this type of diploma have to find a company to gain this practical experience and I think I have found the best way to combine my education and training perfectly. In fact I would like to extend this for even after I graduate. I still have to approach the club to see if they would be interested in employing me for the number of hours that are suitable to fit with my training and competition schedule but that's my long term plan... (FRA C)

Although during his time at University the British rugby player had not yet turned fully professional, his club still provided him with a car which facilitated his travelling arrangements to go to training and games:

Financially I got given travelling expenses and got a car from them because I played for my home club so it was a 40 mile drive so I used to drive there all the time. (UK E)

Other National systems of good practice in combining University education and elite sport

During the course of the interview student-athletes were also asked if they were aware of other national systems combining elite sport and education, which they thought were based on a good model. Although most of the student-athletes interviewed had limited knowledge of national initiatives abroad there were four participants who drew parallels between their particular sport system and those of other countries. Three of the student-athletes, specialising in synchronised swimming (France), judo (France) and golf (UK) argued how other national systems were more favourable to combining University education and elite sport. The reasons underpinning this argument were that other models either followed a different time schedule (e.g. in Spain), or had more flexible measures at University level (e.g. in Japan) or provided the student-athlete with more information and support to make an informed decision on playing the sport professionally:

I do know of one other model of combining training and education. I have some friends from the Spanish national team who are based in Madrid. They are a very interesting team actually because they are all a bit older than us, they are about 28 (our oldest athlete in our team is 23) and practically grew up together. They don't seem to have a big selection process in place, probably because they have such a low rate of turnover. They train in the morning till the beginning of the afternoon and then they do their education or work afterwards depending on the athlete. They get to earn some money from their sport as well which is always good. (FRA F)

I used to speak often about university with other judo athletes who were also at university during international competitions or training camps. What was interesting was that the success of some of the athletes depended on the history of their country and the way they had trained their athletes traditionally. So there were the Eastern European countries were saying that you should send your athletes to the army from a very young age in order to succeed in sports. Then in Asia everybody was at University but I think it is a much more flexible university system than France, I mean the French one is already flexible but there were definitely better systems like the ones in Japan. I was aware of that. This was obviously in relation to judo, I don't know about other sports. (FRA D)

Especially in Europe, in Scandinavia they got what they call Team Sweden which is based on the model they use in Australia and the Australian Institute of Sport. They pick guys that are excelling or at a particular level and give them the option of either taking up golf full-time or whether to continue studying but still be able to play golf. They explain and present all the opportunities that they have. Whereas here the England Golf Union tries to stay involved but it's very cliquey organisation, once you're in and you've played for England they're very supportive but if you haven't got anything to offer them they wouldn't take time out of their day to help you out. (UK C)

In contrast the Finnish gymnast observed that while he was aware of other National systems of combining education and elite sport, he still believed that his own system was equally functional. He did not think that an 'ideal' model existed and was convinced that the key to managing a dual career successfully ultimately relied on the individual:

I haven't come across any system that's ideal or is any way better than what is on offer here in Finland, I think it all depends on the individual and his personal commitment towards his studies, you have to take the initiative. I mean there are some countries who allow you to go at a slower pace or else negotiate special arrangements on your

behalf but I don't think it's necessarily better than what's on offer here. I know in the U.S for example they have a good scholarship system but I wanted to stay in Finland, as I said we have good training facilities and good level of training. (FIN D)

6.3. Priorities given in combining an academic and an elite sporting career

In an ideal situation student-athletes should not have to decide between their education and their sport and in some cases findings from this research study suggest that this was achievable as the following four participants observed:

I never felt that judo compromised my education but then again I never had to choose between my sport and education. (FRA D)

There was never the possibility of not coming to university in order to do running. It was never presented to me as being conflicting. It was always going to be harmonious in the sense that I could come to university and I could do my running. I always knew I wanted to come to university and I was lucky that I could do my running too. (UK A)

No I don't think I've ever felt that either my sport or my education are compromising each other. I am the type of person who tries to do everything to the best of my ability so for example if I have an essay I am going to concentrate on that because I want to do well in course work. I guess running helps in some way as well because for example I always want to run faster and work hard for that so when it comes to writing my essays I try really hard to get good marks as well. I think it really motivates me to get into my work and it helps to manage the time well . (UK B)

I think rugby and school had equal priority, they were definitely very similar. (UK E)

However, there were other instances where student-athletes' felt that they did not have any other choice but to give precedence to either their sporting or academic commitments at any given period. Therefore, student-athletes constantly had to shift their priorities depending on the need:

Maybe the most important thing is to remember that when you are doing sport you forget the school and when you're doing school you forget the sport because having both on your mind constantly is very hard. And it's very important to plan your schedule well and in advance not make decisions on the day so you know what needs to be done. Otherwise you just keep going from one thing to another without finishing anything. (FIN E)

Usually you have priorities according to the time period. For example in the Olympic period I used to train all the time and studying came second but I kept it going for all these years. There were times when I didn't work so hard for example in 2003 and 2004 when I decided to do the second part of the coaching qualification. I mean usually it takes two years, I did in three but it does not matter as long as you get there in the end. (FRA B)

Another set of responses reflected what these student-athletes conceived as being a priority at that particular point in their life depending on their circumstances. There were a number of factors that influenced these student-athletes' decisions whether in favour of the sport or their education, such as their age, academic year, success in their sport or injury:

When I came to INSEP the only thing on my mind was the sport and the first year was superb. I really improved a lot, we got really good results as a team but then after a while things started going a bit badly to the point where in 2006, we got some awful results. To make matters worse I got injured very badly, that is when I changed my priorities and started thinking more of my education rather than the sport. (FRA F)

There are moments when you have to choose and it depends a lot on what you do and the time of life. When I was young it was one thing, now that I'm 31 years old it's a different story. (FRA B)

However, there were also those student-athletes who argued in favour of a broader perspective on education and sport. For example despite relative success in their athletic career two of the French athletes argued that they still valued their education more as they both agreed that it was only through a good education that they could better their chances of gaining the post-athletic career of choice. Therefore, these particular two students tended to give more priority to their education:

Not a lot of professional handball players are in education, most of them prefer to go back to education after their handball career is over, usually they are about 30 years old. But I was afraid that at 30 I would not want to go back to school so I was determined to get my certificate now. This is what real life is about, real life is work not sport! Yes we do earn quite a bit of money now but it will not last you for long after your career is over. (FRA C)

In the beginning education was the most important thing for me but then since I started getting good results in the sport, priority given to training soon caught up. But I still believe that you earn money with education not sport! Most athletes do not earn enough so they have to work. (FRA A)

By contrast four of the student-athletes argued that they had always tried to put their sporting needs first as much as possible, one to the extent of deciding to dedicate his whole life to his sport. Thus, this set of student-athletes prioritised their sport over their education:

So far I have always put gymnastics in front but as I said I had good grades out of high school and if I wasn't a gymnast I would have graduated from university years ago and might be doing something completely different! But I have no regrets you just have to understand that if you are an elite athlete especially in gymnastics where you have to practice 30 hours per week, you have to consider how studies are going to fit alongside. So it will definitely take you a bit longer but then if you think of how much you receive from a gymnastics career then it's worthwhile. (FIN D)

Obviously I chose the sport. If I was not doing swimming I would have approached my studies very differently. It is very competitive in France to get into the university and the department you want, so you really have to be focussed on your studies. At the moment I do not see myself much as a student. My day's work is all about swimming! I don't go and open my books after my last training in the evening. (FRA E)

I always make the decision in favour of sport when it comes to training camps or competitions. Normal training sessions I usually fit around education but for the others it's impossible. (FIN A)

6.4. Combining elite sport and university education – challenges to be addressed

6.4.1. Challenges at (Sport) high-school / Lycée / College level

Despite passing all of their examinations to enter university some of the student-athletes had to overcome some challenging moments during the 16 - 19 age period. These issues ranged from the sporting to the academic as will be illustrated in the following student-athlete accounts.

Although the option to extend the final year over two years is available at INSEP, one of the French student-athletes decided not to take this option as she wanted to complete her studies within the regular time period. However as she admitted in retrospect this was not a good decision as her examination grades suffered as a consequence of not having had enough time to study due to a major international competition:

I was doing a scientific baccalaureate at the time and I had a lot of work to do. I had the option of extending the final year over two years but I didn't do it. It was very hard because 2005 was a very important year for my swimming career. I had just won the French Championships with my club, and was preparing for both the European and World Championships later that year. I was so exhausted and I remember being too tired to study. As was expected my final marks were not very good but they were enough to pass.
(FRA F)

For two of the Finnish athletes who were already competing at international level, a number of critical decisions had to be made which at times placed each of these student-athletes in a vulnerable position. For example in the case of the ice-hockey player, her very first Senior World championships coincided with the National Matriculation examination period. Contrary to what her parents advised, she was adamant she would compete at this championship even if negotiating alternative arrangements for the taking of her exams proved to be lengthy and complicated. The negotiations took longer than anticipated because she did not want to risk missing her first

chance of passing these exams since in Finland students are only given three chances to obtain their National Matriculation certificate to be able to go to university. In the end she did manage to get permission to sit her exams in the autumn term as if it was the first time and she went on to win a bronze medal at the World Championships.

In the case of the Finnish judoka, the final year of high school coincided with her first year of competing in the senior championships, which she considered as a major transition in her life. As she explained she went from being the best athlete in her category at a junior level to being the worst in the senior competitions, which came as a shock. The strain of having to compete at a far more advanced level coupled with the academic demands to pass her National matriculation certificate took their toll on both her body and her mind affecting her sporting performances drastically:

In 2005 it was the year when everything went bad! It was my first year in adult category, I couldn't compete in junior level anymore and I found the level very different and very hard. I had a lot of injuries that year and I also was graduating from my high-school and preparing to enter university so I had a lot of things to study. I didn't get good results in competitions, I think I lost almost all my competitions and it was very hard to train in the adult category because you go from being the best in the junior category to being the worst in one year. So it was hard for my body and it was hard for my mind! (FIN F)

To aggravate matters instead of finding the help and support that she so desperately needed to cope with such a challenging period in her life, one of her senior coaches blamed her for everything that was going wrong and accused her of lacking the motivation to practise and compete well, which made it increasingly hard for her to deal with all these issues as she continued to explain:

My head coach wanted me to be for many months in Europe which I couldn't do because of school so I had to keep going in and explaining what I'm doing and why I can't go and then I kept getting injured so for him it seemed like there was always an excuse...So that was very hard to deal with. He had to choose just the one year that things were not going well and he immediately comes and starts telling me about motivation and training especially when he knew that the reason I was not practising was

because of the injury, and I tried explaining that many times but he didn't want to listen. (FIN F)

Eventually she sat her exams and in spite of her initial concerns, she did obtain the results that she needed to progress through her academic career. From a sporting point of view she took her time to re-build her confidence and prepare better athletically and psychologically to meet the demands of senior competition with astounding success as she secured a place in the Beijing Olympic Games less than two years after this incident.

From an academic point of view, one of the British athletes experienced some challenging moments during her college years for a number of reasons. First her choice of 'A' level subjects was not based on those subjects that she enjoyed and did well at school such as English and art. Since she was young she had aspirations to become a doctor so she decided to choose sciences (biology, chemistry and mathematics) to keep her options open and give her the opportunity to pursue a medical career if she wanted to. However, she also knew that her sport was becoming a very important aspect of her life and in order to practise the sport to the highest standards she wanted to go to one particular university which unfortunately did not offer any medical degrees. Having made the decision to go to this university offering the elite training programme while she was still in college this did not help to motivate her with her choice of subjects. On a more personal level she also found some difficulty in fitting into the lifestyle and student culture at college, where other students expected her to go out clubbing and drink with them regularly:

They just wanted to go out clubbing and it really wasn't something I wanted to do all the time, I don't do it now because I don't enjoy it but back then there was a lot of pressure to do it. So it was hard. In the end I got an A and 2 Bs for my 'A' levels which was slightly disappointing. No one really said it but I knew that if I had picked the right subjects, I would have been a bit happier and would have done better. But I got the grades to get in here (university of choice) so that was what I wanted. (UK A)

Another athlete who faced some challenging moments in his academic career was the badminton player in France who acknowledged that he had

struggled to stay motivated during his high school years. Having already established himself as a national team athlete, competing at international tournaments and already earning a substantial amount of money made it very hard for him to concentrate on the school work as he explained:

I wasn't working very hard at school I remember. I was playing quite well at the international level already, I was already playing for the national team so I was not very motivated for school. I guess I can say I was struggling, I mean I passed all my exams and everything but I was definitely struggling. It was not easy. I was only doing it for the degree but I was not trying very hard so I had a lot of pressure from my family because my brother always studied very hard so I had to do well, especially in the high school exams. (FRA B)

When I was in high school (15-17yrs) I started to compete quite a lot at the national level and therefore it was becoming increasingly difficult for me to combine both. Competitions were at the weekend but I had to travel from Friday evening and I used to have very important lectures on Saturday important and the teacher did not care at all so it was very challenging for me. I almost never made that lecture, I used to get the notes from other students but it's not the same so I used to try and go and speak to some other teacher who knew what I was doing to explain things to me. We had school from 8.30-12.00 on Saturday and half day on Wednesday as well. I used to arrange these sessions myself and my mum had to invent an excuse every Saturday morning because she had to write a note to the school to inform them why I am not at school e.g. that I am either sick or something like that because otherwise they wouldn't allow me. I didn't have any support from the school. (FRA D)

6.4.2. Challenges at University level

Choice of University Degree

Having established that these student-athletes had selected the university / training centre first, depending on their sporting needs and then went on to choose an academic degree that could fit around their training and competition schedules, at times this meant that some individuals had to forego childhood aspirations of a professional career. For example in the cases of the Finnish ice-hockey player and the British runner they had both wanted to pursue a medical degree when they were younger but had to opt

for a different option since they were both very well aware that a medical degree and an elite sporting career were hardly compatible. As the British athlete commented both studying for a medical degree and being an elite athlete is a choice of lifestyle, each demanding a considerable amount of time and commitment to be successful and therefore a decision had to be made which in these athletes' case went in favour of their sport:

I am doing psychology now, which is not something that I have done before. I sort of picked it a bit randomly because I picked the university before I picked my degree. The thing was that I wanted to do medicine up until I was 13 so then when I knew that is not going to happen I wasn't keen on anything else...I guess at the back of my head I was thinking that I could go on to do medicine if I wanted to but from the first year in college I knew I wasn't going to do that, I wanted to come to Loughborough. I wanted to come for the running. But I saw running as a lifestyle and medicine as a lifestyle and those two were not compatible. (UK A)

I had a lot of choices but first I wanted to be a doctor but it wasn't possible to do sports and a medical degree then I chose this course (food technology) because it could fit with my sporting career. I do not always have to be there for lectures so if I am away on training camps I can work on my own. (FIN E)

Similarly, the British professional rugby player described how his initial career plan was to become a veterinary surgeon as he had already gained some practical experience by working with his father. However, as his rugby career became increasingly important in his life, having been selected for the national team (U/16 and U/18) he decided that it was likely to be problematic to manage combining those two careers while at University. Therefore, he opted for a degree that he thought was more compatible with his rugby lifestyle:

At first I thought I was going to be a vet, I just thought I would follow in my dad's footsteps. I thought I would be good at it because I got to practice a little I used to go out and help dad ever since I was young. I was probably 7 or 8. I used to go out on calls and used to do certain small things to help him. So that was something I fancied doing up until the latter stages of school. But then I thought it might be difficult to combine those studies with rugby. I know it can be done, one of the national team players just qualified as a vet so it can be done. But I got to that stage and I thought it will be tough! (UK E)

The British gymnast also had very different academic aspirations since he wanted to pursue an engineering course either at an academic institution or with the Royal Air Force but had to put his plans on hold for a while and choose a degree in Sport Science instead because he was more familiar with the content and it suited his lifestyle as an elite gymnast better:

I chose the Foundation degree in Sport Science because first it was easy, my A level in Sports Science was my best subject and it's just something I'm interested really. I'd like to have done engineering, I was very keen to do it, I even looked into the RAF to try and do it there...but then I came to Loughborough and everything was put on hold. So once gym is finished with, I might start all over again, especially if I do retire early I still have enough time to pursue a second career (UK C).

Department and degree choice

Choosing the right degree and department was deemed critical by the student-athletes in reconciling the demands of university education and elite sport, and while some options seemed more straightforward than others (especially when athletes choose sport-related degrees), sometimes as in the case of two of the French athletes, this decision eventually worked against them. The department they chose was STAPS, (*Sciences et Techniques des Activites Physiques et Sportive*), which incorporates various strands of sport related degrees such as teaching physical education, sport management, coaching and working in disability sport. Both athletes agreed that although their initial thoughts were that they would be capable of pursuing a Physical Education degree due to their involvement in elite sport the reality proved to be different. The sheer volume of content and coursework expected, difficulty of exams and questionable relevance to the actual teaching all played a part in discouraging these student-athletes. For one athlete it took just one year to reconsider his decision and to change not only degree but also the university altogether. For the other athlete, after completing three years of this degree which is equivalent to a Bachelor's degree, and failing the fourth, she decided to change route and specialise in coaching instead for her Masters degree:

I passed my Baccalaureate first time and went to Orsay University. I started the STAPS programme which is what you do if you want to become a sport teacher. However, it was very difficult to manage, we had a lot of coursework and the exams were really hard to pass so I gave it up after one year. Sports teacher are considered as civil servants in France so we had to do all these other things that are not really relevant in my opinion, so I stopped it. (FRA C)

After I got here I started STAPS which is the diploma that you do if you want to become a physical education teacher in France. All the lectures were here but I did not like it a lot. Basically their philosophy is make things difficult if they can be done easily. I got very frustrated. The exams were very difficult. We had a lot of coursework to do, we needed to write a lot. We were doing history of sport which was not very relevant to the actual teaching, and there was a very big gap between the theory and the practice. In the end I failed my fourth year and dropped it. I could not continue to do it. (FRA A)

Retrospective Comments about choice of degree

In hindsight choosing an incompatible degree and / or department with a specific sport can create all sorts of problems and tensions as the Finnish footballer explained. Although he did eventually complete his Masters at an engineering department, at times he struggled to fulfil both his roles as a student and professional football player especially in the latter stages of his university career. Asked whether he would change anything from his academic career given the choice he stressed the point that as much as possible he would have preferred to have chosen a degree that was more relevant in content to his post-athletic career:

The only thing maybe was that perhaps I shouldn't have gone to that department, maybe I could have chosen to study something else. But when I went to university I did not realise that I was going to become a professional footballer and that my whole life would be in football after as well because if I knew that I would have chosen otherwise. The department that I chose and football did not support each other at all, because for example I wanted a career in engineering I would have to do the placements in industry, I would have to get a summer job that gives me experience. Of course I couldn't go to any of this because I was playing football all summer so it was a crazy situation because I could never get the working experience I needed. (FIN C)

Another limitation that was expressed by two of the British athletes with regard to their choice of degree was that in hindsight they felt that they would

have benefited more from choosing a more 'specific' degree, one which led to a particular job. Although they both confirmed that they had enjoyed learning more about their subjects (sports science and psychology) they acknowledged the fact that their degrees were too broad and did not give them any specialist knowledge in a particular area. Therefore both had made plans to further their studies in the future to specialise in one specific field in hope of enhancing their opportunities in the job market:

I enjoyed doing my degree, it was reasonably hard but in hindsight I think I should have done something a bit more specific like physiotherapy or to be a chiropractor, something like that. There are very few people that studied my course (Sports Science) who are still involved in it and the ones who are, are either personal trainers or fitness instructors so they are scraping by. There is not that much money in it for that many people! (UK E)

I wish I had done a degree that has a job at the end of it, my brother has done pharmacy for four years and now he got a job, well a training job but it still get him a reasonable salary which in a couple of years will turn out to be a very good salary. But with psychology you come out of it and you think 'What do I do now?!' You've delayed making any decisions so in a way I wish I've done another course but I have enjoyed it so much that I wouldn't want to change it... but I've looked into a few options that I have to further my studies and there are quite a few things that interest me like clinical psychology or organisational behaviour but nothing clear cut yet. (UK A)

Choice of university

For some of the student-athletes who were reluctant to compromise on the quality and level of education they received from their university of choice, they needed to consider alternative arrangements to manage their academic and sporting career smoothly. As with the French judoka opting to go to one of the best universities in Paris to pursue a sport degree meant that she had to commute from home to the university, then to the training centre and back home every day. As she commented having to drive across Paris every day was tricky at the best of times but she was determined that her academic career would not suffer for the sake of convenience:

It would have been easiest in terms of planning if I had decided to follow a degree at the university which was in partnership with INSEP, however the level was not good enough for me. The way it works there is for example for tutorials there was a person who is in charge of supervising all the high level athletes so if this supervisor identified any difficulties that the athletes might be having in certain topics they would give them extra tuition. In terms of time-tabling athletes had less lectures to get their degree but the rest was relatively similar. In terms of distance it was next door to INSEP so athletes were practicing at INSEP then going back to campus. They didn't have to travel. For me it was 35km but then again it was Paris so it can take you from 20mins to an hour and a half so I used to drive there and back all the time. Because as well trying to cross from the west side of Paris to the East with public transport is quite challenging as well. You can do it but it will take you some time. (FRA D)

A contrasting scenario was when the student-athlete did miss out completely on the academic degree or university of preference as in the case of another French athlete in order not to spend more time commuting away from the training centre:

Having said all this I am not too sure that I would have been able to combine high level sport with mathematics because they do not provide lectures for it here and it is a little bit complicated to keep travelling in and out of INSEP to go to one of the Universities in the city. (FRA A)

Similarly, one British athlete had to put her academic plans on hold for a while in order not to compromise her athletic training:

I was supposed to start a PGCE course this year so that I can become a primary school teacher but because the running went so well last summer I was recommended to focus on it a little bit more this year. The PGCE is quite intensive and having to commute every day to Leicester was going to compromise my running. (UK B)

Lack of Academic Guidance and Support

Although most athletes interviewed commented that they had usually get the help from academic staff when they ask for it, there were still a couple of athletes who think that more should be done in this regard. One of the

Finnish athletes would like to have had a permanent member of staff at university to whom he could go to discuss his academic and sporting commitments for the year allowing him to avoid having to go and explain his circumstances to different members of staff every time he needed to be away from class:

I have emailed the education adviser at the Finnish Olympic Committee a few times but usually it's up to me to manage. I would like to have someone in school who knows what I'm doing and what I'm studying who can help me, which I don't have now. (FIN A)

One French athlete also felt that she would have probably benefited from a little more guidance by an academic member of staff when it came to choosing her degree and how compatible this was going to be with her sporting schedule in order to manage to fulfil her role both as a student and as an athlete:

Before I got injured I used to think that it was very difficult to combine study and sports successfully because there never seems to be time to go to the classes or do the coursework after...The other disadvantage that I had was that when it came to choosing between the various education programmes/ diplomas I did not get a lot of guidance and since I did not have anything specific in mind, I was a bit lost. (FRA F)

However having the understanding and the professional help of academic staff can only influence the dual career of these student-athletes to a certain degree but as the Finnish judoka commented, in order to combine the two careers well support must also come from the people within elite sport.

Issues with time management

A critical factor that has been highlighted by all the student-athletes in helping them combine a university and elite sport career successfully was how well they managed their time. This usually did not depend entirely on them as individuals but also relied heavily on the kind of people and support structure they had around them. However where time mismanagement did occur in a consistent manner for a number of reasons that will be discussed in the

subsequent sections of this chapter, negative repercussions ensued, leaving the student-athlete with feelings of frustration and stress. In some instances when student-athletes were unable to deal with this level of stress effectively they decided to give up on one of their careers as a result of poorly scheduled and badly managed time-tables:

After passing my Baccalaureate, I started a computer science management course, for two years but then I had to quit. Usually (outside INSEP) it is a two year course but it is done over three years here. Unfortunately, this time round the time schedule was very maladapted to my training hours and I had to stop. (FRA E)

As the French swimmer continued to explain although time-tables for both training and study commitments may not appear to be conflicting in terms of timing, there were other aspects that should be taken into consideration in an elite athlete's life. For example having sufficient recovery time between practice sessions was an important factor to be able to train well and therefore this particular athlete would have preferred to have the opportunity to start the day with swimming then to have the four hours of classes and to go back to the pool for the afternoon / evening session. However, with the schedule in operation at INSEP, (which had remained the same for a number of years) student-athletes were first expected to attend class in the morning then alternate with training:

From my experience I would prefer to have training –class – class - training rather than what they (INSEP) have now which is class (08.00-10.00)- training (10.30 – 13.00) – class (14.00- 16.00) – training (16.30 – 19.30) because then you would have more time to recover between the two training sessions. Having only three hours to eat lunch and have classes was a little tight. They have never tried to change the system to start with training first and then have class afterwards since I've been here. So that's something I would definitely change if I had the opportunity. (FRA E)

Having insufficient time (whether it was due to poorly planned time-tables or as in the case of two other student-athletes as a result of over loading their schedules) not only had an impact on their sporting performance but it affected other aspects of their lives too. Feelings of exhaustion, described by

the French athlete as 'mental and physical tiredness' tended to have a negative effect on both the academic and sporting aspects in his life which sometimes made him reconsider his specific choice of lifestyle:

A typical day like today for example, I came here at 8am and I had 2 hours course then straight after I went to the badminton hall, started training at 10.30 for an hour and a half. Then I went to have lunch. At 2 o'clock I have another course, then from 4.30 -6.30pm I have training again. Then I go back home and I'm coaching from 8.00-10.30pm. So it's a big day...Sometimes there are times like today when you are very tired and you're tired from all the training, of course you start thinking what if I had done things differently. Because sometimes you do not train very well because of it, then you come to class and you cannot really concentrate either, so you have this mental and physical tiredness all the time so of course it becomes difficult. (FRA B)

As the British athlete attested having this sense of being constantly rushed all day made managing her dual career seem a far bigger challenge, which again affected her university grades negatively during her second year:

I remember in the second year I was struggling with time in general. I just remember that I was struggling for time because for example we were doing all these little developmental sessions for athletics so for example I used to have a 2 hour break between lectures, I would just run off and do work for gluteus and thighs and then have to rush back for lectures. I used to end up being late for those and then it was just a general feeling that I am simply rushing from one thing to another and I was not liking it. I was in halls as well and they had set times for meals and I used to find myself rushing through training to get in time for dinner so that was a bit of a struggle as well. (UK B)

In this particular instance the British runner took control over the situation as she approached her department to get permission to split her final academic year over two years and moved to a house just outside campus so she could organise her own eating times. However, there were still some factors in student-athletes' lives that they had very little or no control over and therefore proved to be trickier to manage. Examples of these issues included training times and duration, going on training camps locally or abroad and also competing at annual international events.

Training and Competition Commitments

The requirements placed on elite athletes in contemporary elite sport are such that they need to dedicate themselves more and more to achieving excellence. This immediately implies that most athletes' time is dedicated towards developing their sporting skills in preparation for major national and international sporting competitions leaving them with a restricted amount of time to dedicate to other aspects of their lives. So for those athletes as the French swimmer commented, who were also pursuing an academic career alongside their sport this was at times problematic if lectures were consistently missed:

Then here (INSEP) despite all the flexibility of the system that we have here, the training hours still keep getting longer and sometimes you miss your lessons and then you have to catch up. The teachers are very good here at understanding the situation but it is still problematic most of the time. (FRA F)

Being at an institution such as INSEP presented a slightly more complex challenge for student-athletes because they were aware that their sporting demands and commitment would always have to be given priority because of the nature of the structure. Being essentially a training centre some coaches did expect their athletes to give sport precedence at all times and this did conflict with the successful management of a dual career for some of the French athletes:

What I can say is that unfortunately with a sport like swimming it is very hard to combine sport and education because of the large amounts of hours you spend in the pool! (FRA E)

Opportunity Cost

Getting the balance right between elite sport and university education can still prove to be highly problematic at times (even if they belonged to 'ideal' institutions such as INSEP) to the extent that some student-athletes may find themselves in a situation where they have to choose between their two careers. The French swimmer was faced with this dilemma after having

completed two years of his computer science management diploma but decided to give it up as his classes were not compatible with his sporting commitments. He was very well aware that choosing sport over education will come at a price as he was subjecting himself to a double-threat; on the one hand he was focussing solely on a sporting career subject to instability due to the risk of injury and de-selection while on the other hand he was forced to make sacrifices in terms of his education which might have repercussions on his subsequent working career:

It is important for me to be identified as a high level athlete because I sacrificed a lot to get to where I am today. I am devoted to my swimming and that came at the price of my education. (FRA E)

Training Camps and International Competitions

Another factor in the student-athletes' lives that was challenging to manage was the number of training camps and competitions they had to attend every year and the duration of such events. As the Finnish gymnast observed if an athlete was at the peak of his / her sporting career, they were usually required to spend around eight months of the year away from home and / or university:

So that first year I only managed to finish two credits and then two or three years after I really did not study that much, I did a credit here and there but between all the training and competitions it was hard. One year I counted I spent 120 days on trips abroad and another 120 days away from Jyvaskyla, everywhere else in Finland so that only left me with a third of the year and most of it was in the summer time and at Christmas so basically between semesters which made it quite difficult to combine education and sports. (FIN D)

As the Finnish gymnast continued to explain timing was critical with such events and therefore at times student-athletes observed that they were unable to progress as consistently in their academic career as anticipated due to clashes in commitments. Unfortunately for athletes many of the annual international sporting events were usually scheduled during the same period, which at times interrupted term-time at university year on year. Thus, even in Finland where students have the opportunity to schedule their own academic

time-table to fit their individual needs, from a student-athlete's perspective this still remained problematic as the same modules were offered during the same period of the year:

The thing that I find quite hard is that at university they have the autumn semester and the spring semester and they have the same classes in autumn and spring year after year. So for example in the Autumn semester I have much more time to attend school and finish courses so I have finished all that I had to do but the Spring modules, they always clash with my competitions. For example last year I was until the end of January I was in Australia then I had the indoor season in Birmingham which ended in the middle of March and it was right in the middle of my studying semester so it was practically impossible to do any work. In May then I went off to another training camp so I only had a month and a half to attend classes but all the modules had already started, it was not the best way to do it. (FIN A)

The British golfer also highlighted his frustration at some of the scheduling issues surrounding his sport, which year on year had left him unable to improve the situation. He explained how despite being awarded a sports scholarship he was unable to represent his university in the final stages of the British Universities golf competitions as the latter clashed with examination periods. He also observed that he was not the only elite golfer who was put in this vulnerable position as other athletes in other universities were faced with the same dilemma. He pointed out the irony of the situation as the staff in charge of University sports should in theory be the more receptive to student-athletes academic commitments. Thus, he urged the planners of the BUSA fixtures to start being more sensitive to the student-athletes' needs in order to raise the level of the sport but avoid unnecessary stressful periods:

The competitive university golf isn't that great really because as I said the vast majority of golfers that are of a certain level are either out of the university system or are out in the States. Also the people who co-ordinate the BUSA (British Universities Sports Association) competition need to reconsider the periods of competition because they tend to clash with major amateur international events or when exams are on. For example yesterday and today are actually the BUSA finals and for the last five years, we must have had the best five golfers in British university golf which have not been able to play and then could not represent British Universities because they were taking exams. So this generally tends to reflect on how good university golf is

at the moment in Britain. I mean the competition is there but the people running the competition need to have a look at what they're doing and cross-reference with what's out there and try not to timetable it at the same time. I mean the things that we get offered such as scholarships and things like that are great but the competitive side of university golf has not lived up to my expectation which is a shame really. This is typical of the whole of the UK. (UK D)

Issues around the scheduling of major sporting events intensified for those student-athletes who were competing in Winter Olympic sports and whose greater sporting demands fell during the Winter season, with the top international tournaments culminating in early spring. As the Finnish ice-hockey player attested, other than having to be away for a week at a time on a monthly basis for training camps, the most challenging period was during the World Championships, where the National team members had to spend a whole month away from their home country every year:

Then we have the National team camps, when we have those I'll be away from home for a whole week. They're usually once a month and they can be either in Finland or in Sweden or even Canada. The longest period we stay away is when we have the World Championships because we stay away from home and school for three weeks. But the championship is always in spring time so there's always school. (FIN E)

Thus having to spend so many days away from their home country and hence university, student-athletes like the ice-hockey player relied heavily on the help and support of her peers and academic staff to make amends for missed lectures.

Financial Hardships

Another critical factor that was identified by student-athletes that contributed indirectly to their dual career development was finance. Having established that most student-athletes had been awarded a type of scholarship fund, in some cases this was still not enough to cover all of their expenses. Therefore, as has been discussed earlier in this chapter, parents often had to intervene to get their children through difficult financial situations, whether it

was to cover academic costs, sport-related expenditure or general living expenses:

My parents mainly helped me to finance my Masters, we have to pay in France. I think it was about 400 Euros each year for undergraduate and Masters but this is nothing obviously because then there's the accommodation, transport, books, sports stuff etc. I was partly dependent financially on my parents but then I got some money from my club and the federation. My club was giving me more than the federation but it wasn't enough to last me the month anyway so my parents gave me some more. (FRA D)

Two of the student-athletes, the Finnish ice-hockey player and the British golfer drew further comparisons between the particularly costly nature of their sport in relation to other sports. The ice-hockey player explained how it would have been impossible for her to buy the equipment needed if her parents had not helped her out financially and she would have never been able to reach the level she competed in now if she had not put in the extra training sessions on the ice rink, a substantial cost which again her parents compensated for. The British golfer also explained how most of the time trying to commit to the additional training sessions required to reach and remain competing at an elite level often came at a cost. This, coupled with the general demands of student living proved to be challenging at times. His situation was further exacerbated since the golf range that the university made use of was not of good quality and was quite a distance away from the campus and therefore given the option he would have preferred to have been able to drive to another golfing range close to his home and to have his travelling costs met. As he concluded this put an added strain on trying to get the balance right between his sporting and academic demands, a challenge that required careful planning in advance:

I wouldn't say I have done fantastically well in combining my sport and my university but I am doing ok...Unfortunately for myself as well however hard I try to practise as much as I can, I simply cannot afford to travel home twice or three times a week to practice and come back. The cost of the petrol will be too much and I would have to keep myself in or not be able to eat...It's ok during the winter when the range starts running with the golf team again and it goes back to these financial issues again, because the range is quite a distance away but

at least if there's 3 or 4 guys going, we can split the costs and one can drive one day and then we take it in turns. If you go there on your own just for an hour or so sometimes you wonder if it's worth it. It is difficult really to get the perfect mix between the two things. I think it could be seen as being difficult but as long as you can plan the time ahead I don't think it is difficult. (UK D)

Another important aspect related to the financial status of student-athletes was highlighted by two of the female Finnish athletes who argued that despite competing in sports that in their country were considered as professional sports, there were still great discrepancies between the overall earnings of the genders.

Gender differences within Professional Sport set-ups

Both the Finnish basketball and ice-hockey players drew comparisons between the relatively professional set-up of the men's leagues and the semi-professional nature of the women's game. They commented that there were only a few women playing team sports who had managed to secure professional contracts in Finland and therefore for the rest it was imperative that they were either in education or employed to be able to maintain their lifestyle:

Women's basketball is not that popular in Finland, to be honest I think most women sports are not regarded very highly. Of course you have the few female individuals who have been successful at their sports and they are regarded highly but it's usually not the case with team sports...The interesting thing is that when you think of the really good players that we had in Finland they also had very important jobs like one player who has dominated the basketball league, she is now over 30 and she's a doctor. But I think there has been a few who did it professionally.(FIN B)

I did think of going to play professionally abroad when I was considering going to the U.S. Women's ice-hockey is not yet fully professional in Finland, I know only four players who are. (FIN E)

Both of the Finnish female athletes explained how despite having been selected for the National team squad, having to commit to as many hours of

training and competition as the professional athletes being recognised only as semi-professional caused a financial strain:

Here you don't get paid to participate in the national team and the schedule is really hard, we train as much as the professionals but without the money so you still have to combine it with work and that I found pretty hard...a lot of female basketball players have semi-professional contracts where you get some money from the club but still have to earn some money elsewhere (FIN B)

Sporting Culture Detrimental to the educational development of some athletes

Student-athletes across the three countries were aware that in some sporting contexts stereotypically in combat sports and football among others, the sporting culture inculcated in such settings is at times to the detriment of the educational development of some of their athletes. Therefore, for those athletes who were trying to break the mould and pursue a second career in education, this proved to be quite testing since not only was it uncommon to find other athletes who were managing a dual career but they were also subjected to pressure by National team coaches. The latter wanted their athletes to give up their studies as this was seen to interfere with their sporting development:

I think most judokas to be honest do not go to university. If I may I would like to tell you a little story about our national head coach, I remember last year when I had just started university I had taken my books to one of the training camps and one time the coach came into my room and asked me 'Why are you still reading, didn't you get into university now?' I couldn't believe my ears! He thinks it's enough to just make to university then not do much else. I was a little bit surprised to say the least but by now I've learnt that certain things he says I'll let them go in one ear and straight out from the other...It has been a little hard to explain to our national coaches that I'm playing judo and also studying because the head coach he's a fireman so he didn't continue studying and he doesn't really understand. He also wants me to stop studying now and then perhaps continue after. (FIN F)

Another drawback inherent in some elite sport cultures that seemed to have an indirect impact on the academic decisions of these student-athletes, was

the short-term planning involved in making decisions by athletes and their coaches alike.

Short-term planning in sport

As the Finnish and British athletes noted it was at times problematic for student-athletes to plan for their academic career in advance due to the nature of decision-making that characterised elite sport. The Finnish athlete explained how at the time of interview he was finding it a challenge to plan his academic work load as final selections for international tournaments only take place just a short period before the actual competition:

You never know when you have to go to the next tournament. Like now I'm pretty relaxed in my sport but for example earlier this year in the beginning of January I was a bit stressed trying to combine my school and sports. Now just before the indoor season starts I'm trying to put in some lab sessions and trying to get good results in school and also in athletics. But it's a little bit hard to combine both and I get stressed when I'm frustrated that I cannot study when I want! (FIN A)

Student-athletes were therefore constantly being held back by this feeling of uncertainty, whether they were competing or not, whether they had to travel for competitions, how many hours they would need to dedicate to their athletic preparation and other similar factors that all needed to be taken into consideration. Consequently short-term planning in sport made it increasingly hard to plan ahead in other aspects of their lives since most decisions revolved primarily around their sport:

I would like to continue my study but it's a bit hard to plan too far in advance with running because you never know which competitions you will be doing and how much time you're going to spend in training. I've looked at a few Masters at Loughborough which in a way restricts me a bit but I can't see my self moving away from here. (UK A)

Lifestyle Concerns

When the student-athletes were asked whether they perceived they had a balanced lifestyle, sixteen participants answered that they did think they had struck a balance between their education and their sport. This notion of

balance was immediately clarified by the interviewees who claimed that it did not necessarily imply a 50/50 split but it was a degree of balance that worked for them depending on their sporting and academic demands. However on introducing a third aspect comprising personal / social life there were a number of mixed reactions by the student-athletes on whether they had managed to strike a balance. For most of the interviewees being a student-athlete meant compromising to a large extent the personal and social components of their life:

I'd like to see my family more, I've got quite a few family living in the North of England, aunts and lots of cousins and my grandma who I am very close to. I get to see them two or three times a year but it's not enough. (UK A)

I do not have time to go and see my family much, I don't have time to go shopping with my friends but it is something that has to be done for the moment because I do believe that by studying now I will be able to have a better career in the future. I have made that decision and I'm happy with that. I still have friends who call me and I call them so I don't think I've lost anything along the way. (FIN F)

Two of the student-athletes expressed strong feelings in this regard claiming that even if they did want to have a social life, this was practically unrealistic as dedicating themselves fully to being an elite athlete and University student occupied all of their time:

It's much easier to study at university if you are not an athlete. If you are an athlete and you want to study then you have to be prepared that those are the only two things you have time for in your life so no personal/social life. (FIN A)

I think most people would find it hard because they would want to have a boyfriend, have a social life, go out drinking and all this stuff. I am not interested in boys at the moment and do not want to be in a relationship, I don't go out late so I think I can be quite successful at it because I am only concentrating on these two things, so just going from one to another. It doesn't leave room for anything else. (UK F)

6.5. Finding a 'Balance'

For the purpose of discussion on sport / life balance during the interviews, the student-athletes were asked to give a rough percentage to indicate the amount of time they dedicate to the three different components of their lives as illustrated in the three tables below. It is important to note that it was not the intention of the researcher to collect critical statistics for the purpose of analysis. Instead these figures were only an attempt by the interviewer to gain a better understanding on how these student-athletes were defining the notion of 'balance' as perceived in their current choice of lifestyle.

What had become apparent from the discussions that took place during the interviews with all student-athletes was that the components that made up a balanced lifestyle and the importance given to each of these elements by the interviewees, relied on a number of factors that needed to be taken into consideration during their life-course. Some of these factors were influenced by the personal attributes of the individual, such as the age, experience and philosophy while other factors depended on the level of support that the student-athletes received from their surrounding environment. From the student-athletes' comments it was concluded that the sporting component rarely gets compromised in order to achieve a balance (other than in the case of the British golfer) while social / personal elements are often the first to be sacrificed for the benefit of either sport or education.

Table 6.2 – Defining the level of balance in student-athletes' lives in Finland

FINLAND				
Athlete	Age	Sport	Education	Personal /Social
Athletics	32	Unable to define		
Basketball	28	30%	70% (job)	0%
Football	42	30%	60%	10%
Gymnastics	32	40%	30%	30%
Ice-Hockey	20	50%	30%	20%
Judo	22	70%	25%	5%

Table 6.3 - Defining the level of balance in student-athletes' lives in France

FRANCE				
Athlete	Age	Sport	Education	Personal /Social
Athletics	28	50%	40% (job)	10%
Badminton	31	30%	30%	40%
Handball	21	30%	25%	45%
Judo	27	60%	30%	10%
Swimming	22	60%	10%	30%
Synchronised Swimming	20	80%	20%	

Table 6.4 - Defining the level of balance in student-athletes' lives in the United Kingdom

UNITED KINGDOM				
Athlete	Age	Sport	Education	Personal /Social
Athletics	23	60%	30%	10%
Athletics	23	40%	30%	30%
Golf	22	30%	50%	20%
Gymnastics	22	80%	20%	
Rugby	22	60%	10%	30%
Triathlon	23	35%	35%	30%

Sporting Factors impact on 'balance' in student-athletes' lifestyles

The factors inherent in these athletes' sporting career related to the stage and level at which they were competing and therefore there was a marked difference between those athletes who were at the peak of their sporting career and those athletes who were either thinking about or had already made plans concerning retirement from elite sport. The French badminton player and the Finnish gymnast were illustrative examples of athletes who

had come to the end of their sporting career and therefore their priorities were quite evenly balanced between competing claims:

I think I have a pretty good balance in life. Not just for in sport and my education. I spend a lot of time with my family and we do things together all the time. We travel a lot as well...Right now I would say 30% is school, 30% badminton, 30% family and 10% social life with friends etc. Actually most of my friends are in badminton anyway so when we go to tournaments we hang out and do things together so they kind of overlap a little bit. It's the same with school. (FRA B)

Another aspect that needed to be addressed was whether the athletes were suffering from a long-term injury or not. In the case of the French swimmer her commitment to education drastically changed as a result of a severe injury and at the time of interview she was focussing almost exclusively on finishing her degree while undergoing rehabilitation:

I do consider that I have a balanced life now but it wasn't before the injury. Before my life was taken up with 80% sport and 20% for everything else with hardly any social life. Now for the last two years, my education is taking up about 70% of my time and I have the rest to do whatever I want. I love shopping and meeting friends. I have a boyfriend as well who is also a high level athlete and studying at university. (FRA F)

In a similar scenario one of the British athletes described how having suffered recurring long-term injuries not only hindered her athletic career development but led to more serious psychological issues as she struggled to come to terms with her injuries. She described how this proved to be the most testing period she had ever endured as she lost all perspective in life:

I did lose my perspective a bit and with so many injuries after each other as well it was difficult because when you just do your sport and cut off everything else that becomes your world so then when even a little thing goes wrong it seems like the world has ended. I was really down and depressed, I was on anti-depressants for a while, it wasn't balanced at all! (UK F)

The time of year and sporting season also affected the balance in student-athletes' lifestyles since they tended to socialise more with family and friends outside their sporting community during their off-season:

You have a couple of friends who understand why you cannot go out every Friday or Saturday. Why you don't call every day because you are bored but there aren't many of them in the end...and at some point you get to this stage where if you don't manage to see someone for a couple of months they go away. Relationships with friends move on very quickly. I was only socialising two months per year, July and August that was about it otherwise it was training and university. I think I was happy with that because when you want to achieve this sporting target then you do whatever it takes, you will do it! (FRA D)

The nature of the sport also influenced to some degree the student-athletes' choice of lifestyle. As the professional handball player remarked he felt privileged to belong to the most successful team sport in France as this allowed him ample opportunities to strike a balance between the three components of his life. Being on a professional contract with one of the top clubs in the country not only provided him with financial security but also allowed him to continue to invest in his academic development while maintaining personal relationships that were significant to him:

I do think I have a balanced life. Even after handball and lectures I still have some free time for myself. I get to go on holiday in December and June. And I can see my friends when I want to. I usually like to spend my free time with my girlfriend but I also like spending time with my family so I go and visit them very often. (FRA C)

Academic Factors impact on 'balance' in student-athletes' lifestyles

During the course of the interview, six of the student-athletes described how their first year at university was the most problematic to find the right balance between their academic and sporting commitments. They described how on entering university they experienced a sense of 'freedom', associated with living independently for the first time, the relatively flexible nature of university education (having no formal attendance requirement for attendance at lectures) and being invited to numerous social activities. All of these factors coupled with their general inexperience and lack of discipline when it came to organising their study times often resulted in student-athletes losing track of their two careers and suffering negative repercussions:

But then I came to university and you do not really have a strict schedule, there wasn't my mum giving me grief for not going to class, yet it was a bit of a reality check the first year. It was the first time I failed an exam in my first year here and I was thinking where did that come from?! (UK C)

It was nice because everybody was having this kind of crazy life for various reasons. I was meeting lots of people at the same time. In the first semester we were 500 students in the same room, after that half disappeared but it was quite nice. And obviously I was doing what I wanted to do so I was happy... My first year of university was probably the easiest one but where I got the worst mark. (FRA D)

All the Sports Science, Sport and Recreation Management and Physical Education departments were there. It was like a little village but it was also known as the 'athletes graveyard' because so many talented athletes had gone there, found the joys of drink and never came back from it. Thankfully I found a balance but in the first year there was quite a lot of drinking and enjoying myself involved! (UK E)

Priority given to the academic career also affected the level of balance in the student-athletes' lifestyle as the case of the British golfer illustrated. Having decided that he would concentrate on graduating from university first and then on establishing himself as a professional golfer meant that he dedicated a substantial amount of his time to his university studies. Unlike other athletes investigated in this research, the golfer's choice to focus primarily on his academic career was a conscious decision as he was taking into consideration the relatively longer career duration specific to his sport. Golf is a sport that can be played by athletes of all ages even at an elite level and therefore golfers do not have the added pressure of having to peak and retire from elite sport by a certain age as in the case of some other athletes. Therefore, as he argued during the interview he wanted to ensure that he would have a contingency plan first in case he did not succeed in earning a living from professional golf but which in the great scheme of life still allowed him ample opportunity to specialise in his sport.

Defining 'balance'

It is important to note at this stage that what constituted a balanced lifestyle implied a series of different things at different times to these student-athletes and therefore made it increasingly hard to conceptualise. However, from the interviewees' comments it was clear that what these student-athletes understood by the term a 'balanced lifestyle' contrasted starkly with how their own university friends, coaches, family members and other friends regarded it:

No I don't think I have a balanced lifestyle because I train really hard. I spend half of my day running! But it's the lifestyle that I want so I'm ok with it. I mean I see all my friends because I run with them and I live with my boyfriend so it's easy enough. It's what I want it to be! So maybe I don't have that particular type of social life where I go out every weekend and I go shopping and definitely not balanced in the way that students expect it to be but balanced enough for me. (UK A)

The critical factor to keep in mind was that all athletes interviewed admitted that they were all willing to make sacrifices in other aspects of their life in pursuit of their "Olympic dream", most notably their personal and social lives if this was required of them in order to make it to the winners' podium:

Yes I did feel at some points in life that I'm compromising the rest of my life for gymnastics. My life is just gym, gym, gym! That's all I want to do at the moment so...it's the way it's got to be. I don't mind it. I just get on with it. I'd do more if I needed to...(UK C)

Yes I do think it's balanced but sometimes of course I do feel that the day should have more hours or that my time is just running faster than anyone's. It would be nice if I had some extra time to spend with my friends but they understand my situation and that's fine. So, judo – 70%, education – 25%, and personal life – 5%. I'm making the decision to lead my life this way at the moment because it's the Olympic year and I really want to concentrate on my sports. (FIN F)

I say athletics is 60% of my life but that is only an indication of the time that I spend but in reality it is 100% because athletics is a lifestyle. And as a lifestyle it does affect a lot of other things that you do. I am not bitter about it or would like to do it differently because I could easily choose to just spend that 60% and the rest of the time do whatever I want but that's not the way I want to do it. I want to be good and I think in order to be that good you have to give it a 100% commitment. (UK A)

6.6. Evidence in support of the benefits in pursuing a dual career

Despite the number of challenges that emerged from these student-athletes' life accounts, seventeen out of the eighteen participants strongly believed that they 'needed' to retain and support both the educational and sporting aspects of their lives in some capacity. The range of responses justifying this 'need' were varied and reflected a number of thoughts, beliefs and concerns that these student-athletes were taking into consideration to help them negotiate their dual career path in the best possible manner to fit their lifestyle. The responses have been broadly classified under nine sub-headings but it is important to note at this stage that each of the student-athletes did not belong to one category exclusively and tended to agree with a number of other justifications given by different athletes in other sports and other countries.

6.6.1. The need to focus on more than one aspect of life

One of the reasons that athletes gave for wanting both of their careers in their life is that they needed to have both. The French badminton player and the Finnish judoka were the two athletes who explicitly expressed this need as they strongly believed that this was the better way of leading their life:

When I had to give badminton priority I had to stop the studying especially when I had important tournaments on and then focus on the studies when I had less important competitions. It was never consistent but I always managed to do both and I think I needed to do both at the same time... That's the thing with me I am not the type to be just up for one thing only, I cannot do that! (FRA B)

It has been a little hard to explain to our national coaches that I'm playing judo and also studying because the head coach he's a fireman so he didn't continue studying and he doesn't really understand. He also wants me to stop studying now and then perhaps continue after. We had some discussions about this and I tried to explain why I need to do it this way because I am that kind of person I want something more than just judo. (FIN F)

6.6.2. Belief that the two aspects; education and sport support each other

The second justification stems from a strong belief that some of the student-athletes held that in fact their two careers supported each other. As the Finnish football player argued there were skills that you learn in one sphere of your life which can successfully be transferred to the benefit of another. From his extensive experience he observed how in both careers learning was an ongoing process as there is an upward curve that one has to follow as a student-athlete. Over time as the two life domains generally proven mutually beneficial one becomes a better student and athlete as a consequence:

I think it's important because when you are interested in going to school in developing yourself and getting to know new things you develop your analytical ability and that's what you need in football and you also need the hard work in the long-term. If you think of a football player it takes years to learn how to play football and it's the same with school, there's a learning curve you follow and I think those two things support each other. (FIN C)

Most of the time I am the type who thinks that they (education and sport) actually support each other. (FIN E)

Because from sport I've learnt that if I'm going to do something I'm going to do it to the best of my ability so that's my attitude towards my education as well. (FIN F)

6.6.3. Putting things in perspective

Another explanation that most of the student-athletes agreed on related to the importance of trying to keep things in perspective in their lives. Interviewees explained how sometimes it was very easy to get consumed by the demands of either one of their careers to the point that it engulfed their whole life. Although some athletes might argue that if their sporting career was developing according to plan this was not too great a risk, the student-athletes did warn that it could make life very difficult at critical times. Therefore, they were strongly in favour of keeping things in a balanced perspective even on a daily basis as learning how to deal with smaller

challenges would eventually help surmount the tougher experiences in the long run:

Last year when I was feeling a little bit down with some things I used to go out for a run and I used to feel so much better after. I could put things in perspective and alter my mood. It was a nice break from revision, to clear your head a bit. (UK B)

Even on a daily basis sometimes you have a bad training session or a bad game it's so much easier to deal with if you turn your attention and focus on school work for a little while rather than let yourself get angry and disappointed. It takes your mind off negative things. If you only think about football, you think and think throughout the day and then try to sleep and all you can think about is this horrible game. It works the other way round as well, sometimes you are stressed with school work and if you run for a couple of hours it helps you deal with it better. (FIN C)

6.6.4. Experience of dedicating time exclusively to elite sport with minimal improvement

Another motive given for wanting to combine a dual career was provided by the British gymnast who just like three other student-athletes interviewed had already spent a period of time dedicating his time exclusively to elite sport. A number of the student-athletes such as the Finnish gymnast and the French swimmers had admitted that they did manage to convince themselves to focus solely on their athletic career as they all had previously thought that having more time to train would make them better athletes. This kind of decision was usually taken following promising results in an international competition but all of these athletes discovered after some time that the improvement in their athletic performances was negligible and they therefore decided to take up education once again:

After my 'A' levels I took a year out and just trained full-time twice a day for a year and I improved a little bit but not as much, so I thought I've been at my club for 13 years, maybe it's time to try something else. (UK C)

6.6.5. Intellectual stimulation

Linked to the factors discussed in the previous section, one of the French athletes explained how it took just one semester to realise that having only her sport to focus on was not the right decision to make as she missed the intellectual stimulation to be derived from being involved in education. As she described spending so many hours per day doing repetitive physical activities sometimes on her own became too mechanical and boring and she therefore immediately resumed her studies:

When I was finishing the Baccalaureate it was very hard to juggle everything at the same time so then in my second year I decided to focus on the sport over education, since we got all the good results. I stopped classes for a semester but it was not a good option, I needed to study because I was going a bit crazy! (FRA F)

The Finnish judoka did not even give any consideration to terminating or postponing her studies despite the relentless insistence by her National team coach to focus exclusively on her elite sporting career. She also insisted that education provided an opportunity to exercise her brain in a different way which she deemed to be important:

As soon as I graduated from high school I went straight to university. I need to do both because if I just had to do judo my head would explode. I need the books to concentrate on something else. I also enjoy spending time at university...(FIN F)

6.6.6. Perform better at the sport

The next type of justification came from the two judokas who strongly believed that being in education helped them perform better at the sport. The Finnish athlete took a more pragmatic approach and argued that through combining her education and elite sport she was able to access some grants from the Finnish government which enabled her to live comfortably without having to work to sustain herself, which allowed her ample time to dedicate to her sport:

I am not sure if being in education has had an effect on my sport but if it did it's definitely been in a positive way. I've never been in a better situation than now in order to be able to combine my sport and my education. The study also gave me a time to concentrate better on my sport. But if I had to just concentrate on the sport I think I will go a little bit over board and it will do me more harm than good. (FIN F)

The French athlete on the other hand discussed this justification from a more psychological angle and although she admitted that she did not have a rational explanation to describe why she felt this way, she genuinely believed that being in education and especially being under pressure academically helped her concentration levels during competition:

I think I just understood that the more under pressure I was at university the better I performed at judo which is quite interesting actually. In my second year I started to understand that so I guess that my vision of university started to change and became much more important. For example if I was in exam period with competition in the middle or the end I did better at the judo than if it was just a random period. I do not have an explanation for that. I didn't know whether because I was more concentrated during this period or because I was even more organised. I mean I'm organised generally but you need to plan minute by minute your weight, where you have to be whether locally or somewhere else in Europe. It could be that I was confident with my exams or confident in my sport. I cannot explain this! (FRA D)

6.6.7. 'Safety net'

Another justification for having an academic career alongside a sporting one was because the student-athletes understood that they needed a contingency plan in case their athletic career did not develop in the way they expected. The reasons for such an eventuality were plenty but the ones that concerned this set of student-athletes the most were those aspects that they felt they had no control over, such as injuries or failing to make the grade at the highest level as two of the British athletes and the French badminton player commented:

I definitely came to university for two things, yes I was good at running but I also wanted to get a degree just in case the running did not work out. As I said before I never wanted to just run. Mum always said that you need something to fall back on because you might get injured,

break a leg for example and take ages to come back or not come back at all. You definitely need something to fall back on. I came to university to get a degree, it just worked out well that running was such of high quality here as well so I could do both. (UK B)

I wanted to come to a university where I could still pursue golf but also got a good degree that put me in good stead as a contingency plan in case the golf did not work out. (UK D)

No I don't think I would choose to concentrate on just the sport, here I cannot just live off badminton. I mean if badminton was like football or tennis, yes why not! But it's not, we don't have millions and you don't have a lot of options after you stop. If you get injured for example, your career is over and if you have nothing to do after, it can be very dangerous and difficult. (FRA B)

6.6.8. More to life than sport

The rationale provided by two of the female student-athletes in wanting to combine their elite sport with University education was based on their conviction that there were other worthwhile pursuits in their life alongside sports. Although both the Finnish basketball player and the British tri-athlete acknowledged that they dedicated significant amounts of time to their sport this did not mean that other aspects in their lives were not equally important. For the British athlete this realisation came soon after she suffered a long-term injury, having 're-discovered' her artistic side in the interim period before her recovery. Linked to the third reason above, she explained how art had helped her regain some perspective in life and she was determined to maintain this newly found balance:

All the money I get from my big paintings so the ones that cost around £950, I just donate to the Fairtrade Innovation Fund so basically I just write a cheque from those paintings to them. It's something that I got involved in ever since I started selling my work. What had happened is that in the last couple of years because I got bogged down with all triathlon stuff, and suddenly realising how trivial it is in the great scheme of the world so I really wanted to be involved in something worthwhile. (UK F)

One of the most important thing for me was that I love basketball of course but it wasn't something that I wanted to do my whole life. There's always been something else important for me and obviously I

cannot say that basketball was just a hobby because I worked really hard at it but in a way it is, it's not my life. (FIN B)

6.6.9. Life stage and preparation for post-athletic careers

The last justification related more to how these student-athletes were perceiving the end stage of their athletic career and their potential post-athletic career direction. By being in education they believed that they are bettering their chances at being able to secure an employment of their choice when it came to choosing a full-time profession:

Well the thought of playing professionally abroad was always there, I was thinking of doing it as well while I was still studying but then I wanted to graduate first because I was thinking that if I go and play abroad I might stay there and never graduate. And it was important to me to graduate for the future. (FIN B)

Well I knew I had to get a profession, gymnastics could never be my profession and even at best it couldn't last very long. (FIN D)
I wanted to go to university to get a good job in the future so that was the idea. (FIN C)

With the injuries now it gets a bit difficult. I mean before I used to work so hard to qualify for the Olympics especially for Athens when I wanted to represent France. But this time round because it is the end of my career I feel a bit different. For example now a big challenge for me is to pass this *Professorat de sport* more than anything else. If I had to choose between going to Beijing and passing the *Professorat de sport* now I would not hesitate. But that's now, before it used to be very different! (FRA B)

These thoughts tended to feature strongly in the older athletes' minds as they were naturally nearing the end of their athletic career, however younger athletes were still aware of this eventuality as the British athlete's comments illustrated:

I feel safe in the knowledge that at least I'm going to have a degree and that I will get a career after. I am glad that I am in a sport that allows me to do this as well unlike a footballer for example who cannot go to university. I am glad that I have the qualifications. (UK A)

6.7. Conclusion

The first section of this chapter has provided a detailed account of the factors that student-athletes themselves have identified as being instrumental to an optimal dual career development. The first level of factors concerned the personal attributes that student-athletes acquired with particular emphasis on the development of transferable skills. It has been argued in the literature that fostering skills such as leadership, team-work, effective decision-making and mature career planning can help to “counterbalance the negative aspects of the elite performer’s experience” (Miller and Kerr, 2002b:144). Some of the negative elements that have been typically discussed in both the literature and in the research findings for this thesis were ineffective coping with both normative and non-normative transitions, and over-identification with the athletic role at the risk of identity foreclosure, which could in turn deter post-athletic career planning. Therefore, the perceived value of developing a range of skills as it has been demonstrated by the student-athletes interviews is clear. Miller and Kerr (2002b) extend this argument as they observe that such skills are not only critical tools to manage a dual career in academia and sport but have life long value as such skills “address the whole person issues including psychological, emotional, personal, social, moral, and intellectual development” (Miller and Kerr, 2002b:144).

Thus, there has been an increased effort by individual institutions, which have invested in Life skills programmes to ensure that student-athletes are being assisted to develop such skills as are needed to achieve their academic and sporting potential. The US has been prominent in such provision, introducing the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) CHAMPS/Life Skills program in 1994 which addressed five core areas of academics, athletics, personal development, service to the community and career development (Carr and Bauman, 1993 cited in Miller and Kerr, 2002). By contrast, in Europe it is only a recent development that academic institutions are investing in such programmes. For example Loughborough University in the UK launched its Performance Life Skills Programme in 2008, which is constituted of a number of mentoring and workshop sessions based

on skills and abilities aimed at teaching student-athletes how to take more responsibility over their decisions, goals and achievements (Loughborough University website, 2009).

The development of such life skills programmes has implications also for the preparation and integration of elite athletes into the labour market both during, and at the end of their, elite sporting career. During the annual UK Sport Performance Lifestyle Conference in May, 2008, Henwood and Stephens argued that employers in industry are very interested in recruiting elite athletes which puts them in good stead to make a smooth transition into the workplace of choice. In their presentation entitled 'Athlete Employability Skills: Current Industry trends and Perceptions' the presenters identified seventeen most commonly sought employability skills including decision-making, problem-solving, planning and organisation, oral communication, written communication, negotiating, adapting, leadership, business awareness, researching information, flexibility, IT literacy, time management, numeracy, team working, ability to prioritise and taking initiative. The underlying message of this presentation was that some elite athletes may not be aware of the full range of skills they had already developed or how these could be transferred. The speakers therefore the speakers urged greater awareness of, and guidance on, how to hone these abilities in order that athletes can 'sell' themselves more effectively to future employers. These findings are broadly similar to those developed by Argent (2006) study of perceived transferability of skills among coaches and human resource specialists. Taking into consideration the current working climate where Baruch (2004) argued that careers themselves are in a constant state of transition it becomes increasingly important for these student-athletes to enhance their employability through the development of these generic life skills.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has also recognised the value of developing skills through the establishment of programmes such as the 'Athletes' Career Programme'. During the 1st International Athletes' Forum in

2002, Olympic athletes had voiced their concern over the lack of support they encountered on retiring from elite sport. Having established that most athletes are dedicating themselves increasingly to the pursuit of athletic excellence which requires a significant time commitment, sometimes to the detriment of other aspects of personal development, the IOC felt that it had a responsibility towards its athletes as they constitute the core of the Olympic Movement (IOC, 2008). Therefore, in 2005 the IOC signed a partnership with Adecco (a multinational human resource management company) in order to support elite athletes to make a successful transition from the world of elite sport to the job market. The 'Athletes' Career Programme' objectives are two-fold: the first is to help athletes recognise the range of skills that they have acquired and show them how to transfer these into the business world; and the second deals with specific job placements that match the skills of the athletes to the demands of the employer. To date more than 3,000 elite athletes from over 30 countries have already benefited from this programme, with Finland being one of the countries which had established an agreement in 2005. Table 6.5 below shows how more than 100 Finnish athletes have already taken advantage of this initiative. By contrast, in 2008 the UK and France were still in the process of negotiation to establish such a programme which is expected to run until at least 2012 (IOC, 2008).

Table 6.5 – Elite athletes participation in Athletes' Career Programme

Athlete Participation in the programme from the launch through 2007	Country	Year the country launched the programme
Less than 50 athletes in the programme	Hungary	2005
	Mexico	2006
	New Zealand	2005
	Poland	2005
	Portugal	2007
	Romania	2005
51-100 athletes in the programme	Denmark	2005
	Norway	2005
	Slovenia	2005
101- 250 athletes	Finland	2005
	Spain	2005
	Sweden	2005
More than 250 athletes	Germany	2005
	Italy	2005
	Switzerland	2005
	USA	2005

(IOC data, 2008)

In one of the few research studies conducted with elite athletes at university in the UK, McKenna and Dunstan-Lewis (2004) highlighted the fact that establishing priorities of the 'student' and 'athlete' roles was one of the major areas of concern for student-athletes. Contrary to popular opinion that student-athletes were primarily focussed on their sport and only marginally concerned with their education, this study illustrated how the athletes were 'high achievers in both the sport and academic domains'. Therefore, this implied that in order to fulfil the responsibilities that these roles entailed, student-athletes had to find strategies that helped establish priorities at various stages of their lives. In line with the conclusions of the research undertaken by McKenna and Dunstan-Lewis (2004) the research findings of the current study consolidate their observations as seventeen out of the eighteen student-athletes interviewed have also reiterated the importance of achieving equally well in both their careers:

I am on a first (the highest degree classification) so I guess I am doing pretty well, but I work really hard...I am the kind of person that was not going to be happy to just get a 2.2 or a 2.1 if I could get a first. (UK A)

Thus, in order to continue to progress well in both careers the student-athletes interviewed had to find strategies that facilitated the way they managed their career demands. From the student-athletes' accounts of such strategies it is clear that there is not simply one coherent approach in to their prioritisation of tasks. As has been illustrated in the preceding sections of this chapter some interviewees had decided to give equal importance to both careers at all times, some gave priority to one career over another whenever it was possible and others opted to continue shifting priorities as they negotiated a dual career path. Given the variety of approaches described by interviewees as contributing to the successful management of a dual career, it is clear that there is not an 'ideal' strategy defined as successful by all, but rather strategies are dependent on a number of factors. One set of elements is inherent to the individual and includes aspects such as his / her general perceptions on education and elite sport, their age, stage of career (both athletic and academic), whether they were suffering from long-term injury or whether they were enjoying a period of significant sporting achievement. The

second set of factors encompassed more external elements and included the demands imposed by both University education and elite sport which the student-athletes had to fulfil.

The above observations highlight two important factors, one that student-athletes need to learn how to prioritise their time while the second relates more to the challenges that balancing the demands of academia, sport and personal / social life present to individuals such as the participants interviewed in this study. The conclusions drawn by Amara, Aquilina, Henry and PMP (2004) in relation to achieving the right balance by student-athletes indicated that it was difficult to strike a balance due to the increasing demands of training and competition placed upon them. It has also been observed that 'sport is very rarely the aspect of an athlete's life that is compromised' and instead participants opted to forego education and social activities first. The account of the French swimmer interviewed for this current research study resonates with the report findings contributed by Amara et al., (2004) as he argued how his sporting demands have dictated his choice of lifestyle leaving him with no other alternative than having to sacrifice his academic studies. Two other student-athletes confirmed how they hardly had a social life to discuss as their day was consumed by sporting and academic demands. In fact fifteen of the participants interviewed had commented on their restricted personal / social aspects of their lives however the level of compromise did depend to a significant degree upon their sport and individual decisions.

In a report commissioned by UK Sport, Douglas and Carless (2006a:6) observed that athletes' perception of balance in life differed in relation to age and experience:

Some younger athletes take the perspective that other aspects of life must be and were being sacrificed in the interest of their sport career. More experienced athletes take the perspective that balance is essential in regard to both performance and life as a whole.

These observations are congruent to the findings of this study as the more experienced interviewees claimed to have had achieved a more balanced lifestyle. However, it is important to note at this stage that younger student-athletes still appreciated the value of striking a balance in life and they had strived to ensure that they achieved this. Although, they admitted that their perception of a balanced lifestyle differed from that of other individuals whether they were family members or friends they still believed that one needed to find a level of balance that worked for them.

However, in order to achieve this balance student-athletes argued how essential it was from their point of view that they had a supporting network of people, who were willing to help them cope with the demands of a dual career together with a conducive social and physical environment that was flexible to accommodate their needs. Miller, Salmela and Kerr (2002) argued that maintaining a balanced lifestyle should not only be the responsibility of the student-athlete but also the wider network of people surrounding him/her. This network of people which from the observations made in this study constituted parents, coaches, peers, academic staff and other professional staff within sports, had to endeavour to cater for specific needs that student-athletes had. The participants described how most times when they had sought the help of one of these support network of people it had been granted, whether it was for emotional, financial, academic, psychological or physical assistance.

Therefore, this research findings suggested that defining 'balance' as a concept was a highly subjective matter and although the concept was readily understood by all participants, what constituted balance differed from one student-athlete account to another. Perhaps the critical emphasis here for this network of people to understand is that the notion of balance is important to student-athletes but there is not a single universal definition. Notwithstanding understanding the notion of balance and the feeling of having a balanced lifestyle from a student-athlete perspective is crucial to the overall management of a dual career.

Another important aspect that interviewees emphasised was that environmental factors characterising the sporting and academic institutions had a role to play in how successful they were in achieving a balanced lifestyle. The five French student-athletes who trained at INSEP regarded their elite training centre as an 'ideal' environment to be able to train and study simultaneously as it provided quality academic opportunities alongside elite training programmes. It was argued that the proximity of high-performance training facilities and classrooms, having a flexible academic programme that took into consideration the requirements of elite sport together with an established support network of academics and sporting staff, all contributed to the successful management of a dual career. It has been more generally acknowledged that these factors play a key role in the development and achievement of student-athletes that even universities which are accommodating elite athletes are ensuring that they incorporate all of these elements. Data from this research study has illustrate various initiatives found in the three nations, whether through a scholarship system or a legal acknowledgement of the student-athlete status which ensured that flexible services were provided. However, as the participants discussed during their interviews, even when all these factors were available to them there were still some challenges in combining a dual career that had to be addressed, whether it was by the individual, the university or the sporting community.

The interviewees were asked to provide some constructive comments on their experience to date that might be useful for prospective student-athletes who were thinking of pursuing a university career. On an individual level student-athletes emphasised the importance of taking time to evaluate the university choices that were available in both their home country and abroad. Three of the British participants recommended that if possible it is advisable to speak to older student-athletes about their experiences in order to be informed better. Although deciding to go abroad to study was regarded by those interviewees who considered it as being a significant risk, and although none of the student-athletes interviewed took up this opportunity, it was still a decision that had to be considered very carefully. The retrospective

comments presented by the student-athletes on their choice of university, department and degree indicated that these were crucial decisions that determined whether they were able to combine a dual career eventually. This chapter has illustrated how three of the student-athletes had to change their initial choice of degree since this was not compatible with their elite sporting lifestyle while four others had enrolled for various academic degrees but had to terminate their studies at various stages and opt for an alternative at a later date. An insightful observation that was reiterated by a number of interviewees was that prospective student-athletes should not simply assume that a particular university/ training institute or choice of degree was going to be more compatible with their athletic career since there were nuances inherent within each system that were difficult to discern beforehand. For example two of the French athletes commented how on choosing a degree that specialised in Physical Education, proved to be difficult to combine with their athletic schedules as it placed high demands on their time and therefore they had had to change their degree programme. Another French athlete described how even if a student-athlete belongs to an institution such as INSEP, there might still be challenges with time schedules that could impinge on his/her academic development.

Other issues with time management were voiced by student-athletes in relation to their athletic careers. It has been widely acknowledged that with the increasing competitiveness in international sport and the growing professionalization of elite sport more time is being invested to ensure that elite athletes achieve their sporting targets (Conzelmann and Nagel, 2003; IOC, 2008). Having to attend training camps and competitions away from university also has been found to add pressure for student-athletes and thus various alternative measures had to be explored.

Another type of challenge related to the specific 'culture' of certain sports where there were marked gender differences and where academic attainment was not appreciated. Two Finnish female athletes observed how there was a disparity between the professional status of the game in their home country and the semi-professional status of the female players. They

explained how there was a much higher proportion of men who achieved full professional status and could earn a living from their sport while the proportion of women who were able to do so remained sparse. This had implications for the effective management of a dual career as women were still expected to work either part-time or full-time to support themselves financially.

The Finnish judoka explained how she had to overcome a number of challenges to effectively cope with the dual demands of her careers since she became part of the national selection. She described how some of the National team coaching staff opposed her furthering her studies at university since they thought that this would interfere with her athletic development. In spite of her many attempts to convince her national team coach otherwise, by the time of the interview they had still been unable to come to a mutual understanding of her choice of lifestyle.

Despite the number of challenges that the student-athletes interviewed had to face in both their athletic and academic careers, seventeen out of the eighteen participants considered themselves successful in managing both. It is however important to reiterate at this point that the choice of sample of interviewees for this study was based on those student-athletes who had already some experience of university education and therefore one might argue that the chances of these particular individuals to be able to combine a dual career successfully might have been higher than those elite athletes who had not chosen to go to university.

In conclusion, having identified some of the opportunities and challenges that exist in combining a dual career successfully as highlighted by the interviewees within the three specific national systems, the next step of the research process will attempt to assess how these student-athletes worldviews articulate with the policy-makers' point of view. Such rich athlete-based accounts will be argued to have clear policy implications, informing thinking in relation to how policy makers, administrators, educators and

coaches might enhance student -athlete experience at university, which will address more fully the third and final aim of this research study.

Chapter 7 – Discussion

7.1. Introduction

Having acquired a deeper understanding of the life experiences of student-athletes in combining a dual career successfully (presented in the previous two chapters), this chapter aims to address the implications of these findings for the key stake-holders involved that include: the student-athlete; the university; the elite training centre; the nation state and the European Union. By clarifying the roles, rights and responsibilities of each of these stakeholders this chapter serves as a starting point to highlight evidence of good practice while beginning to elicit some of the policy concerns and inequitable treatment that exist in relation to student-athletes pursuing a dual career. This chapter is therefore intended to develop further the discussion on the emergent policy patterns within this particular context that were outlined in Chapter 4. The value of this chapter lies in illustrating that having adopted a 'bottom-up' approach to inform policy, has served to identify challenges that exist at every level that include the individual; institutional; national and international. Thus the second half of this chapter aims to answer the third research question driving this study by suggesting ways in which some of these barriers can be overcome with the support of practitioners and policy-makers in an attempt at optimising the life experiences of future student-athletes.

7.2. Roles, Rights and Responsibilities of Key Stakeholders

Crucial to an evaluation of the systems summarised in the typology outlined in the methodology chapter of this thesis is an understanding of what these policy systems are seeking to achieve. This may be expressed in terms of a balance between the obligations and the rights of the various stakeholders: the athlete; the university; the nation-state; the elite training centre / professional academy; and the European Union. Where rights are acknowledged to exist, for example, the State can 'expect' of the athlete a sustained attempt to fulfil athletic potential on the basis of support from the

public purse, while the athlete can “expect” from the State equity/comparable treatment in terms of the educational experience delivered. Equity in this context is probably best conceptualised as equity of throughput (rather than resource input or output/performance). Equity of throughput implies access to equivalent amounts of tutor support, time for preparation of assignments and examinations and the freedom to undertake examinations without undue pressure of international sporting performance.

Table 7.1 summarises the roles, rights and responsibilities of the primary stakeholders in the system. In an ideal world these three ‘Rs’ would perhaps constitute the basis of the design and implementation of an elite sports support system. However, based on this analysis one can begin to outline the kinds of issues that exist and which the policy system might reasonably be expected to address. Two policy concerns are identified below and illustrate the kinds of policy opportunity for each of these Nation states.

Table 7.1: A summary of Roles, Rights and Responsibilities of the main stakeholders

1. The student-athlete

Roles: Citizen; Athletic representative of the state

Rights: access to education; support from state and from the university (where there is an implicit or explicit ‘contract’) in meeting demands of sport / education

Responsibilities: to the university and the state.

2. The University

Roles: provision of educational, sporting and lifestyle management services

Rights: responsible representation by athlete

Responsibilities: to maintain the quality of provision while enhancing athlete well being.

3. The Elite Training Centre / Professional Academy

Roles: Developer of sporting skills on behalf of (a) club, (b) the National Sports Federation;

Rights: Return on investment in terms of access to athlete/player services.

Responsibilities: to commercial stakeholders to provide return on investment; to ensure that commercial exploitation does not impinge on athlete/players’ rights

4. The Member State

Roles: Guarantor of social rights; allocator / regulator of educational and sporting resources

Rights: to be represented responsibly by athletes supported

Responsibilities: equality of treatment of citizens; where additional demands placed on citizens, additional resources provided.

5. The European Union

Roles: Enhancing the knowledge base of Member States and highlighting inequities; protection of the individual's rights against the Member State (ECJ);

Rights: for Member states to conform to appropriate legislation; to negotiate with Member States where shared competence exists

Responsibilities: subsidiarity principle applies, responsible (either alone or jointly with Member States) for resource allocation or regulation

(i) Policy concern 1: by the professional sports academy

Although the focus has been on universities and for sports such as football in the UK the interaction between professional clubs, their academies and higher education is marginal, in some instances such as rugby academies in France, a significant proportion of players up to the under 23 age category are engaged in higher education. In the French context clubs have targets to be met, in terms of annual academic goals, for each individual recruited to an academy. Failure to meet these targets for more than 80% of the academy recruits results in loss of significant funding to the clubs which operate the academy (Nier, 2004). This is a financial lever employed in an attempt to prevent abuse of the system by professional clubs which promote the player academy experience as having a significant educational element but which may fail to deliver such opportunities for many of their trainees. Given that in most professional academy systems for team sports fewer than 15% of trainees are likely to find work as full time professionals, the dominant market position of major clubs' academies leaves young people vulnerable to being used by clubs in the process of distillation of sporting talent which will not benefit them directly in economic terms if they are part of the large majority who do not secure professional contracts, and who as part of the process of talent development do not receive appropriate education and/ or training.

(ii) Policy concern 2: by the nation-state (or the national federation)

The placing of excessive demands and expectations on young elite sportspersons by the nation-state (usually in the form of national institutes of sport or national elite training centres e.g. INSEP) or by national federations, in terms of commitment of time and other resources can effectively deny these young people access to educational opportunities. When nation-states are funding bodies which place such individuals in positions where educational opportunities are sacrificed, one would argue that there is a moral obligation to compensate athletes with privileged access to resources to ensure that their rights as ordinary citizens to appropriate educational opportunities are not prejudiced.

The case of the French swimmer is an illustrative example of this type of policy concern as he struggled to complete his academic degree due to the increasingly high demands being placed on his time by his sport. He noted how following his best sporting performance at the Athens Olympic Games in 2004 he was constantly being pursued by sponsors and other individuals from the elite sporting world which put a strain on both his sporting career and personal life. He admitted that in retrospect he would have appreciated having some guidance / support on how to handle such success as it subsequently led to a negative experience.

In the context of France, Bayle, Durand and Nikonoff, (2008) point out that an increasing number of French athletes are finding themselves in similar vulnerable situations as more demands on their time are being made by sport federations / elite training centres on the one hand and private / commercial organisations on the other. There does not seem to be any regulatory framework to help the athlete decide on how much time s/he can dedicate to each of these entities and therefore the authors envisage a situation where “different organisations – clubs, national teams, and national, regional, and world organising bodies – keeping a tally of the number of dates that accrue to each” (2008:160). This situation calls for a reassessment of the demands made by each of the stakeholders involved, where the ‘ownership’ of an athlete’s time is reclaimed back by the athlete and where appropriate support is provided to guide the negotiations made by the athlete.

7.3. Implications for Policy

7.3.1. The Role of the European Union

As was noted in chapter 4 of this thesis, the European Union has demonstrated a significant concern for the protection of athletes in relation to education and training and their integration into the workforce in a post athletic career. This is explicit for example in a number of statements in

documents such as the sporting Annex to the Nice Treaty, and to the conclusions of the French Presidency delivered in Nice in 2000, and in the recent White Paper on Sport. Promotion of equity or at least good practice thus remains a key concern.

However the potential role for the EU in addressing this policy problem in sport might seem at first sight to be limited. Even if a competence in sport were to be attained, the Lisbon Treaty provisions allow only for a supporting competence. Radical action such as harmonisation of policy in areas governed by supporting competences is explicitly precluded. Nevertheless despite the limitations on practical action one of the responsibilities of the EU is to highlight unequal treatment of individuals (in this case young elite sportspersons) in different national contexts, particularly where such practices will, for example, promote social exclusion. The commissioning of the research reported here, and other related projects, and the dissemination of their findings reflects this concern. The EU can thus be an important vehicle for keeping this issue on the policy agenda.

However, this problem is as much a problem of education policy as it is of sports policy. If we consider the area of education, which is itself a matter of a supporting competence, the EU has demonstrated that it can foster good practice. The Education and Culture DG describes its role in the following terms:

While each Member State is in charge of its own education and training system, co-ordinated action can help achieve common aims. The European Commission focuses on two aspects: firstly, co-operation with national authorities and European stakeholders on improving policies and exchanging good practice, and secondly the development and administration of funding programmes. (European Commission, 2008a)

Funding in favour of educational provision for elite athletes might well be fostered under existing education programmes, such as the Lifelong Learning Programme, in particular the elements on “policy cooperation and innovation in lifelong learning” which is a core element of this programme. There are some direct actions such as the funding of the development of materials for

distance learning / e-learning / distributed learning across national boundaries which for example, might allow smaller states which do not enjoy economies of scale, to develop tailored programmes for athletes.

The development and diversity of the policy activity of the EU in education is an indication of the room for manoeuvre for policy action even in an area of complementary competence. Given the size of budgets spent on developing elite sports performance in the Olympic Games and other global competitions by Member States, the phenomenon is likely to continue to be of significance, and thus one can anticipate policy action even if a sporting competence fails to add to the EU's formal powers.

7.3.2. The Role of the Nation State

Since it has been noted in the preceding section that the European Union has a fairly limited competence to act in this matter, it can be argued that it is the Nation State therefore that has to assume responsibility to ensure that student-athletes have access to opportunities and support to combine a dual career successfully. However, Bergsgard et al., (2007:153) observed that the level of 'priority given to elite sport varies considerably between countries, due in part to different national cultural values and traditions, political and administrative structures, and relationships between governmental and civil society sport organisations'. Congruent to this argument, the typology of approaches to service provision for student-athletes illustrated in Chapter 3 of this thesis demonstrated how the level of Government intervention varied across European States. This variability of response in national systems in relation to these dual demands of academia and elite sport ranged from negligible provision to established structures backed by legislation.

France was one of the selected comparative nation states representative of Type 1 in the typology, where there is state legislation placed on higher education institutions to provide flexible measures for their student-athletes. Interviewees participating in this research study were fully aware of their right

not to be discriminated against while they were studying at university as the French judoka explained:

Whenever competitions and exams clashed I didn't do the exam and then they find me a suitable slot in my time-table and will do it then. I didn't have to wait for the re-sit period of the other students to take my exam. This is by law in France, that if you are a high level athlete you are allowed to sit the exam some other time and miss certain lectures. (FRA D)

It can therefore be concluded that since the French government continues to have an active involvement in facilitating the education of elite athletes, (whether training in Olympic and / or professional sport), and in monitoring whether educational targets are met throughout an elite athlete's sporting career, the likelihood is that most student-athletes will be better able to combine a dual career successfully. With the establishment of training centres like INSEP, where training venues and lecture halls are within close proximity, together with a range of qualified professionals in both academia and elite sport working around the student-athletes' needs, this environment was considered to be 'ideal' by the five interviewees who had trained there. Therefore, the role of the Nation state in this case can be argued to be to sustain the efforts made in this regard and to continue to monitor closely student-athletes' dual career progression.

Finland was the second comparative state representative of the second approach, where the state promotes formal agreements to ensure that student-athletes' needs are being met at University level, for example through 'permissive legislation'. During the ICSSPE Symposium held in Berlin in 2007, Merikoski-Silius reported the results of a survey that was conducted in 2004 which indicated that 83% of Finnish Members of Parliament thought that it was important for Finnish elite athletes to be successful at the international level. However, she also reiterated that this success was not desired at all costs and that the government had therefore launched a number of initiatives such as scholarship awards to assist with the management of a dual career.

It is generally acknowledged that education is regarded highly by Finnish people and in fact Finland was the highest performing country in an assessment exercise undertaken by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) through the established Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). More than 60 countries (including France and the United Kingdom) have taken part in PISA so far and the surveys, which are carried out every three years (the latest being in 2006) allow countries to track their progress in meeting key learning goals. PISA is the only international education survey to measure the knowledge and skills of 15-year-olds, an age at which students in most countries are nearing the end of their compulsory time in school. (www.pisa.oecd.org)

From the interviews undertaken in Finland for this research study, the general conclusion was that all student-athletes regarded their education seriously even for those individuals who were in sports that stereotypically inculcated an anti-intellectual mentality such as professional football and combat sports (McGillvray and McIntosh, 2006). This research findings further consolidate the conclusions drawn from a survey investigating 425 Finnish athletes' educational and vocational profiles, conducted in 2006 where overall student-athletes were seen to "follow the same academic paths as their non-sporting peers, while those elite athletes aged 20-29 have a even higher level of academic qualification attainment to date than the Finnish population of the same age" (Merikoski-Silius, 2006:58). Other findings from the latter study showed how 80% of athletes interviewed agreed that having access to services such as study counseling and career management, which were not directly linked to athletic training still had a positive impact on their sporting performance (Merikoski-Silius, 2006:59). These two sets of conclusions from both studies demonstrate how the two careers of academia and elite sport can actually support each other to the extent that they can enable the student-athlete to achieve higher performance in both their academic career and their sport.

Therefore, the role of the nation state here can also be argued to be that of continued support in identifying initiatives that can help Finnish student-

athletes to cope with the demands of a dual career. One of these recent initiatives was the establishment of sport academies in various regions of Finland with a large concentration of student-athlete populations. As one of the more experienced Finnish athletes explained, the introduction of such academies was a welcome initiative since this had facilitated flexible measures to combine a dual career effectively:

I think one good thing that is in place now and wasn't there when I started was this system of sport academies. They started when I had already spent 5 years in university so it wasn't relevant for me. But the athletes that are starting some type of higher education now, they are helping them from the start. For example I know that with some athletes like myself who are away a lot they have arranged for them to take exams while they are away. (FIN A)

However, judging from another Finnish interviewee's account this system of sport academies has not been delivered in a consistent manner across all regions as the judoka explained:

They had set up this sport academy system to help people like myself who are combining their sport and education but there weren't enough staff to co-ordinate everything and after a year it had to close down. Of course it was a good system but it didn't really help me because I just needed to pass the exams of my modules. The woman in charge there once phoned one of the professors to make some different arrangements and he was asking 'What is this sport system?' So no one at university knew about them. (FIN F)

One area of policy improvement for the Finnish government might therefore be to ensure that all student-athletes are able to access the same levels of support and resources that these sport academies were set out to provide.

In the United Kingdom the third comparative nation state, representative of Type 3 in the typology of approaches, the government's intervention is less visible as it has been argued that 'sport advocates' (national governing bodies or national institutes of sport) tend to act on behalf of the student-athlete to negotiate flexible educational provision with academic institutions. In this case there are members of staff such as performance lifestyle advisers within National Institutes of Sport, who are responsible to guide

student-athletes as to how to manage a dual career effectively. However from the findings of this study it appears that all of the participants interviewed in the United Kingdom preferred to negotiate flexible measures with academic staff personally. There were a number of provisions that student-athletes availed themselves of such as extending the number of years to complete their degree and getting special permission to attend training camps and competitions abroad, however in all of the six instances special arrangements were agreed on a case by case basis. National Governing bodies were only occasionally consulted to provide documented evidence of the international training camps and competitions that the interviewees were attending. This particular finding could be interpreted in a way that 'sporting advocates' might be seen as having limited scope in the day-to-day management of student-athletes' lives but as five of the British student-athletes interviewed argued it was important for them to have access to the range of services that were provided by the various National Institutes of Sport. The key services identified were medical help that included doctors and physiotherapists, sports science support and in one case the service of a sport psychologist. Although all of these services were directly linked to the athletic development of the participants, having the right support in their sporting life was deemed to have a positive impact on their academic career, and therefore contributing to the successful management of a dual career.

However, making a successful application for a scholarship fund to be able to access such services in the first place seemed to be fraught with complications as the British gymnast indicated when commenting on the inconsistency of the TASS (Talented Athlete Scholarship Scheme) system, having been accepted for a one year period but dropped from the official list the following year. He explained how despite being one of the top eight gymnasts in the UK at the time of the interview, his athletic training was being compromised due to financial constraints. He described how he needed to follow a specialised weight programme as part of his athletic preparation yet he was unable to access the university's own fitness facilities because this service was only offered free of charge to student-athletes on the scholarship scheme:

Unfortunately we're not allowed to use the fitness centre because you have to be on the TASS scheme to get that or you have to pay but it costs £300-400 a year to become a member so I don't really want to pay that... I don't get any physiotherapists or things like that, again you have to be on TASS. I was on it last year and I got all the fees paid but this year they cut the amount of gymnasts so only the very top gymnasts /trampolinists/ artistic women (20 gymnasts in all of the UK) got the funding. Unfortunately not this time. I will apply again next year, no harm in applying maybe I'll get it but I don't have contacts to help me out here, they're not the people in charge of TASS, they just work for them. (UK D)

Another type of concern with regard to the TASS fund was voiced by another British athlete, who despite being successful at securing the scholarship, had some reservations on the quality of the services that were being provided as part of his contract. The National Governing Body is usually the entity responsible for designing a customised package of core sporting services for TASS athletes comprising for example coaching, sports medicine, sports science, strength and conditioning, and lifestyle management services. Following this there is a service level agreement that is drawn up by the TASS representatives, the university and the specific NGB for the athlete's sport. This agreement outlines which services are going to be provided for the athlete and how they should be delivered. Usually the NGBs or the academic institution covers the costs of the service providers on behalf of the athlete. However, as this athlete's account below illustrates there seemed to be a discrepancy between the substantial amount of money that was being spent from the scholarship fund to access certain services and the poor return on the investment being made by the student-athlete:

In golfing terms, we've got the opportunity to see a physical training coach but they take a big chunk of our scholarship, every single scholar has to pay out of their funds to see him every single week for him to tell us the same thing. It would be fantastic if we had him for one or two weeks and then he'll tell us what we have the ability to do and I think we would get a better value for money that way. We also have the opportunity to go to British Olympic Association physiotherapists to do a physical screening and they are supposed to send you a report back with what you need to work on at the gym. I have had two of those, they cost £150 each out of my scholarship money but I never got anything from them. You go there, you spend 20mins on the bench to see how flexible you are and they would say, alright we'll prepare a report for you and nine months later I still

haven't had anything back from them. I feel I had to work hard to earn that money so that I am able to see someone who could potentially help me get to that next level but I have just given them £300, there you go I might as well have burnt it! A lot of the guys who are TASS scholars who have this chunk of cash that should make a difference to their lives golfing wise but they are not quite sure where the money is going. Basically from the £3000 I am able to see £1500-1600 and that's for travelling expenses and equipment. (UK C)

Therefore, it can be argued that an area of policy improvement specifically in England (the Talented Athlete Scholarship Scheme, which is a Government Department of Culture, Media and Sport funded programme only operates across England) would be first to establish clarity on how student-athletes can apply successfully for this scholarship fund. Second is to undertake an evaluation of the range of services being currently provided as part of this scheme to be able to address issues such as those raised by the British golfer interviewed in this study.

7.4. Implications for Practice

7.4.1. The Role of Universities / Elite Training Centres

De Knop et al. (1999) observed that HE institutions' acknowledgement of their student-athletes' dual needs across European states has only been a relatively recent development. The authors drew parallels with the North American college 'model' and highlighted the fact that in Europe student-athletes' needs were still not being met fully as the level of service provision had to date been sporadic and inconsistent. Therefore, the authors urged European Nation states to start developing competing opportunities through their HE institutions and to share models of good practice. It has also been suggested that initiatives in Europe should not seek to emulate the North American intercollegiate sports 'model' in its entirety by adopting an academic or a 'balanced' rather than a predominantly sporting perspective.

Since the publication of the article by DeKnop et al., in Belgium the opportunity to combine elite sport and studies professionally has been

facilitated since 2003 by an agreement, the 'Topsportconvenant HO', between the Ministry of Sport, Flemish Sport Governing body, the Belgian Olympic Interfederal Committee and Sport federations, where two universities and three polytechnics took on a range of responsibilities with regard to elite athletes. Through this formal agreement, Belgian Olympic student-athletes are eligible for a contract to the value of 70% of a full time professional Olympic athlete. Awards are made to, student-athletes on Olympic lists specifically to allow them to combine elite sport and studies in higher education. This contract is an inclusive package comprising professional coaching, training at top facilities, professional support services and enhanced academic opportunities. Incorporated in this arrangement is a scholarship of €20,000 enabling student-athletes to pay for specific elements related to the combination of elite sport and study (e.g. registration fees) as well as specific support for sport (e.g. a sport psychologist) (Amara et al., 2004).

On a larger scale, other European initiatives include the case of Germany, where a co-operation agreement was established initially with 45 Universities (encompassing over 800 national squad athletes) between the major governing education and sporting bodies responsible for elite athletes. Such co-operation agreements between the Olympic Support Centres, German University Sports Federations and/or National Sports Federations are aimed at accommodating students who wish to pursue a professional sports career while in full-time third-level education. These universities offer reduced entry criteria for athletes and special efforts are made to promote athletes within the university system. The primary aspects which this co-operation agreement deals with are issues such as time management, curriculum 'stretching', flexible exam dates and access to free use of sport facilities. Students are also offered personal tutors and study counselling (German Sport Confederation, 2004).

However, the development of initiatives to support the dual career of student-athletes has not been an area of policy concern for European Union Nation states alone as the case presented below of Australia illustrates. Following a

review in 2003 of the higher education sector and the issues associated with elite athletes completing their studies, a Guiding Principles document was developed for the implementation of a National Network of Elite Athlete Friendly Universities (EAFU). This network established in 2004 includes more than 30 universities which endorsed this project. On implementing the two sets of recommendations it has been reiterated that despite the high athletic profile of some of these student-athletes academic standards must and will be rigorously applied (Jobling and Boag, 2003). The service provisions that were recommended in this document and have since been implemented by the respective universities, include having a designated member of staff to provide student-athletes with advice and guidance with academic planning. S/he is also required to provide support in negotiating flexible arrangements to meet academic expectations while promoting the student-athletes activities within the university environment. This member of staff is also responsible to co-ordinate cross-institutional study on behalf of the student-athlete should the latter decide to transfer his / her studies to another academic institution. Another set of recommendations revolve around flexible study options, which consisted of assessment, enrolment and course related measures (Jobling and Boag, 2003).

Having established that there are a number of good practice models in Europe and world-wide of how the demands of elite sport and university education can be better accommodated, the rest of the discussion will give particular attention to reviewing the particular universities and elite training centres investigated in this research study and to consider how their service provision in relation to their student-athletes can be improved.

It has been illustrated in the previous chapters of this thesis how in the UK, individual institutions such as Loughborough University have taken responsibility to identify initiatives and implement services to support the increasing numbers of student-athletes that are commencing university studies each year. For example the preceding chapter outlined how the recently launched Performance Life Skills Programme is aimed at developing skills and competences in student-athletes to help them achieve their

potential in both academia and elite sport. However, one of the British student-athletes' accounts highlighted some peculiar inconsistencies with the type of services being provided by this university.

The British golfer expressed some dissatisfaction with how his athletic scholarship provided by the university failed to meet his expectations. He described how on being accepted on the sports scholarship scheme, his contract stipulated a list of service provisions tailored to his golfing needs that were going to be provided by the university, yet some of these were never realised and he could not envisage a way of how he could improve these conditions:

We are promised in the handout before you join the university that you will get a coach and this, that and the other but none of it come to fruition when you actually start so you kind of ask why are you listing down all these things if you cannot provide them. For example one of the things is warm weather training but it doesn't happen so we have all this money that is not getting spent on the right things...The golf is pretty poor here to be fair. We have some good players, poor facilities with no real means of changing it. We know what we want but getting it is a different thing. If just one student turns up to SDC (sports development centre) and says I want this that and the other, they would just say 'No, no thanks!' (UK C).

He also highlighted the fact that on occasion when he needed to discuss golfing matters with a member of staff, his only point of contact was the coordinator of the golf programme at the university but the individual was not a full-time member staff and therefore was not always available. He therefore urged the university to explain better the scholarship's terms and conditions on entering university and to establish a formal structure with designated support staff who the student-athletes could talk to in order to manage their dual career better:

there isn't any structure where they tell you as a sport scholar at the university who you can speak to and what is available to me. So it is quite difficult at times to know what's out there and what I can get out of university while I'm here. It's not a case of wanting to squeeze out things from the university for free but it's more a case of if I need help what kind of people are available to me. (UK C)

This issue was similarly raised by three of the Finnish student-athletes interviewed who suggested how it would have facilitated their student life significantly if they had the services of a member of staff who they could notify when they needed to be away from university. Although since 2001 the Finnish Olympic Committee has been providing the services of a study co-ordinator, it was argued that it is far more convenient from their point of view to have someone based at the same university who can understand their study workload better and who can notify the lecturers concerned on their behalf if they had to miss lectures or lab sessions. As the Finnish ice-hockey player commented it would save a lot of time and stress if she can get to sit with this designated person at the beginning of every term and work out the times when she had to be away for training and competition. This would avoid having to get hold of each member of staff separately and explaining every time the reasons why she could not be at university with the rest of the class:

I have emailed the education adviser at the Finnish Olympic Committee a few times but usually it's up to me to manage. I would like to have someone in school who knows what I'm doing and what I'm studying who can help me, which I don't have now (FIN A).

...I thought they would be able to send someone to my university to explain to my professors that I cannot be there all the time. I know that so far I have managed to make different arrangements but every time I start a new course and I have to be away I always stress about it because I am not sure what to do if they don't allow me to miss classes. (FIN E)

The French student-athletes seemed generally satisfied where this issue was concerned (since five out of six student-athletes had benefited from the services of having an education co-ordinator based at their training centre INSEP), however there were three other types of concerns that were expressed during the course of the interviews. The more pertinent issue related to the time schedules currently established at INSEP in relation to the academic workload and the elite training programme that student-athletes had to follow. This concern was raised by the swimmer who described that while the actual times do not clash, the way the time has been allocated, where student-athletes are first expected to attend lectures, then go to

training followed by another lecture then attend the longer training session made it increasingly hard for athletes like him to recover between training sessions in such a short time. Although, as he continued to explain at the start of the academic year the student-athlete, coaches and teachers have an opportunity to meet to allocate the time schedules, this interviewee suggested that it might be useful to have more regular meetings throughout the year to be able to make adjustments to the academic schedule according to the athlete's specific sporting needs.

Another minor issue voiced by two of the French student-athletes in relation to INSEP related to the general set up of their training centre, which has not changed for the duration of the time they had been there. In the particular case of two of the student-athletes who had been training and studying at INSEP for about eight years, they recounted how at times a certain wariness is experienced since they are expected to follow similar schedules year on year, learn and train at the same locations (most of the time with the same coaches and teachers), eat the same food and meet the same people on a daily basis. This seemed to leave a negative psychological impact on the student-athletes concerned and therefore this might be a future area of improvement for the benefit of both the individual and the sport:

I have been here for eight years and I am starting to feel that I have taken all there is to take from here. Being in the same sport with the same people I feel that I cannot progress as well as I might. (FRA E)

The last type of issue that was expressed by another French student-athlete related to the quality of the infrastructure currently being used for training purposes at INSEP. She drew attention to the fact that for a substantial period of time athletes competing in field events had to carry out their training sessions under inadequate lighting conditions which had a significant impact on their training sessions. However it must be stated that at the time of the interviews the elite raining centre was undergoing major infrastructural renovation, which will undoubtedly go some way into resolving similar types of issues in the near future:

From a sporting perspective some things can be done a bit better for example the lighting in the training facility is very bad and it makes a lot of difference if you are a field athlete. At the moment because of all the new renovations there are a few problems with some of the training facilities and some athletes have to go and train outside. I am sure that after the renovation everything will be better but it will not be finished for at least another four years. (FRA A)

7.4.2. The role of coaches

During the 4th Annual ICSSPE/DKB-ISTAF (International Council of Sport Science and Physical Education) Dimensions of Performance Symposium (31 May 2008) held in Berlin, Jan Stirling - Head coach of the Australian women's national basketball team illustrated how this 'athlete friendly' university system established in Australia worked in practice. The list of achievements over the last ten years by this particular team is unparalleled having won three silver medals in the last three editions of the Olympic Games (Sydney, 2000; Athens, 2004; Beijing, 2008) another silver medal in the Women's World Championships in 2002 and a gold medal in the Commonwealth Games in 2006. Yet out of their current squad of 16 that were training in preparation for Beijing, eight of the athletes were at university including Lauren Jackson, who is one of the most high-profile female basketball players in the world. This elite player has dominated the WNBL (Women's National Basketball League) in the United States for ten years (1997 - 2007) winning numerous accolades, and subsequently though she was at the time on a professional contract with Spartak MR in 2008, she was also studying psychology at Lomonosov Moscow State University in Russia. For some of the other squad athletes who were studying in Australia, Stirling (2008) highlighted the good practice of Sydney University Sports, which had been providing designated athlete services since 1990. By 2007, forming part of the Athlete Friendly Universities (EAFU) network, 220 student-athletes were being supported representing 38 sports, one of which was basketball.

In conclusion Stirling (2008) stressed her philosophy as an elite coach was to promote unequivocally 'a holistic approach to life which assists athletes to achieve better results in their sport' and therefore she always ensured that

her student-athletes had access to the best support to be able to manage their dual careers successfully. This particular coach's favourable disposition towards the educational career of her athletes supported the claims made by seven of the interviewees participating in this research study who deemed the support received from their coach to be a critical factor in the successful management of their dual career. These observations were reiterated in the literature by Miller and Kerr (2002:148) who stressed that coaches should have 'a working knowledge of child / adolescent / adult development in addition to their technical background'. By working knowledge, the authors imply that coaches should be responsible for gaining a deeper understanding of the broader areas of development of the individual they are coaching. As Chapter 5 of this thesis highlighted, the four key areas of development for elite athletes identified in Wylleman and Lavallee's (2003) developmental model on transitions faced by athletes are academic, athletic, psychosocial and psychological. In instances when student-athletes were coached by individuals who did possess this knowledge, they found it increasingly helpful to have their coach's ongoing support readily accessible on a day-to-day basis. As one of the British runners commented she did not need to look further than her coach to deal with transitional issues as her coach provided all the support needed to adjust to any new developmental changes:

I have never used a sport psychologist here (at university) because my coach is qualified himself about such things, he's quite good and he knows us so well! (UK B)

Therefore, more effort should be targeted towards implementing educational programmes for elite coaches where they can learn about such key areas of development and transitions to help them manage their relationship with their elite athletes better. Six of the student-athletes' accounts (FIN F, FRA A, FRA D, FRA F, UK A, UK E) across the three countries investigated revealed how their relationships with some of their coaches had suffered as a result of poor communication and lack of effective coping skills on the coach's part to deal with their demands. For example one of the British athletes recalled how her previous coach had failed to allow her the opportunity to take more control over the decisions that were being made in relation to her athletic

development, which eventually led to her choosing a different coach who was more sensitive to her needs. This incident is illustrative of the type of issues that are experienced in a coach-athlete relationship and therefore there is a felt need for coaches to be better equipped to deal with such circumstances. Miller and Kerr (2002:148) suggest that educational programmes specifically designed for elite coaches should also be able to cater for this need:

Educational programmes should also address ways in which coaches can nurture and empower their student-athletes, thereby developing leadership and self-responsibility in their athletes and readdressing the existing coach-athlete imbalance.

On a positive note the analysis of this study has also revealed that in instances when coaches were willing to readdress this imbalance in their relationship with their athletes, it had made a significant difference to the coach-athlete dynamic. Student-athletes commented that by having coaches who were sensitive to their dual demands they had benefited from being in such an environment which helped them to progress further in their careers. Therefore, as the findings suggest a guiding note to elite coaches who work within this context could be to demonstrate more empathy in relation to their student-athletes' needs and inculcate a 'balanced' sport / education environment that help the latter maximise the benefits of pursuing a dual career.

7.4.3. The Role of Student-Athletes

Chapter 6 has highlighted personal observations made by student-athletes that suggested that a number of individual related capabilities contributed to the successful management of a dual career such as being in the right mind-set and developing a range of skills. All student-athletes unanimously agreed that ultimately being able to combine a university career alongside an elite sporting career depends on their willingness to accomplish such an achievement. Fourteen out of the eighteen student-athletes interviewed were confident that to date they had been able to manage a dual career with

relative success, having understood that with the right attitude and level of commitment this was actually possible.

However, from the findings of this research study it has been observed that there is a discernable difference in the way these two careers get developed. While the development of the student-athletes' athletic careers is largely the responsibility of coaches and other professionals working within a university / national elite training centres environment, the development of their academic career lies almost exclusively with themselves. This can be contributed to a number of factors as highlighted within the literature by De Knop et al., (1999:55) since for example universities typically operate within a relatively higher degree of freedom and therefore requires from students a sustained 'personal involvement' to progress through their degree programme. This level of personal involvement has been demonstrated to varying degrees by the interviewees having some who committed a substantial amount of time and effort to gain excellent academic qualifications while others who settled for less. De Knop et al., (1999) argued that while the decision by student-athletes to invest less in the development of their academic career could be simply a personal one, it may also be as a result of the influence of a particular person in their immediate surrounding such as the coach. This research study has illustrated the particular cases of the two judokas who found themselves in this scenario, having both their national team coaches being adverse to their decision to continue developing their academic career at university. While in these two instances both of the student-athletes did not hesitate in going against the requests of their national team coaches and enrol at university, it must be acknowledged that such decisions may not be received well.

It has also been quoted in the introductory chapter of this thesis that one of the ethical concerns surrounding elite athletes within this context is that sometimes they remain 'spectators to their own career development' and therefore a more conscious effort is perhaps required by these individuals to take charge of their own career plans, whether they are within academia and / or elite sport (Breivik, 1998). This research study has demonstrated that

when student-athletes did take responsibility of managing their own career plans they had benefited from such a decision as they continued to progress further. This has implications not only for the way they manage their current dual career but also in the way they plan for their post-athletic careers. The systematic review has highlighted the importance for elite athletes to make serious plans in relation to a realistic post-athletic career opportunity while they are still active in sports in order to make a smooth transition into the labour market (North and Lavalley, 2004). The findings of this research study also illustrate how each of the student-athlete interviewed (regardless of age, gender and nationality) had given careful consideration to his/her post-athletic career prospects as they discussed their realistic chances of securing the occupation of their choice in the near future.

It is thus argued that the student-athlete should assume a greater responsibility for how both his/her careers are to be managed. By becoming more independent, self-reliant individuals they can develop expertise in deciding and negotiating arrangements for the progression of their dual career, which should in turn have a positive impact on their lifestyle more broadly. Such expertise can be potentially enhanced through the development of life skills (as illustrated in Chapter 6) which equip the individual with the right tools to effectively manage and cope with the demands of a dual career. Therefore the findings of the study suggest that it is advisable that future student-athletes are encouraged to engage in ongoing professional development opportunities as much as possible.

7.5. Conclusion

While it has been argued above that the European Union has to date a seemingly limited scope in influencing policy at the nation state level within this context, it is however continuing to find alternative means of engaging in dialogue with other global stakeholders to discuss this matter. Presidency Conclusions (11-12 December, 2008) in Brussels stated that the European Council Declaration on sport has acknowledged the “need to strengthen the

dialogue with the International Olympic Committee and representatives of the world of sport, in particular on the question of combined sports training and education for young people". (17271/08 Annex 5). By including this issue on the agenda, the European Council has demonstrated the increasing importance attributed to the effective management of a dual career of elite sport and education by young sportspersons. Thus it may be anticipated that that this phenomenon will continue to be the subject of some political discussion in the near future.

As noted above Bergsgard et al., (2007) argued that it is a matter for each nation state to decide how important sporting achievement is, usually by taking a local democratic decision whether to invest in promoting elite athletes. However, the main argument presented in this chapter is that if they do decide to do so, as demonstrated by the three countries investigated in this research study, nation states have a moral responsibility towards their elite athletes. The critical message here is that nation states should not leverage sporting success by mortgaging the future of student-athletes. The findings of this thesis have illustrated student-athletes own perceptions on what the contributions of pursuing higher education have been so far both on a personal level and to their athletic performance. Therefore, nation states should continue to ensure that these educational opportunities are not severely compromised for the benefit of athletic success. As has been suggested above the role of the state should be to continue to actively protect the academic interests of student-athletes for the benefit of both the individual and the sport.

However, responsibility does not rest solely with the nation state and this chapter has also elaborated on the significant roles that universities / elite training centres play in facilitating the management of a dual career in higher education and elite sport. As the participants of this research study highlighted, being in an environment that was conducive to their dual career needs helped many of them to become more efficient and effective in meeting the demands placed on them. This chapter has identified a number of good initiatives that institutions have developed in order to keep abreast of

their student-athletes' requests. Although it has been recognised by student-athletes that there is not one 'ideal' model of service provision that is optimal, they did suggest some ways in which these services could be improved to facilitate further the management of a dual career.

Finally this chapter has refocused attention on the student-athletes, who are the primary focus in the development of policies and service provision within this context, and the crucial role that they have in relation to their own dual career development. All interviewees recognised that they had a responsibility in ensuring they had an active role in the way their two careers in academia and sport were managed. Thus, by engaging in discussion about decisions that directly affect them student-athletes may be able to have more control over their current choice of lifestyle which may also influence their post-athletic career direction.

Chapter 8 – Conclusion

8.1. Introduction

This final chapter will encompass the concluding observations founded on the basis of the synthesis of research data derived from this study. The aims of this thesis were three-fold: the first was to identify the decision-making processes that student-athletes go through in order to combine their sporting and academic careers successfully while at university; the second considered how the nature of the university system, and the type of sport, impacted on the athlete's perceived experience of sporting and educational decisions on their life during and after their athletic careers; and the third highlighted struggles and constraints that were experienced by the participants interviewed in combining a dual career and suggested ways in which policy could be adapted to ameliorate these life experiences. Thus, a defining feature of this study is its 'bottom-up' approach adopted to provide deeper insight which might benefit policy-makers and practitioners working within these two broad areas of higher education and elite sport assisting them to identify creative ways of how these two can be successfully combined.

The first part of this chapter will discuss the contribution to knowledge and theoretical insights developed in this thesis in light of the empirical analysis of the management of a dual career in elite sport and university education successfully. However, as with every social science research project there are a number of limitations. Thus the second section of the chapter outlines some such limitations at the level of both methodology and substantive findings. Finally, the chapter will conclude by identifying potential avenues for future research to build on the data findings and analysis presented in this thesis.

8.2. Research Study Contribution

This research study has contributed to the existing literature on combining a dual career of university education and elite sports in a number of ways. First, it included 13 sports, using the life-story approach to interview the 18 student-athletes across three European countries. To date this is the only comparative study that has utilised this logistically demanding method to capture data with as many elite level athletes from a large number of different sports (including individual and team sports, professional and Olympic, Winter and Summer sports).

Second, it was argued in the introductory chapter of this thesis that to date policy provision within this particular context has been largely informed by empiricist data rather than an empirical method (Sparkes and Smith, 2002; McGillvray and McIntosh, 2006; Roderick, 2006a). There has also been an increasing awareness that policy decisions and advocacy in this area have been largely adopted without the full understanding of elite athletes' perspectives, which arguably can only be captured through qualitative research methods. Douglas and Carless (2006a:10) pointed out how in Britain, UK Sport (2001) itself had identified that previous studies investigating elite athletes had adopted 'a narrow focus' and therefore a more holistic approach was deemed necessary to take into account the wider social, experiential, psychological and environmental factors influencing these individuals. To this end, this study has adopted both a multi-disciplinary approach to take into account as many of these factors as possible utilising, as a starting point a psycho-social model (Wylleman and Lavallee, 2003) that encompassed four life domains (athletic, academic, psychological and psycho-social), and also a virtually unique qualitative method which is arguably uniquely suited (within this context) to provide a clearer understanding of the holistic experience of student-athletes.

The research study also contributed by adopting a 'bottom-up' approach to informing policy in this area. Having acquired an enriched understanding of

the life experiences of student-athletes in combining a dual career successfully, the discussion chapter of this thesis aimed to address the implications of these findings for the key stake-holders who included: the student-athlete; the university; the elite training centre; the nation state and the European Union. By clarifying the roles, rights and responsibilities of each of these stakeholders involved, this research study served as a starting point to highlight evidence of good practice while identifying some of the policy concerns and inequitable treatment that exist with regard to the treatment of student-athletes pursuing a dual career. Adopting a 'bottom-up' approach has therefore served to identify and suggest ways in which some of these tensions can begin to be diffused for the benefit of all the stakeholders involved.

This research implications also have a dual role in informing both policy and practice. Since the late 1990s there has been a shift in policy research towards a more evidence-based practice. While it is recognised that most practitioners are unlikely to be involved in formal theory-driven academic research, they are likely to be involved in planning and implementing educational programmes for student-athletes and coaches. This research study has sought to make a significant contribution to the establishment of a stronger evidence base within this field to inform practice. Douglas and Carless (2006a:11) remarked that to date "the majority of studies have segregated and individual's 'sport' from their personal values and lives with the simplistic idea that 'a really focussed athlete' can simply switch off those factors and outside influences". This is reflected in the rhetoric used by performance directors, particularly in the UK, who insist that all elite athletes have to be 'obsessed' with their sport relentlessly in order to succeed on the world sport performance stage (Keen, 2007). This may come at a cost as elite athletes are continuously expected to put the rest of their life 'on hold' for the sake of their sport. In contrast this research study suggests an alternative perspective to these partially informed ideas expressed by some performance directors. The rationale provided in Chapter 6 outlined nine reasons that student-athletes identified to justify their decision to pursue a dual career path. This is an important contribution to this field of research as

to date there has been hardly any evidence that claims that the two careers were not simply mutually compatible but in fact mutually complementary.

8.2.1. Contribution to Theory

This research study has illustrated how each student-athlete interviewed had a personal narrative to tell of his /her experience of being heavily involved at the highest level of sports while still committed to his / her academic development. By adopting a life-story approach to interviews the researcher sought to find a creative and meaningful way for these student-athletes to discuss issues that concerned them directly. In order to ensure that this does in effect take place a narrative approach to life-stories was employed where interviewees were given the opportunity to express their own perceptions in negotiation with the researcher in an open fluid manner. This generated a range of intuitive understandings from student-athletes. By engaging the participants through this particular qualitative method they were empowered from the start giving them the opportunity to present their unique perspective of how they had personally negotiated their dual career path. In order for the reader to gain a better insight into these perspectives extensive quotations extracted from the interview transcripts were presented throughout the whole thesis.

However, from a methodological point of view, at one level it has been acknowledged by the researcher that life-stories can aid in gaining an understanding on how these student-athletes are constructing their academic and sporting careers but without giving further consideration to how these life-stories are being shaped. Therefore, in order to account for this limitation a critical realist perspective was adopted to guide the analysis of these life-stories which has the potential not only to understand but also to change these life experiences in an emancipatory fashion. By identifying where the power struggles lie and giving 'voice' to the 'powerless', this research study principal contribution is that it can help to bring about positive change.

A further contribution of this study is in relation to Wylleman and Lavallee's (2003) Development model on transitions faced by athletes which allowed the researcher to view student-athlete transitions in "a holistic, life-span perspective which spans the athletic and post-athletic career" while also taking into consideration those transitions that occurred in other domains of life (Wylleman, Alfermann and Lavallee, 2004:7). This particular study has focussed predominantly on the academic and athletic / vocational domains of life outlining both a series of normative (expected) transitions as depicted on the model together with a range of non-normative and in-career transitions that the model does not account for. This chimed well with the recommendations put forward by the proponents of the model Wylleman, Alfermann and Lavallee (2004:7) who suggested that future conceptual developments to the model should include:

the need to extend the available knowledge on the characteristics of specific transitions (e.g. non-normative transitions, in-career transitions), on the influence of sport -, gender-, or culture-specific factors on the quality of the transitional process...

This research therefore has managed to make a substantial contribution to fill this gap in the literature, having identified the developmental, interactive and interdependent nature of transitions and stages that student-athletes encountered while also beginning to tease out the specific characteristics that impact on the transitional experience. Having interviewed nine females and nine male student-athletes, some insight into the gender-specific factors that influence the career plans of these individuals was provided as the findings illustrated that some female athletes may have different requirements to managing a dual career; especially of elite sport and full-time employment. Due to the particular comparative nature of this study, culture-specific characteristics belonging to each of the nation state under investigation have also been suggested. Chapters 4 and 7 in particular highlighted the wider cultural context that the participants inhabit describing the various institutional systems, policies and support networks established to facilitate the management of a dual career and the transitions inherent in each career path.

8.3. Research Limitations

While it has been argued that this doctoral study has sought to make a significant contribution to both theory and knowledge within this particular field, the researcher must also acknowledge a number of limitations that and should be taken into consideration when conducting future research in this area.

One set of limitations relates to the nature of this piece of research. In order to investigate the three research questions set for this study a qualitative approach was deemed appropriate to capture the range, diversity and complexity of the research participants' life experiences in managing a dual career of university education and elite sport. Since this study was designed with the aim of developing in-depth understanding of these life experiences only 18 student-athletes were interviewed and although the data ranged across 13 sports and three nations states, generalisation from sample to population is inappropriate. Analytic generalisation rather than statistical generalisation is thus the goal of the account which accompanies this research.

Another limitation inherent in the research sample is that by targeting university student-athletes (who one might argue are already a privileged group who have the capability to articulate their narrative to serve their own interests) and who have 'made it' into higher education, the research may be missing out on a substantial segment of the elite athlete population. By not interviewing elite athletes who did not pursue higher education the researcher may be overlooking a population whose experience (for example those focusing exclusively on sporting careers) may be markedly different from those who opt for a dual career. However, it should be noted that in the case of the UK, 58 per cent of Olympic athletes from the Beijing Olympics had had experience of higher education (BUCS website, 2008) while almost 50 per cent of the French medallists at the Athens Olympic Games had been students at INSEP (Bayle, Durand, Nikonoff, 2008:153).

Criticism towards qualitative research has also been directed in terms of its lack of validity and reliability. While the strategies that were adopted in this research did not meet the traditional positivist notions of validity and reliability, it has however employed alternative means to ensure that the study was rigorous, trustworthy and credible. Such strategies included 'member-checking', confirmability and researcher reflexivity (Plummer, 2001; Miller, 2000). 'Member checking' required returning verbatim transcripts to the interviewees to give them an opportunity to amend any of their comments if necessary (though none of the participants sought to add or amend comments).

In order to demonstrate rigour and credibility, another measure - confirmability was employed during the data analysis stage. Inductive coding was initiated by the researcher and her supervisor simultaneously but separately. In this way the supervisor, who was at the time unfamiliar with the data, was able to give an unbiased opinion regarding the credibility of the analysis. The supervisor and the researcher worked on three interview transcripts together in order to have an opportunity to discuss the different interpretations and to agree on the way in which the analytical findings should be presented.

Researcher reflexivity has been described by Plummer (2001:208) as the process of acquiring a greater social and self-awareness through the research journey, in relation to both the participants and the environment (e.g. personal, cultural, academic, intellectual) in which the research knowledge is produced. Although it has to be acknowledged at this stage that in practical terms this might prove to be quite challenging at times, the researcher sought to engage in critical reflection throughout the whole research process. For example during fieldwork, reflecting on the lived experiences of the student-athletes enabled the author to develop a sensitised, complex and occasionally, sharp understanding of a number of issues raised by the interviewees. It soon became apparent that the researcher shared common knowledge and assumptions about a number of the issues which were concerning the student-athletes interviewed, and

these were shared during the interview process. While current trends in social science research postulate that when the researcher shares similar experiences to those being interviewed the understanding of a phenomenon is increased, the reader must also recognise that the researcher's particular biases and assumptions might also influence the research outcomes in a certain way (Douglas and Carless, 2006b).

From a methodological point of view the researcher must also account for the use of retrospective, self-reported data collected through the life stories. Respondent bias, poor articulation, faulty memory recall are all factors that could have potentially influenced the data (Cresswell, 2003).

From a pragmatic point of view this research was also constrained in terms of time and resources available to undertake the empirical stage. Ideally student-athletes should have been interviewed twice and it is possible that further insight into these student-athletes' worldviews could have emerged if there was a possibility to conduct a second interview. However, time constraints on behalf of both student-athlete and researcher had to be taken into consideration and the data collection was therefore limited to one interview. It would have been particularly useful for this study to conduct the second set of interviews after the Beijing Olympic Games as four interviewees had expressed their plans to retire depending on their athletic performances during 2008.

8.4. Future Research

This thesis has highlighted a number of issues that go beyond the aims of the immediate study but which provide opportunity for further research in this field. The first area of further research would be to investigate a younger age group such as high-school/college-age (15-18 years) individuals as most student-athletes interviewed for this study identified this period as being particularly difficult to manage. As one of the British athletes observed

academic schedules during this period tended to be more rigid in nature allowing little flexibility to combine the two careers efficiently:

I know of other students who do struggle to combine their education and their sport. As I said with my course it's much more flexible. I mean if I was still at school like doing 'A' levels that would have been the worse because you cannot really fit your training in between. But I think I've done well in managing myself at university. (UK A)

More research is therefore required to identify the specific challenges that these younger student-athletes might be facing while preparing to go to university particularly in the light of the recent introduction of the Youth Olympic Games in 2010. One might expect these problems to be further exacerbated in the near future as student-athletes may experience increasing pressure to dedicate more time to the development of athletic excellence at a younger age.

The second area of future research should take into consideration a wider selection of the type and nature of sports giving particular attention to the different sporting cultures and the mechanisms employed in these sports to develop their elite athletes. This study has begun to elicit some of the issues inherent in combining a dual career within the structures of Olympic and professional sports but there is ample opportunity to develop this research further by investigating for example Paralympic sports, professional academies and apprenticeship schemes, as well as teasing out differences within and between contrasting sport cultures.

The evidence from this study also illustrate how gender distinctions exist in the ways in which dual careers are managed. Chapter 6 highlighted how the status and definition of being a 'professional athlete' varies between men and women within and across sports since for example women get less money from professional contracts or are less likely to have these. The findings of this study suggest that as a consequence it becomes more difficult for some women to manage a dual career of employment and elite sport which may lead them to compromise their athletic involvement.

A further dimension to consider would be the inclusion of more countries both in Europe and worldwide which have developed positive measures to facilitate the management of a dual career of their student-athletes. This research study has focused exclusively on the three European states of Finland, France and the UK. However there were a number of other 'models' of combining university education and elite sport highlighted within the literature that are worthy of investigation and may inform policy-making and practice in this context.

A further recommendation relates to recent private and commercial ventures which have also established systems of combining higher education with elite sport in various countries but which to date have not been investigated for research purposes. The Johan Cruyff University established in The Netherlands, for example offers a four-year Bachelors programme in Business Administration specialising in Commercial Sport Economics. Graduates of this programme can then apply to join an international Masters programme in Sport Management offered at one of the Johan Cruyff Institute for Sports Studies located in Barcelona (Spain), Mexico City (Mexico), Quito (Ecuador) and Sao Paulo (Brazil). This particular university continues has invested in new academic programmes, taking advantage of former elite athletes' interests as well as labour market requests by delivering a selection of tailor-made programmes that are in part aimed at securing post-athletic careers. Another initiative concerns the International University Audentes, considered to be the largest private university in Estonia. The university was built on three academic schools: a business school, a law school, and a school of social sciences and humanities. Audentes Ltd. is owner of Audentes School, Audentes Sports School, International University Audentes, Audentes Sports Club and sports facilities. Audentes is the only sports school in Estonia, where students can acquire secondary and university education. There are a number of sport disciplines that this company specialises in such as: athletics, wrestling, judo, shooting, basketball, volleyball, handball, tennis, cross-country skiing, Nordic combined, biathlon and cycling. Many of Estonia's elite athletes compete under the name of Audentes (Nybelius, 2008). A different type of commercial

initiative is the online resource entitled *World Academy of Sport*, which was established in June 2005. The Academy provides educational programmes to International Sporting Federations and their member constituents around the world. Through the provision of internationally recognised education qualifications in association with International Sporting Federations. The World Academy of Sport Athlete Centre aims to offer an online service to all athletes to assist them in their sporting and educational development. The three levels of programmes that are offered range from the Athlete Certificate which is approximately 15-20 hours of self directed learning (specific to the International Federation) to the first virtual community of the International Baccalaureate Online diploma, a globally recognized university entry qualification; and also extends to a distance learning undergraduate degree qualification. These are only some of the private and commercial initiatives that are currently available to elite athletes pursuing higher education and therefore future research might aim to identify the range, and evaluate the quality, of such programmes.

Finally, while the current study focuses on student-athletes, a number of the lessons learned might inform future study of other groups such as other gifted students (musicians / dancers), retirees and corporate managers.

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Appendix 1

Data Extraction Forms - Combined Key word searches -

Elite athlete* and career*

Database:	ArticleFirst
Title:	The Causes of Career Termination from Sport and Their Relationship to Post-retirement Adjustment Among Elite-amateur Athletes
Leading Author/s:	Lavalle,D
Year of publication	1997
Inclusion or exclusion	Exclude
Justification for exclusion	Repeat entry
Database:	ASSIA
Title:	The emotional abuse of elite child athletes by their coaches
Leading Author/s:	Dunn, N
Year of publication	2004
Inclusion or exclusion	Include
Justification for exclusion	
Database:	ASSIA
Title:	The Pressure and Profits of Top Basketball Camps.
Leading Author/s:	Haworth, K
Year of publication	1998
Inclusion or exclusion	Exclude
Justification for exclusion	Falls outside the scope of this research study
Database:	Physical Education Index
Title:	The development of volition in young elite athletes
Leading Author/s:	Elbe, A.M
Year of publication	2005
Inclusion or exclusion	Exclusion
Justification for exclusion	Falls outside the scope of this research study
Database:	Physical Education Index
Title:	"What Ever Happened To...." The Effects of Career Termination from the National Football League
Leading Author/s:	Lotysz
Year of publication	2004
Inclusion or exclusion	Exclude
Justification for exclusion	Repeat entry
Database:	Physical Education Index
Title:	Physical performance in aging elite athletes - Challenging the limits of physiology
Leading Author/s:	Rittweger, J
Year of publication	2004
Inclusion or exclusion	Exclude
Justification for exclusion	Falls outside the scope of this research study
Database:	Physical Education Index
Title:	The role of social support in the career transitions of young footballers
Leading Author/s:	Woods, C.B
Year of publication	2004

Inclusion or exclusion	Include
Justification for exclusion	
Database:	Physical Education Index
Title:	An investigation of potential users of career transition services in the United Kingdom
Leading Author/s:	North, J
Year of publication	2004
Inclusion or exclusion	Exclude
Justification for exclusion	Repeat Entry
Database:	Physical Education Index
Title:	Elite athletes' image of retirement: the way to relocation in sport
Leading Author/s:	Torregrosa
Year of publication	2004
Inclusion or exclusion	Exclude
Justification for exclusion	Repeat entry
Database:	Physical Education Index
Title:	Injuries in development squad netballers: Would early prevention reduce injury occurrence
Leading Author/s:	Williams, D
Year of publication	2004
Inclusion or exclusion	Exclude
Justification for exclusion	Falls outside the scope of this research study
Database:	Physical Education Index
Title:	Exposure to Diagnostic Ionizing Radiation in Sports Medicine: Assessing and Monitoring the Risk
Leading Author/s:	Cross, T.M
Year of publication	2004
Inclusion or exclusion	Exclude
Justification for exclusion	Falls outside the scope of this research study
Database:	Physical Education Index
Title:	Then and Now: Marianne DiRupo
Leading Author/s:	Woelfel, R
Year of publication	2003
Inclusion or exclusion	Exclude
Justification for exclusion	Less than 3 pages long
Database:	Physical Education Index
Title:	Physical self-perceptions, eating and weight control behaviours in former female athletes of appearance-based sports
Leading Author/s:	Walsh, M
Year of publication	2002
Inclusion or exclusion	Exclude
Justification for exclusion	Repeat entry
Database:	Physical Education Index
Title:	Seeking identities: Towards an Understanding of the Athletic Careers of Masters Swimmers
Leading Author/s:	Stevenson, S
Year of publication	2002
Inclusion or exclusion	Include
Justification for exclusion	
Database:	Physical Education Index
Title:	The developmental environment of elite athletics: An evolving system

Leading Author/s:	Naylor, A.H
Year of publication	2001
Inclusion or exclusion	Include
Justification for exclusion	
Database:	Physical Education Index
Title:	Psychosocial characteristics of elite adolescent athletes: An initial exploration
Leading Author/s:	Holt, N.L
Year of publication	2001
Inclusion or exclusion	Include
Justification for exclusion	
Database:	Physical Education Index
Title:	Morphological Evolution of Athletes Over the 20th Century Causes and Consequences
Leading Author/s:	Norton, k
Year of publication	2001
Inclusion or exclusion	Exclude
Justification for exclusion	Falls outside the scope of this research study
Database:	Physical Education Index
Title:	Moving on? Elite Hong Kong Female Athletes and Retirement from Competitive Sport
Leading Author/s:	Chow, B.C
Year of publication	2001
Inclusion or exclusion	Exclude
Justification for exclusion	Repeat entry
Database:	Physical Education Index
Title:	Cultural Changes: Mobility, Stratification and Sportswomen in the New China
Leading Author/s:	Jinxia
Year of publication	2001
Inclusion or exclusion	Exclude
Justification for exclusion	Falls outside the scope of this research study
Database:	Sociological Abstracts
Title:	Slim Bodies, Eating Disorders and the Coach-Athlete Relationship: A Tale of Identity Creation and Disruption
Leading Author/s:	Jones
Year of publication	2005
Inclusion or exclusion	Exclude
Justification for exclusion	Repeat Entry
Database:	Sociological Abstracts
Title:	Bodies, Narratives, Selves, and Autobiography: The Example of Lance Armstrong
Leading Author/s:	Sparkes, A
Year of publication	2004
Inclusion or exclusion	Exclude
Justification for exclusion	Repeat Entry
Database:	Sociological Abstracts
Title:	African American Student Athletes' Perceptions of Career Transition in Sport: A Qualitative and Visual Elicitation
Leading Author/s:	Harrison, K
Year of publication	2003
Inclusion or exclusion	Exclude
Justification for exclusion	Repeat Entry

Appendix 2



Institute of Sport and Leisure Policy,
Loughborough University,
UK

Mobile phone: xxxxxxxx
Email: D.A.Aquilina@lboro.ac.uk

Date xx.xx.xx

Dear athlete,

Degrees of Success: Negotiating dual paths in Elite sport and University education in Finland, France and the UK

I am a doctoral student at Loughborough University, conducting a comparative study on elite and professional athletes in Europe, who either have been or are currently at university. The aim of my study is to look at the decision-making processes that athletes experience in order to combine an academic and sporting career successfully. Also, I would like to look at how the specific sport and the type of university system impact on the way athletes make decisions now and possibly influence their post-athletic career direction.

In order to understand the decision-making processes involved in making educational choices from an athlete's perspective I am adopting a biographical approach based on athletes' life stories. This will involve asking you to trace with me the factors which influenced your educational and athletic training decisions at various points in your career. The analysis of this material will not identify you, and anonymity of participants is guaranteed.

One of the principal objectives of the study is to improve the way educational systems and institutions interact with athletes, so I hope that your participation in the project will constitute to the well-being of future elite athletes.

Therefore, on the recommendation of (Performance Director / coach), I would like to invite you to be one of the participants to take part in this research project. If you are willing to participate, please contact me at the following email address D.A.Aquilina@lboro.ac.uk so we can arrange to meet at a convenient time and location. Should you have any queries or wish to discuss the research project in further detail please do not hesitate to contact me.

I will look forward to hearing from you,

Sincerely,

Dawn Aquilina

Appendix 3



CONSENT FORM

Degrees of Success: Negotiating dual career paths in elite sport and University education in Finland, France and the UK

Type of research

This research project is a comparative study on elite and professional athletes in Europe, who either have been or are currently at university. The aim of this study is to look at the decision-making processes that athletes go through in order to combine an academic and sporting career successfully. The study will also consider how the specific sport and the type of university system impact on the way athletes make decisions now and possibly influence their post-athletic career direction.

Research method

The research method that is going to be adopted is the life-story method - a biographical approach based on athletes' lives. This will involve you tracing with me the factors which influenced your educational and athletic training decisions at various points in your career. The interview which should last between 50 and 90 minutes depending on the athlete, will be taped and transcribed for analysis. A full transcription of the interview can be sent (on request) for verification and if at any point you wish to adjust or delete some of the information, this can be done at your discretion.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

The analysis of this material will not identify you, and anonymity of participants is guaranteed for the whole duration of the project and in any subsequent publication.

Withdrawal

If, for any reason you wish to withdraw from this research project you have every right to do so at any point in the process and can request that your data be destroyed.

Storage of Data

Data will be saved and coded in a manner that complies with the Data Protection Act 1998, as advised by Loughborough University Ethical Advisory Committee.

I, hereby confirm that I have read and understood the terms of this research project and am willing to participate.

Name of Athlete: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Name and signature of principal investigator: _____