

Life After Sport: Athletic Career Transition and Transferable Skills

Kerbi **McKnight**, Kerry **Bernes**, Thelma **Gunn**, David **Chorney**, David **Orr** and Angela **Bardick**, Canada

Kerbi **McKnight** is a graduate student in counselling psychology at the University of Lethbridge. Her research interests are athletic career transition and transferable skills.

Email: kerbimcknight@hotmail.com

Dr. Kerry **Bernes** is a registered psychologist and an Associate Professor at the University of Lethbridge. His research interests are career development, and school counseling interventions.

Dr. Thelma **Gunn** is an Assistant Professor of Educational Psychology at the University of Lethbridge. Her main research interests include learning, information processing, critical thinking and text processing.

Dr. David **Chorney** is an Assistant Professor at the University of Lethbridge. His research interests are health and wellness education and gender issues in physical education.

David **Orr** is a graduate student in counseling psychology at the University of Lethbridge. His research interests are risk assessment and career counseling.

Angela **Bardick** is a registered psychologist. Her research interests are eating disorders, at-risk youth, and career counseling.

Abstract

Athletes transitioning out of sport are faced with many obstacles. Well-trained counselors have the appropriate skills to assist athletes through athletic career transition. An examination of the literature focused on career retirement and transferable skills lead to the development of intervention recommendations for athletes transitioning out of sport. Treatment recommendations include psycho-educational and cognitive behavioural interventions that focus on the emotions associated with transitioning from sport as well as an emphasis on transferable skills.

Life After Sport: Athletic Career Transition and Transferable Skills

Career retirement of athletes is an important watershed change that is often overlooked. Athletic retirement or transition is inevitable for all athletes (Zaichkowsky, Kane, Blann, & Hawkins, 1993). Baillie and Danish (1992) stated that athletic retirement has been disregarded because this transitional

event is equated with the occupational retirement of older adults, and there is a misconception that only a small number of individuals who compete in elite and professional sport are likely to be affected by this transition.

Athletic career retirement is very different from occupational retirement. The first major difference is that athletes typically start

and finish their athletic careers at a relatively young age (Baillie, 1993; Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985). At approximately the same time that athletes are ending high-level competitive sport, their peers are often beginning careers in other non-sporting domains, getting married, and having children. These comparative situations may add to the already stressful feelings inherent in athletic retirement.

A second major difference is that many individuals who undergo career retirement do not experience the same disruption to their identity as do athletes (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). Because athletes spend much of their time dedicated to their sport at an early age, this creates a situation in which time has not been allocated to acquiring interests in other areas. This may result in a disruption to normal developmental events such as identity development, and young athletes may form a foreclosed identity (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). As suggested by Heyman and Andersen (1998), young athletes obtain a foreclosed identity when they identify exclusively with the role of athlete.

Consequently, when athletes retire from sport, they may feel loss and become disillusioned (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). Athletes often fail to give credit to the lessons and skills acquired through their sporting career. This may result from a tunnelled vision and foreclosed identity in which athletes are incapable of seeing how the same skills that made them successful in sport will make them successful in other career pathways (Petitpas, Danish, McKelvain, & Murphy, 1992). Retirement from sport needs to be considered within the context of other variables and factors that are apparent in life (Coakley, 1983).

Transferable skills are general skills that are context and content free (Wiant, 1977). In athletics, transferable skills are those acquired through sport that can be applied to other areas of an athlete's life and to other non-sport careers (Mayocchi & Hanrahan, 2000). An example of a transferable skill is tenacity. Hockey players learn tenacity and demonstrate hard work on and off the ice, which they can use in a new career in business when they retire from sport to learn domain-specific skills such as successful negotiating and proper ways to manage employees. Danish, Petitpas, and Hale (1993) provided an example of life skills or transferable skills that can be applied across settings, including organizational skills, adaptability/flexibility, dedication and perseverance, patience, self-motivation, and the abilities associated with performing under pressure, meeting challenges/deadlines, and setting and attaining goals (Danish et al., 1993).

Therefore, athletic transferable skills can be defined as abstract skills learned in the sporting environment that are applicable to other facets of life or to another career (Mayocchi & Hanrahan, 2000). Intuitively, athletes view learning transferable skills as critical to adjusting to retirement from sport. Sinclair and Orlick (1993) reported that athletes are interested in learning how to transfer their mental skills to another career. Swain (1991) stated that athletes become concerned with the transferability of their skills and knowledge when they think about retirement from sport. Research has shown that athletes respond positively to learning about how specific skills from sport transfer to other non-sport areas of their lives (Petitpas et al., 1992). This type of research is important because it outlines the importance of transferable skills for transitioning athletes.

Athletic Career Transitions

In a review of the literature on athletes' career retirement, Crook and Robertson (1991) concluded that the adjustment varies depending on the individual. In considering the spectrum of career retirement experiences discussed in the literature, it is important to understand the level of involvement of the athletes and the time frame being studied in relation to the retirement, as they can have very different results (Crook & Robertson, 1991). When researchers studied the retirement of professional and elite-level amateur athletes immediately after retirement, their results suggested that retirement from sport is traumatic and requires an adjustment process (Botterill, 1981; Broom, 1981; Haerle, 1975; Hill & Lowe, 1974; Lerch, 1982; McLaughlin, 1981; McPherson, 1980; Mihovilovic, 1968; Orlick, 1980; Rosenberg, 1979, 1981, 1982; Svoboda & Vanek, 1981; Werthner & Orlick, 1986). In contrast, researchers who examined high school and college athlete retirement retrospectively supported the view that retirement from sport does not create trauma or require adjustment (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985; Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985; Kleiber, Greendorfer, Blinde, & Samdahl, 1987; Otto & Alwin, 1977; Phillips & Schaffer, 1971; Sands, 1978; Snyder & Barber, 1979). This may be due to the fact that these athletes have simultaneously pursued other interests and academic training. Thus the level of the athletes involved and the time frame of the study are important considerations (Crook & Robertson, 1991).

The literature does not clearly define or directly measure factors related to athletic career transition, but it is still possible to outline several factors that are related to successful career transition (Crook & Robertson, 1991). Crook and Robertson outlined the following five factors as affecting career transition:

- a) anticipatory socialization,
- b) identity and self-esteem,
- c) personal management skills,
- d) social support systems, and
- e) voluntary versus involuntary retirement.

Each of these factors will next be summarized.

Anticipatory socialization.

Anticipatory socialization is the proactive response of preparing for retirement before it happens (Crook & Robertson, 1991). The lack of attention to preparing for life after sports can negatively affect athletes' ability to adjust (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985; Crook & Robertson, 1991). Kerr and Dacshyn (2000) stated that most of the athletes in their study experienced a stage of existential questioning after retirement because they had not taken the time to prepare for retirement and that, without sport, these athletes were left asking, "What is next?" Some athletes do not think about retirement during active involvement in competitive sport because they consider it defeating and admitting to failure (McLaughlin, 1981), whereas athletes who pre-plan for retirement find the transition out of sport less disruptive. They have a new passion and challenge into which they can channel their energy (Werthner & Orlick, 1986). Allison and Meyer (1988) reported that many of the female tennis professionals that they interviewed considered retirement an opportunity to regain more traditional societal roles and lifestyles. A positive factor in adjustment is having other interests and participating in other activities after retirement. This provides support for the importance of encouraging athletes to maintain balance in their life by pursuing other interests and activities while engaging in competitive sports (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993).

Identity and self-esteem.

Problems in retirement are often associated with a loss of identity and diminished self-esteem (Botterill, 1981). Many athletes end up dependent on sport for identity and gauge their self-worth by their ability as an athlete (Botterill, 1981). When athletes' self-esteem and identity are tied to sport, they often experience negative transition and are confused about their identities (Crook & Robertson, 1991). Many athletes do not feel that they have accomplished everything that they had set out to achieve in the sport if they are plagued by injury or are cut from teams and forced to end their careers. Such events often results in a difficult transitions (Werthner & Orlick, 1986). Many of the female gymnasts whom Kerr and Dacyshyn (2000) interviewed were faced with a loss of identity when they retired. Athletes who no longer feel that they can compete at the same skill level and intensity may perceive it as a breakdown in their ability, which may greatly impact their self-perceptions (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993).

The degree to which athletes consider alternative role possibilities is a strong indicator of successful transition out of sport (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985). The athletic status of interscholastic athletes is often less prominent in the social environment, and their transition out of competitive sport requires less adjustment. Furthermore, their memories of their sporting experience will be less likely to hinder their future growth and development (Coakley, 1983). A sense of accomplishment at having reached the goals that they set out for themselves in the sporting area allows for an easier transition as the athlete feels that their athletic experience was positive, and that they are ready to tackle new challenges (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Werthner & Orlick, 1986).

Personal management skills.

Having good personal management skills is crucial for successful career transition. Athletes may not be prepared for the transition into athletic retirement because they are dependent on others for such factors as personal management (Botterill, 1981). They often have little choice in their training and the competitions in which they participate and thus depend on their coaches for decision making. Athletes might therefore lack the skills in self-management that they need to make alternate career decisions (Crook & Robertson, 1991).

The coaching staff can both teach athletes personal management skills as well as support them. Werthner and Orlick (1986) reported that coaching has an effect on the transition of athletes. A positive relationship with the coach has a positive effect on transition, allowing the athlete to reach their goals and enjoy their sporting experience. However, a negative relationship with the coach may force athletes to leave the sport sooner than intended, which can lead to a difficult transition. Many athletes feel that the sport associations are responsible for their coaching problems (Werthner & Orlick, 1986). Specifically, they reported feelings of being used (and abused) by the system in terms of funding or being cut off because of their age, and they felt forced into retirement because of the politics surrounding the sport organizations (Werthner & Orlick, 1986). Although the system looks after athletes while they compete, they often offer little support to the athletes during the retirement process. Support systems, if available, often just help with employment and fail to recognize the need for emotional support (Crook & Robertson, 1991).

Social support systems.

The support of family and friends can ease the degree of disruption in the transition out of sport as emotional support helps the athletes to adjust to the transition (Werthner & Orlick, 1986). Athletes who experience a negative transition often cite the loss of a support system when most of their friends actively continue with sport (Mihovilovic, 1968). They believe that support from former athletes, family, and sport helps them to adjust to athletic retirement (Botterill, 1981). In addition to a lack of access to old support systems, they may not have the ability to create a new support system, which can create feelings of isolation (McLaughlin, 1981). However, Haerle (1975) stated that while former major league baseball players missed the contact with their teammates, this did not hinder their search for jobs and adjustment to life after sport.

Voluntary versus involuntary retirement

The literature suggests that problems arise when career transition is involuntary. Mihovilovic (1968) contends that athletes may have no control over their retirement because of injury, being cut, conflict with management, or family reasons. Injuries and health problems often play a negative role in the career transition of athletes. Those who face injury are often unable to control when and how the retirement process transpires (Werthner & Orlick, 1986), and career-ending injuries often do not allow athletes to accomplish their goals and plans for life outside of sport. Athletes who are involved in involuntary retirement are often more resistant and less prepared than are those who retire voluntarily (McPherson, 1980). When athletes have alternative skills, they may be more likely to voluntarily leave sport and are less likely to experience adjustment problems (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985).

If a decision to retire is prompted by problems with a coach, retirement might be the only solution to a situation that is no longer tolerable (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000). Politics and the sport association often have an effect on athletes' transition (Werthner & Orlick, 1986). Finances are crucial in the transition because funding cuts by sport organizations may lead to retirement if the athlete no longer receives the funds necessary to continue training (Werthner & Orlick, 1986).

Coakley (1983) stated that voluntary retirement can lead to a positive transition and that leaving interscholastic and amateur sport is regarded as part of normal development. However, Kerr and Dacyshyn (2000) warned that the distinction between what constitutes "voluntary" and "involuntary" is sometimes blurred if athletes decide to retire when they are faced with impossible situations. Retirement is actually voluntary only when an athlete has another choice of action.

As can be seen by the number of factors that affect athletic retirement, it may be perceived as either a positive or negative experience. A key variable to make this transition positive is to focus on transferable skills.

Transferable Skills and Successful Career Transition

Athletes that have a successful transition are able to capitalize on transferable skills (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985). When athletes experience a negative transition from sport, they may be unable to see how the skills learned in sport will transfer to another career. It is inevitable that athletes will face career transition, but taking a more proactive approach to career transition such as focusing on the importance of transferable skills may make the transition more successful (Danish et al., 1993). Athletes, regardless of

competition level, will have learned very valuable lessons through sport that will be valuable in other settings. When athletes realize they already have the skills and characteristics to make them successful in non-athletic areas, they become empowered (Petitpas & Schwartz, 1989; Petitpas et al., 1992). For example, athletes often have to deal with opposition while they strive for success in sport, and this ability to overcome opposition, or “weather the storm”, can be an important transferable skill. When athletes lack the support to transfer their skills or overcome obstacles, the counseling profession may provide much needed support.

Awareness of transferable skills

One of the main barriers to using transferable skills may be that athletes are simply not aware of them (Danish et al., 1993). Increasing athletes’ awareness of their ability to transfer skills from sport to other areas of their life may be enough to affect adjustment to career transition (Mayocchi & Hanrahan, 2000). When athletes are successful in sport, their focus may become so narrow that they do not see how their skills may also be effective in a non-sporting environment. Teaching athletes about skill transfer increases their confidence in their own ability to start a new career and may improve their ability to use their skills in different settings (Petitpas et al., 1992). Athletes may find that increasing awareness of their skills may help improve their athletic career by increasing their understanding of the role certain skills play in athletic performance (Mayocchi & Hanrahan, 2000). Athletes who have an increased understanding of the skills they have acquired through sport will be better able to explain these skills to future employers and outline how these skills will be useful in a non-athletic career (Mayocchi & Hanrahan).

Implications for Counselors

There has been very little research done to date that addresses effective treatment for athletes transitioning out of sport. Currently, there are significant organizational obstacles to the proper treatment of career transition difficulties for athletes (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998). Many athletes have limited contact with qualified sport psychologists, which is problematic for athletes trying to access professional help when transitioning out of sport (Taylor & Ogilvie). Alternatively, athletes may not perceive counseling as an important component of their career transition. For instance, Sinclair and Orlick’s (1993) research outlined that former world-class amateur athletes indicated that they did not view individualized counseling to be a helpful coping strategy when transitioning out of sport. Improving athletes’ access to competent counselors and building a strong therapeutic relationship are the essential first steps.

General Goals

The general goals for treatment, in relation to athletes transitioning out of sport, are to create a more successful positive transition and to increase awareness of transferable skills in order to make effective life changes. Two primary factors may aid in this endeavour: a) emotional well-being and b) use of transferable skills. Counseling professionals can play a key role in helping to create successful transitions for athletes. Counselors and counseling interventions can assist athletes as they cope with the emotional impact of transitioning (Danish, Petitpas & Hale, 1992).

It is important for athletes to acquire knowledge about their transferable skills, but they must also believe they are competent. Individuals often fear situations if they do not believe that their coping skills are adequate (Bandura, 1977). However, if individuals

believe that their coping skills are adequate, they will address the situation with greater confidence (Bandura). In the case of athletes, when they exhibit high self-efficacy, transition is more likely to be successful (Mayocchi & Hanrahan, 1997). Counselors may assist athletes in exploring their perceived competency through cognitive behavioural interventions.

Increasing Transfer For Athletes

Athletes retiring from sport need to be aware of how their skills may be transferred to other settings. In order for athletes to transfer skills, they must understand how their skills and qualities may be valuable in areas other than sport. Danish et al. (1992) outline the following six factors as being important for effective skill transfer:

1. understanding how one's skills may be valuable in other areas
2. believing that one's skills are valuable
3. understanding how one's skills may be useful in contexts other than sport
4. understanding how feelings of anxiety may accompany transition, and overcoming this anxiety
5. developing a new identity
6. developing appropriate social supports.

Athletes have many opportunities to practice applying their skills outside of the sporting environment. Therefore, it is important for other individuals in athletes' lives (e.g., parents, coaches, teammates, peers, and counselors) to encourage them to use their skills in other settings (Danish et al., 1992).

Self-efficacy

Research has shown that an individual's self-efficacy affects one's ability to transfer skills (Mayocchi & Hanrahan, 1997). Many individuals fear circumstances where they believe that the situation will exceed their coping skills. However, individuals are more

likely to become involved in an activity if they believe they have the necessary skills to positively manage the demands of the situation (Bandura, 1977). Athletes may be more willing to transfer skills into other settings if they have a high self-efficacy. Conversely, they may not attempt to transfer their skills if they are not certain of their abilities (Mayocchi & Hanrahan, 2000). Counselors need to be aware of this to ensure they begin work with athletes from a perceptual position of strength by emphasizing athletes' strengths, self efficacy, and ability to transition successfully.

In-depth Treatment Plan

Research has suggested that the competition level, and/or age of the athletes transitioning can influence the type of intervention that is most appropriate. Career research has often concluded that students go to their parents first for career related issues. This suggests that career counseling should focus upon providing parents with the necessary skills to help their children through career counseling issues (Authors, 2004; Authors, in-press; Authors, 2005). Student athletes may also be better supported through career transition by their parents. The counselor might, in fact, actually help young athletes by increasing parental awareness of transferable skills. The following in-depth treatment plan focuses on elite or national team athletes in which case targeting their parents may not be as effective. For these athletes, a more individualized counseling treatment plan will be discussed.

Step 1: Engagement in Counseling

The main goal of this intervention is to create a strong therapeutic alliance. Through the development of a strong therapeutic relationship, athletes can explore the connection between their core beliefs and their various identities, and thus realize that the core meaning they derived from athletics

can also exist in their future endeavours. By connecting the stability of their core beliefs to their changing identity when transitioning out of sport, athletes are empowered to make life changes while maintaining their core beliefs.

This intervention is based on examining the relationship between general skills learned in sport and general skills appropriate for changing careers. The core of this transition must ensure that athletes derive personal meaning from their non-sporting career as they did from their sporting career. The counselor's role is to encourage the athlete to move from sport-skill thinking toward career-skill thinking through the use of tangible symbols in the athlete's own "equipment bag". In doing so, the athlete develops a connection between the relative unfamiliarity of his or her future, and the familiarity of his or her athletic equipment. These steps form the acronym ACE, which stands for *Athletic identity*, *Core meaning*, and *Employable identity*. The creativity of the counselor makes the process more effective, as creativity is useful in helping athletes generate a variety of ways to deal with a situation (Delaney & Eisenberg, 1978).

Athletic identity

An athlete's identity is most often observed in terms of the equipment associated with the sport (e.g., footwear, safety equipment, uniform). Before initiating this intervention, the athlete will have been asked to bring an athletic equipment bag filled with a selection of his or her athletic equipment to the counseling session. The counselor then invites the athlete to speak about the importance of each of the items. The counselor's initial interest in the athlete and his or her equipment not only helps build a therapeutic alliance, but also engages the athlete in discussion about something both tangible and meaningful to the athlete.

Core meaning.

The counselor helps the athlete to examine overall themes from the discussion about important equipment to develop metaphors about identity and transferable skills. For example, the use of specific footwear in one's sport may be linked to stability, while the use of a specific uniform may be linked to identity. Other themes might include dedication, problem solving, tenacity, or teamwork. The combination of these themes forms the athletes' core meaning, and may be used to develop important metaphors for transition.

Employable identity.

Once general sport skills have been identified, and core meaning determined, the counselor introduces the concept of general career skills to the athlete. To help make the connection between the athlete's general athletic skills, and general career skills, the counselor encourages the athlete to reassign career related meanings to his or her athletic equipment. The items in the bag take on a new identity in terms of the athlete's career aspirations, and the bag containing the items metaphorically represents the individual in that he or she contains the set of transferable, general skills. The tangibles then serve as an anchor for the athlete throughout therapy, and a reminder that core meanings exist inside them, and can appear as various skills depending on their context throughout life.

Expected results.

While the distal goal of counseling retiring athletes is to ensure successful transition to other activities, the proximal goal of this intervention is to inspire the athlete's interest and creativity on which to base the remaining sessions. Increasing the athletes' awareness of sports general skills (core meaning) that are useable across various life situations is very important. During counseling, athletes will gain confidence and competence in

both solving future dilemmas in their life as well as using their sports general skills across many domains.

Step 2: Emotionality

Athletes that enter into career transition need to explore the emotions associated with making a major life change. Athletes are often taught to move past their emotions in order to be successful in sport. However, when making a transition out of sport, it is important for athletes to learn to be aware of and acknowledge their emotions. The level of anxiety that is likely to accompany the transition can affect the success of the transition. This fear can lead to a lack of confidence which creates difficulty when transferring skills (Danish et al., 1992). Athletes may have an identity that is so closely tied to sport that they lack interest in exploring non-sporting options, or they lack the confidence to use the skills to be successful in other settings (Danish et al., 1992). Therefore, exposure-based therapy that focuses on increasing awareness and tolerance of emotions associated with career transition would be beneficial.

Exposure-based therapy can be useful to help athletes address feared stimuli. Exposure-based therapy may be helpful if an athlete perceives career transition as traumatic and has subsequently been avoiding situations he/she perceives as fearful. In vivo (real life) exposure techniques should be implemented when possible as they are more likely to produce more rapid results and foster greater generalization than imaginal exposure (Cormer & Nurius, 2003). Through exposure-based therapy, the athlete is able to learn how to cope with the heightened emotional response associated with uncomfortable situations (Cormer & Nurius, 2003). Once athletes are better able to understand and effectively address their emotions associated with career transition, the

counselor can begin to utilize psycho-educational interventions and cognitive behavioural interventions.

Step 3: Knowledge of Transferable Skills

Athletes would benefit from counselors using psycho-educational interventions that increase their knowledge of transferable skills. The research outlines that it is beneficial to teach athletes about transferable skills (Petitpas, et al., 1992). As Danish et al., (1992) outlines, the first step in successful skill transfer is to create an understanding that individuals actually have skills that are transferable. Athletes must come to understand that they have qualities that are valuable in other areas. If athletes lack this knowledge, the qualities they possess will not be transferable (Danish et al., 1992). It is important for individuals to recognize the usefulness of their skills learned, or knowledge gained as it relates to other life contexts. George Reed was a former member of the Saskatchewan Roughriders, and in 1977 became a sales consultant at McKay Pontiac Buick GMC in Calgary, Alberta. Reed was able to adjust to athletic retirement with relative ease because he was aware that the skills and abilities that he had developed in football were equally valuable in the business environment (Lau, 2003). After athletes have gained an increased knowledge of the importance of transferable skills, the next logical step is to increase their awareness of their own transferable skills.

Step 4: Awareness of Transferable Skills

The next stage in successful skill transfer and successful transition is to address the perception that athletes have of their transferable skills. When athletes believe that the qualities acquired in sport are in fact skills, then they can begin the transfer process (Danish et al., 1992). Athletes who apply transferable skills report better adjustment in career retirement (Petitpas et al., 1992).

There are many examples of athletes recognizing that they have skills that will transfer outside of athletics. According to James F. Molloy, a professor at Northeastern University's College of Business Administration, it is no coincidence that successful athletes often turn into successful entrepreneurs (Cavanaugh, 1989). Molloy outlines that the athletes and entrepreneurs share similar characteristics; "To become a star athlete you need drive and energy and you have to be a risk-taker" (Cavanaugh, p. 23).

Athletes must also understand how other contexts may be similar to the sport in which their transferable skills have been learned (Danish et al., 1992). It becomes important for counselors to help athletes identify what physical and psychological skills acquired through sport can be used in other settings (Mayocchi & Hanrahan, 2000).

Step 5: Perceived Competency

An individual's perceived competency affects the use of transferable skills (Mayocchi & Hanrahan, 2000). When individuals are not aware of, or do not value the skills they have developed and understand when these skills maybe useful in different settings (Yelon, 1992), then successful skill transfer is unlikely (Mayocchi & Hanrahan, 2000). Athletes must believe they are competent in order for them to effectively use their transferable skills. Through counseling, athletes will gain the belief that they have the competency to effectively engage in life after sport. When athletes feel they have a high self-efficacy, and feel that they are capable, the result may be a successful transition (Mayocchi & Hanrahan, 1997).

Cognitive behavioural therapy would be the most effective way to assist athletes in examining their perceived competency. Athletes may have developed distorted thinking patterns, such as black and white thinking,

perfectionistic thinking, and filtering (Cormier & Nurius, 2003). Black and white thinking occurs if athletes believe that they are 'nothing' without their sport or that their skills are 'useless' if they are no longer involved in sport. Perfectionistic thinking occurs if an athlete expects to be immediately successful at a career outside of sport. Filtering occurs if athletes become overly focused on the negative aspects of their transition and forget to include the positive aspects. To effectively challenge such distortions, counselors can utilize cognitive behavioural therapy to help athletes monitor and challenge their negative thinking patterns and focus on their positive assets. As well, teaching athletes strategies like goal setting and action planning may provide the help needed to overcome the barriers to skill transfer (Mayocchi & Hanrahan, 2000).

Step Six: Developing a Support Network

Transitioning athletes may feel isolated from their former social support network. For many athletes, a team provides their social support and is comprised of friends. It then becomes the role of the counselor to help transitioning athletes reconnect or create new support networks. When this support network is missing, counselors need to engage athletes in acquiring a support system outside of sport. Athletes are often used to being involved in a support system in which athletes push each other in a supportive environment. This same type of network needs to be created outside of sport. Transitioning athletes benefit a great deal from ongoing social support. When athletes lack the needed support to develop their use of skills in non-sport contexts, they may experience increased resistance to retirement from sport (Danish et al., 1992). There may be times when athletes lack the foresight to see that they have been applying their transferable skills already to other parts of their life. It is beneficial for athletes to have a positive so-

cial support network that is reminding them of their competency to transfer skills. It is important for parents, coaches and governing bodies to develop a view that places increased importance in athletes' life development rather than only an athletic development (Danish et al., 1992).

Step Seven: Evaluating the Success of the Transition

The general goals of treatment (emotional well-being and perceived competency) can also be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the athlete's transition out of sport, as well as the effectiveness of the counseling interventions. The counselor and athlete can use the previously mentioned steps as indicators for evaluating a successful transition. When the emotionality of the issue, knowledge of transferable skills, awareness of transferable skills, perceived competency and support

network have all been successfully addressed in counseling, athletes are given the tools for a successful transition out of sport.

Conclusion

After an in-depth literature review of athletic career transition and transferable skills, a treatment plan was developed for athletes dealing with career transition from sport. The proposed treatment plan incorporates psycho-educational and cognitive behavioural therapy by focusing on the emotionality of the transition as well as the development of transferable skills. Counselors may be effective in assisting athletes to engage in life after sport by helping them realize the skills they need to be successful in other areas of their life are skills they have already acquired through their involvement in sport.

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