

Findings from a study of the mental, physical and financial wellbeing of retired professional sportsmen

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The Study



In 2013 we examined the lives of more than 1000 professional sportsmen, asking them about their playing career, their transition to a second career and how they felt about that career.

We identified what those who are now thriving did whilst they were playing to create that success and what the warning signs are in players that suggest they will struggle in their second career

The Study

- The oldest respondent was 95, and the youngest 22
- Responses cover the full range of playing experience:
 - 15% in team sports have played more than 10 internationals
 - 14% have played fewer than 10 club first team matches
- 97% are extremely (80%) or somewhat (17%) proud of having been a professional sportsman
- 49% retain some kind of paid involvement in their sport

Respondents

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Methodology and Sample

- On-line or paper confidential survey
- Identical structure for all sports
- 1199 respondents in total
- Sample size was sufficiently large to allow us to look at:
 - the total picture
 - individual sports
 - different cohorts
- **Caveat:** *whilst the methodology is sound, certain groups (e.g. those struggling the most) may well be under-represented*

Cricket	507
Rugby League	131
Rugby Union	248
Football	197
Horse Racing	118
Total	1199

The Good News

Most ex-Pros are in good shape

- 79% are satisfied with their lives, compared with 76% for the adult population as a whole¹
- Contrary to popular myth, 90% need to work after retirement from sport, and most are in “normal” jobs, earning an average of between £30-40k a year²
- 90% regard themselves as being as/more healthy than other people of the same age
- They have the same worries as everyone else – finances, families, relationships etc.

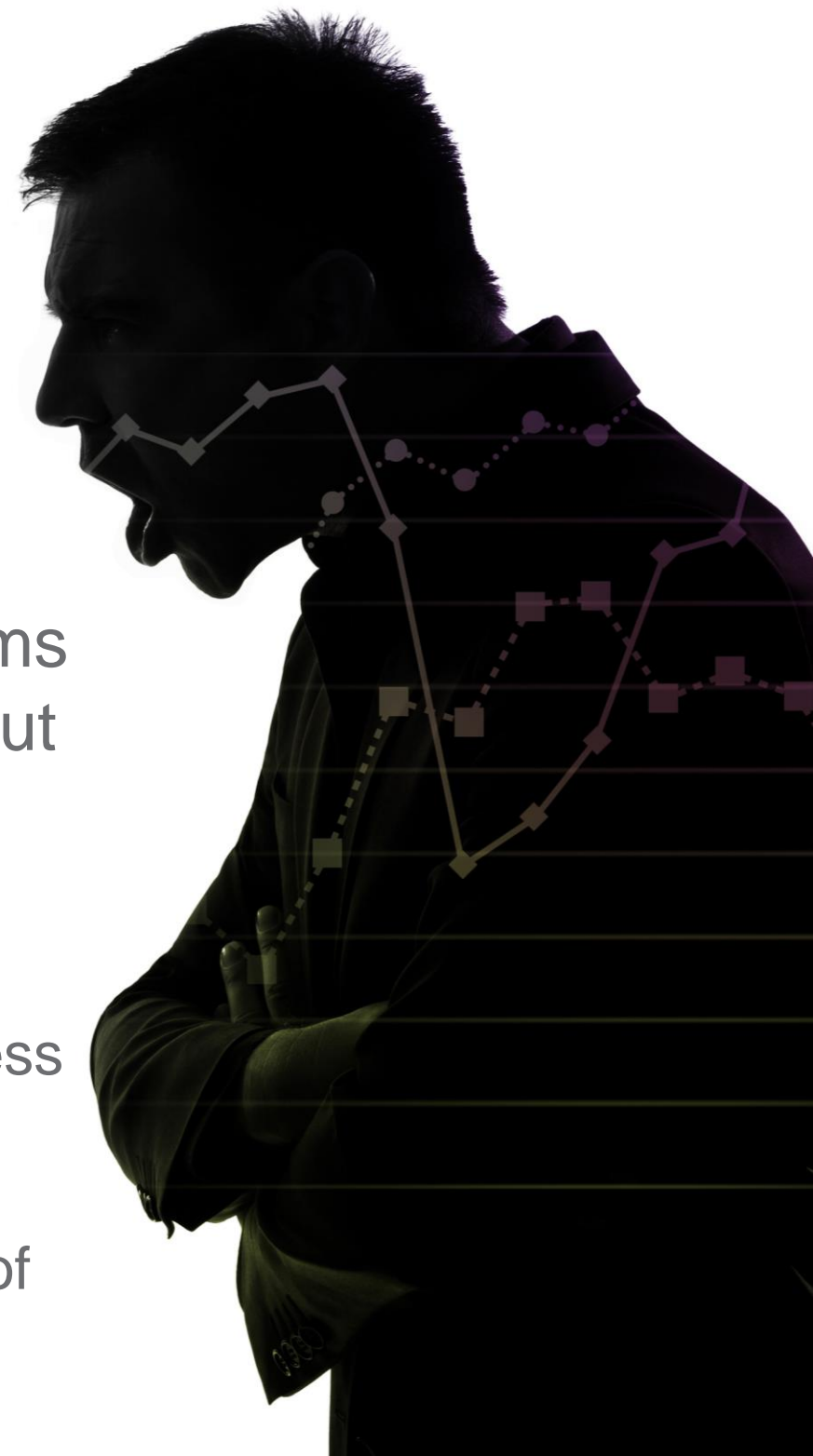
¹ Survey data compared with response to an identical question in the ONS national wellbeing survey

² The range of salaries is quite wide, but the overall average is above the UK average of £24,600 (source ONS Labour Market Statistics).

However:

Many struggle to adapt

- 32% did not feel in control of their lives two years after finishing
- 24% admit to on-going physical, mental, addiction or financial problems (we suspect others have problems but aren't prepared to admit it)
- Problems in the first year after retirement from sport are common:
 - 17% admit to high levels of anxiety/stress
 - 16% admit to loss of self esteem and confidence
 - 16% admit to depression and feelings of despair



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Five key factors influence how well sportspeople adapt to life after sport

1. Satisfaction with their playing career
2. Preparation for the future while playing
3. Retiring on their own terms
4. Quality of transition
5. Regaining control of their life

1. Satisfaction with playing career

1 in 10 of all players report that they were disappointed with their playing career, but this increases to **1 in 5** amongst those who have experienced health, addiction or financial problems



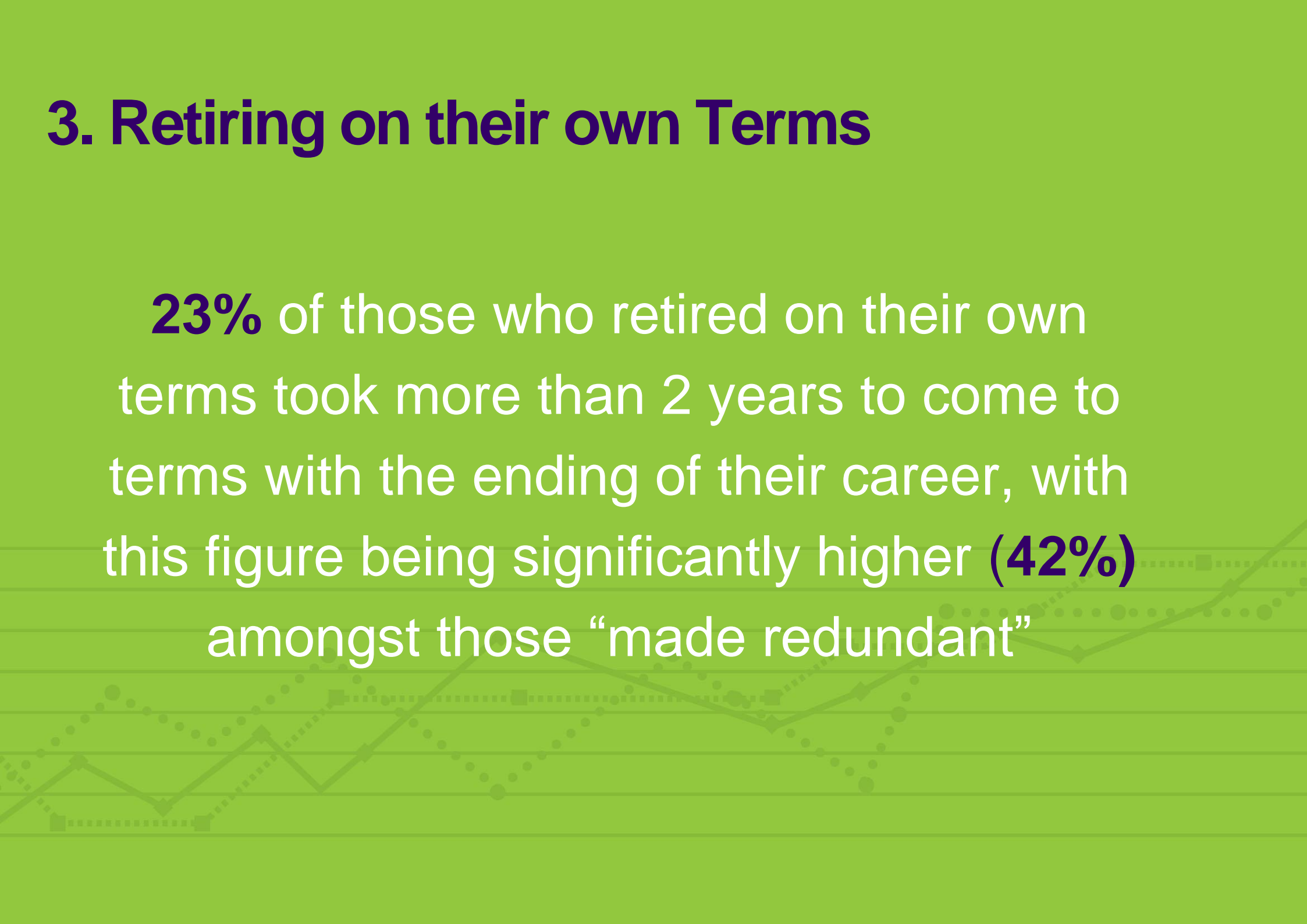
2. Preparation for the future while playing

46% of players say they were satisfied with how they prepared for life after sport (**56%** amongst those that retired from sport after 2000)

Amongst those who said they didn't feel in control two years after finishing playing, this figure is just **38%**

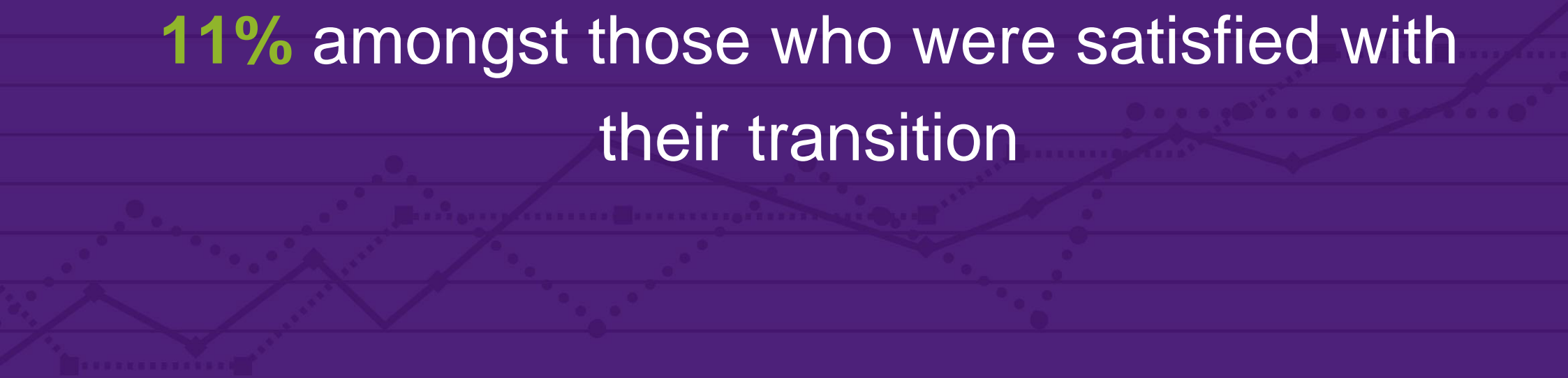
3. Retiring on their own Terms

23% of those who retired on their own terms took more than 2 years to come to terms with the ending of their career, with this figure being significantly higher (**42%**) amongst those “made redundant”



4. Quality of transition

25% of those dissatisfied with their transition to life after sport admit to being unhappy with their current wellbeing, compared with just **11%** amongst those who were satisfied with their transition



5. Regaining control of their life

79% of respondents are happy with their lives nowadays.

However, this figure is just **62%** amongst those who took more than 2 years before they felt in control at the end of their sporting career

Advice from past players

Think ahead, plan and prepare: *it's never too early to start*

Gain experience and qualifications : *work experience is invaluable*

Use your Player Association: *you don't know how lucky you are*

Appreciate your playing days: *come away from your sport with no regrets*

Make contacts and take advice: *there is no shame in asking for help*

Treat people well: *you never know when you might need their help*

You are a long time retired: *make as much of your second career as your first*

Use your experience: *recognise the value of the skills sport has given you*

Look after your money: *it won't last for ever*

Broaden your horizons beyond sport: *it helps bring perspective*

Key conclusions

1. Cultivate a culture which reinforces the benefits of asking for help.
2. Continue to build support networks to help players prepare for life after sport.
3. Understand the importance to players of feeling fulfilled by the sporting career. Encourage them to focus on their achievements, not their failures
4. Recognise the more challenging transition faced by players whose careers end prematurely/abruptly
5. Support players after retirement – especially through the key transition stage (1-2 years)