

## ABSTRACT

### EXAMINING RETIREMENT FROM ATHLETICS THROUGH A GERONTOLOGICAL LENS

by Kevin Joseph Chaney

This critical inquiry examines the literature on retirement from sport using a gerontological framework. Review of the literature reveals that thanatological perspectives and gerontological theories such as disengagement, activity, continuity, and social breakdown, provided an early conceptual basis for understanding retirement from sport. However, these perspectives fell out of favor because of their inability to be generalized to the unique trajectories of athletes who retire much younger than the general population. Moving forward, scholars incorporated traditional transition models while focusing on athletic identity development to better understand retirement outcomes experienced by athletes. Because the relationship between athletic identity development and life course development, the Life Course Capital model is introduced as an alternative framework to understand the mechanisms for withdrawal from sport and how athletes can rely on acquired capital to adjust accordingly.

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LENS

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## **I. Life after Professional Sport and the Idea of Retirement:**

### **The Professional Athlete**

It can be assumed that professional athletes represent a unique subculture of individuals, simply by the odds of becoming one. For example, the National Football League Players Association (NFLPA) (2009) concludes that statistically out of 100,000 high school seniors who play football, 9,000 will go on to play Division 1 college football, and only 215 of those will ever make an NFL roster, and a small fraction of these 215 will actually play more than three seasons. Perhaps it is because of the small odds of becoming a professional athlete that those who make the pinnacle of sports are often viewed as icons, heroes, gods, and immortals because of their exclusive talents and athletic achievements (Sage, 1998; Stier 2007). They earn a living through the cultivation of specialized talents and skills that eludes a majority of people, transforming them into compelling figures, perpetuated by commercialization (Weiss, 2001). Unfortunately, these commercialized outlets portray the assumption that professional athletes have long, successful careers, primarily devoid of injury and a loss of talent (Sage, 1998). Given these aspects, those on the outside looking in, such as fans and journalists see an athlete's retirement through rose colored lens – with retirement from sport romanticized as a voluntary event with the wealth and fame obtained during that individual's career carrying them through life. However, very few athletes actually enjoy a long career filled with luxury, and even those who do can still experience a difficult transition into retirement for a variety of internal and external factors (McPherson, 1980).

What makes retirement from sport difficult is that although most athletes know that the inevitable, exit from sport, will happen, yet few have control over when and how it will happen. Ultimately situations and circumstances - such as an unexpected injury, de-selection, or decline in performance - will dictate for them (Hill and Lowe, 1974; Mihovilovic, 1968; Rosenberg, 1980). According to Witnauer, Rogers, and Onge (2007), 20 percent of professional baseball players will play only one season; for those lucky enough to play longer, their chances of exiting as a result of injury or de-selection (meaning cut or waived from a team) is at least 11 percent each additional year. Perhaps these untimely events explain, anecdotally, why so many athletes seem ill prepared for life after sport. Furthermore, retired athletes must deal with situations that plague some athletes beyond the field of play – divorce, income disparities and financial planning are some of the major issues.

An article by Pablo Torres (2009) in *Sports Illustrated*, suggests after interviewing several sport agents, lawyers, financial planners and anecdotal evidence, that within two years following retirement roughly 75 percent of National Football League (NFL) retirees are bankrupt and almost 60 percent of former National Basketball Association (NBA) players will face bankruptcy within five years, because of poor money management decisions and higher than average divorce rates. Duncan Fletcher, director of the Professional Athletes Transitional Institute at Quinnipiac University, concluded that based on anecdotal evidence and his work with various Player Associations that divorce rates range from 60 percent in the National Hockey League (NHL) and Major League Baseball (MLB), to nearly 80 percent in the NFL; Fletcher also stipulates that many players might see more than half of their earnings go towards alimony following divorce (Lankhof, 2009). However, with no official numbers and limited access to athlete marital data these numbers remain suspect. The bigger issue is even if a professional athlete makes millions of dollars during their career, the odds of a long career with a guaranteed source of income are against them.

According to the NFLPA, the average professional football career was only three and a half seasons and the average rookie contract for those who fall outside of the first draft round is roughly \$250,000 a year. High injury-prone positions such as running back have an even shorter career length – two seasons on average. Sports such as basketball and baseball tend to be a bit more forgiving; the average baseball and basketball career ranges between four and six seasons. Specifically, based on recent research by Witnauer, Rogers, and Onge (2007) the careers of baseball players over the last century (from 1902 to 1993), based on a sample of 5,989 position players was just shy of six seasons. The average length of career within the NBA is just short of five seasons (Pizzigati, 2004). Given the average length of career, salary projections after taxes, the typical athlete might never actually earn the millions of dollars we associate with the select few who do make an exorbitant salary. Even if they do, the day they stop playing, athletes are confronted with a major disparity in income, and whether they had saved properly is unknown. Furthermore, once the time to leave sport comes, athletes are still twenty to thirty years from collecting a pension – which assumes they were vested long enough to qualify – therefore, the ability to stretch income made while playing takes proper planning.

It could be postulated that athletes, depending on their ego development and involvement, will experience a difficult transition because of an identity crisis following sport (Brewer, 1993).

This identity conflict may be exacerbated if the individual did not prepare him/herself for life after sport – resulting in deviant behaviors (such as addictive gambling, drug use, and high-risk activities) or regrets for their current situation (Baillie and Danish, 1992; Pearson and Petitpas, 1990). Fans of professional athletics cannot help but notice the popular media's (e.g. Entertainment and Sports Programming Network and Sports Illustrated) increased coverage surrounding the retirement of various professional athletes, particularly successful athletes as they have come in and out of retirement.

An example is seen when former quarterback of the Green Bay Packers and New York Jets, Brett Favre held a nationally televised press conference in early 2008 to announce his retirement. During the press conference, as his voice cracked and eyes watered, Favre insisted that despite his uncharacteristically long (17 seasons) and successful career (for professional athletic standards), it was 'time to hang it up and move on' to things outside of football, such as spending more time with his family. However, Brett contended throughout the press conference that he could 'still play' and that 'football was the only thing he knew how to do'. Six months later, Brett had 'un-retired' as the media described it, and went on to play another season for the New York Jets before retiring once more - citing old age and nagging injuries. It should be noted that at the time of this paper, Brett Favre is once again considering a comeback at quarterback.

Michael Jordan, considered to be one of the greatest basketball players of all time and un-retired not once but twice during his career, was notably somber when he discussed his acceptance into the basketball of Hall-of-Fame during a press conference in 2009:

"This is not fun for me. I don't like being up here for the Hall of Fame, because at that time your career is completely over, is the way I look at it. I was hoping this day is 20 more years, or actually when I'm dead and gone . . . Now, when you get in the Hall of Fame, what else is there for you to do . . . I'll always want to be able to have you thinking that I can always go back and play the game of basketball. Put my shorts on . . . Am I? No. But I'd like for you to think that way . . . To me it's like, OK, it's over and done with. It's pretty much done -- you can't ever put a uniform back on. It's totally the end of your basketball career . . . It's a great accomplishment; I don't walk away from it. But I've never envisioned myself really wanting to be up here so quickly. I wanted it to be when I was 70 years old, or something, 80 years old, but I'm 46 and I still think I can play."

Even lesser known athletes have talked openly about the hardships they experienced after leaving their sport.

Scott Tinley, a two-time Ironman Triathlon champion, wrote several chapters in his autobiography, *Racing the Sunset*, discussing his retirement from triathlons, a sport that requires a competitor to swim 2.4 miles, bike 112 miles, and run 26.2 miles without a break. In the book, Tinley (2003) recalls:

“Missing the excuses for everything you don’t want to do [take the kids to the dentists, visit the in-laws] ... missing the smells of oils and lotions and balms and creams – one or two for every purpose in sport, because of what they represent ... missing the freebies and not necessarily big things like cars or trips, but small things ... missing the regularity of things, the nice neat package your life is wrapped up in ... not missing the anxiety of prerace jitters, but missing the feeling, shape, color and texture of a victory ... missing the fame, the kudos, the applause ...”

Tinley (2003) also says, “that even successes in other ventures in life, whether it be business, family, politics, etc. cannot replace the immediate closeness and gratification of applause, and once this is gone an athlete enters the netherworld of being forgotten.” A standout moment in the book is when Tinley portrays what it was like to “slowly die away in the dim light of remembrance by fans” as he struggled to maintain his competitive edge due to an aging body. Instead of retiring at the top of his game, Tinley suggests he was simply “digging his own grave into nonexistence” as he stuck around the sport competing – spending more time training just to keep up with the younger athletes. Such characterizations hint at the struggles Tinley faced with his retirement from sport. At the same time, in his book he describes the challenges and opportunities of things he missed out on because of his athletic career but eventually got to experience such as going to college, working a nine-to-five job, and taking on a new identity outside of sport.

Other high caliber athletes have demonstrated a pattern consistent with Favre’s, Tinley’s and Jordan’s experiences over the decades (e.g. Lance Armstrong, Martina Hingis, George Foreman, Muhammad Ali, Martina Navratilova, Bjorn Borg, Gordie Howe) but they represent only a fraction compared to the majority of professional athletes, who will leave sport with little to no attention. Additionally, although these examples focus on some of the more somber experiences of successful male athletes, this does not mean all athletes’ experiences are the same. The popular media tends to bias their coverage only towards the transitions of more prominent athletes. Unfortunately, little is known about less popular athletes competing on a smaller

circuit, and even less is known about female athletes, regardless of popularity, who are subject to different circumstances such as childbearing<sup>1</sup>.

In an attempt to better understand the retirement transition of professional athletes, literature on general retirement, from a gerontological perspective, is laid out to serve as a backdrop for conceptualizing athletic retirement. Additionally, it serves as a focal point to determine if the study of athletic retirement has progressed in a similar fashion when compared to the field of gerontology. The following sections will layout the conceptualization of retirement in the American culture and its influence on the development of gerontology as a field of study, followed by a concise review of the retirement from sport literature.

### **Conceptualization of Retirement**

The notion of retirement is fairly young in a historical context, but has constantly evolved over the past 100 years, as trends in retirement have shifted. In American society, retirement as a transition has been defined as the withdrawal from one's position or occupation in society to a position of not working and receiving income from a pension and/or Social Security (Purcell, 2008). Retirement can also be voluntary or involuntary, with individuals being negatively pushed (e.g. mandatory retirement age for some occupations) or positively pulled (e.g. pension package or work alternatives) into retirement (Shultz, Morton, and Weckerle, 1998). However, to fully understand these characteristics, one must comprehend the circumstances and events that have lead to today's view of retirement.

The perception and normative construction of retirement has directly been tied to the creation of post-work benefits referred to as a pension, whether it is offered through an employer or government entity (e.g. Social Security). Although a pension rarely equals a worker's highest earned salary, it is designed to serve as a financial support system for retirees coupled with personal savings, Social Security and other financial investments. These benefit programs, the largest being Social Security, have played a major role in creating retirement specific norms, as well as structuring the life course (Ekerdt, 2004). Many retirement benefit plans are fixed to years of service and a minimum age qualification. Therefore by having an age-based benefit,

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<sup>1</sup> It is noted that due to the lack of information describing the retirement transition for female athletes, this paper focuses primarily on the experiences of male athletes and what happens when they retire and the factors responsible for a positive or negative transition away from sport and into retirement.



ranging from age 55 for some private employer plans to age 62 or 67 for public based plans, has created a normalized retirement structure for the general population. The age of 65 has long been the gold standard for when someone is eligible to retire. However, even the common retirement age of 65 is starting to shift as older adults have begun to delay retirement for a variety of reasons stemming from pension eligibility reforms, changes in employer-sponsored benefits, improvements in health, and declines in physical job demands (Urban Institute, 2006).

Although nearly everyone will eventually leave the workforce, little is still known about how individuals spend this time. According to Ekerdt (2004), although we know when someone might retire (around age 65), there is little evidence showing how retirees spend their retirement – whether it is relaxing, keeping busy through traveling, athletics or grand-parenting or volunteering or even launching a second career. General retirement scholars (Kim and Moen, 2001; 2002) argue that a career exit is a major life change that transforms one's social and psychological worlds – with changes in roles, relationships, and daily routines. Despite a lack of clarity describing how an individual spends retirement, research (Johnson, Kawachi, and Lewis, 2009; Palmore, Fillenbaum, and George, 1984) suggests overall happiness and overall life satisfaction remains stable and slightly increases following normal retirement age, while those who involuntarily retired earlier experienced more adverse effects. Such adverse effects could be attributed to the off-time sequence of a major life event, which disrupts the expected normative structure of an individual's life course (Neugarten, 1979; Rook, Catalano, and Dooley, 1989). The normative social clock created by society encourages individuals to move through time in a structured fashion. However, those who deviate from this expected time frame could experience a significant amount of stress, for they are not considered to be on-time (Neugarten, 1979; Rook et al., 1989).

A new trend suggests that retirees launching a second career in retirement are becoming more common. One possible reason is because older adults can expect to live nearly a quarter century in retirement; on average, men spend 17.1 years in retirement, whereas women can spend an astounding 21.4 years in retirement (Urban Institute, 2006). Because of these gains in life expectancy, nearly a quarter of all older adults have opted to reenter the workforce after retirement (Johnson, Kawachi, and Lewis, 2009). However, these career changes typically involve jobs that pay less and offer fewer benefits; at the same time they tend to offer more flexible work arrangements, less stressful working conditions, and fewer managerial

responsibilities. For workers interested in delaying retirement after long careers or obtaining a new career following retirement, such jobs allow older adults to keep themselves engaged in the workforce. Therefore, if older adults are looking to get back into the workforce, after a long career, what about professional athletes who are still twenty to thirty years away from the normative retirement age, but are involuntarily forced into retirement? Chances are they have no other choice but to continue working, but it is probably not for the same reasons as a general retiree. In a sense, by the time a professional athlete's sport career is coming to an end, fellow peers are starting a career of their own.

### **A Gerontological Emergence**

As the demographic transition (going from high birth and death rates to low birth and death rates) became more prominent during industrialization, the field of gerontology emerged with it. Sociologists and psychologists began to theorize how older adults transitioned into retirement, and what happened with them following retirement after a spending so much time working. From the 1950s through the 1970s a burst of gerontological theories arose – from Neugarten's and Havighurst's (1961) activity theory and Cumming's and Henry's (1961) disengagement theory to Atchley's (1971) continuity theory and Kuypers' and Bengtson's (1973) social breakdown theory – in an attempt to capture how older adults experienced life following retirement. With the theoretical cornerstones set in place, the field of gerontology and the study of retirement transitioned from retirement as a singular event, to retirement as a transitional process, to retirement as a multifaceted event evolving across the life course.

The growth and evolution of gerontological theory grew largely out of criticism of the earlier theories. Neugarten's and Havighurst's (1961) activity theory revolved around the notion that following nearly thirty years of labor, older adults strive to maintain a consistent level of activity following retirement. Conversely, Cumming's and Henry's (1961) disengagement theory suggested that retirees mutually disengage from society. Atchley's (1971) continuity theory, suggesting individuals pursue and desire a level of stability after retirement in their social and personal areas of life, became a dominant framework in the field. Atchley's (1989) continuity theory broadened, stating that individuals sought both internal and external levels of continuity to maximize satisfaction in life. Efforts to apply these theories to the study of professional athletes have been criticized with debate over whether an athletic career is generalizable to those who have worked in a field or career for twice the amount of time. I argue

a life-course approach to understanding retirement from athletics would be the most appropriate, for its ability to encompass several components that can affect the retirement process.

### **Does a Gerontological Link Exist?**

The purpose of this critical inquiry began as an investigation to determine if any gerontological frameworks, which were used to describe retirement for the general population, appeared within the literature describing retirement for a professional athlete. Given the unique situation of retired athletes, often retiring from sport before the age of 35, they may or may not experience the same transitional process as the general population (Baillie and Danish, 1992). It could be possible that the literature on retirement from sport could have incorporated gerontological perspectives in an attempt to understand how an athlete experiences retirement. The primary research question is: does a gerontological framework appear within the literature to describe the professional athlete's withdrawal from sport? A preliminary review of the literature (Hill and Lowe, 1974; Mihovilovic, 1968; Rosenberg, 1980) indicates that social gerontology plays a role in the early development of understanding retirement from sport for professional athletes. Knowing that gerontological frameworks are incorporated spurred several questions to be investigated: which types of gerontological frameworks were used? Are these frameworks still being applied as the research evolves? As the field of gerontology evolves with the development of new frameworks, do these frameworks appear in the sports retirement literature? Is there a gerontological framework available to understand retirement from sport that has not been applied?

### **Methodology**

A systematic and historical review of the literature was conducted to understand the development of the field over time and the framework(s) used to represent a professional athlete's retirement from sport. Examining academic databases through Miami University's inter-library network, such as Academic Search Complete, JSTOR, and Google Scholar was used. Key words such as: disengagement, athlete, retirement, withdrawal, and gerontology were entered in these electronic search engines to bring up relevant articles. A preliminary search of the literature yielded a series of articles dealing specifically with retirement from sport – spanning several decades, from Weinberg's (1952) study of retired boxers to Kadlck's and Flemr's (2008) study of various professional athletes retiring in the Czech Republic. A series of

articles detailing athletic retirement using a gerontological approach as a framework was compiled. Time was also spent at Miami University's libraries, looking through catalogs of academic journals catering towards sports sociology and sports psychology. A snowball approach to identify articles was also employed by using the reference sections of more recent studies (within the past ten years). This was deliberate to incorporate previous articles and research reports that helped build the groundwork of more recent studies.

Only articles investigating elite-level athlete's retirement from sport – those competing at the collegiate, semi-professional, top-level amateur or professional levels – regardless of cultural background were collected and reviewed. All materials were cataloged in a Microsoft Excel database by noting the authors' retirement rationale, the kinds of gerontological frameworks incorporated, and whether or not the authors found such frameworks to be an appropriate model. Any new frameworks introduced by authors were also noted, as well as the mechanisms they incorporated to describe retirement outcomes for various athletes. To gain a historical perspective, articles were read in chronological order to map out the use of gerontological frameworks and if it reflected the general retirement literature. Distinct shifts in the literature were accounted for and are marked within this paper to assist readers gain a sense of the development of the field. Before analyzing the literature on retirement from sport, a succinct overview of the development of the field of gerontology is presented to provide a backdrop for comparison.

## II. Development of Gerontological Frameworks

The earliest foundations of gerontology have been ascribed as far back as roughly 3000 B.C. with the epic of Gilgamesh in Babylonia, to the time of Aristotle (4<sup>th</sup> century BC), who described old age, his final stage of life, as cold and dry, to the 16<sup>th</sup> century when Coronaro depicted a healthy aging routine consisting of exercise, diet, and self-control (Bengtson, Gans, Putney, and Silverstein, 2009). While the formal beginnings of gerontology are blurred, the 20<sup>th</sup> century marked an era when theoretical traction started to take shape. According to Andrew Achenbaum (2009), the 1909 publication *The Problem of Age, Growth and Death* by C.S. Minot and the 1939 publication of *Problems of Ageing: Biological and Medical Aspects* by E.V. Cowdry, manifested the emergence of gerontology as a biological field of inquiry. Around 1922, G. Stanley Hall's *Senescence* offered a method that social scientists could further explore, as he discussed the "last half of life" (Achenbaum, 2009). Under the backing of the Gerontological Society, Otto Pollak's 1948 *Personal Adjustment in Old Age* pushed the field of gerontology to new heights, and this was bolstered with the aid of Ruth S. Cavan's and University of Chicago colleagues' 1949 publication *Personal Adjustment in Old Age* (Katz, 2000). As the field of gerontology began to separate itself from other disciplines with opportunities, the University of Chicago began the Kansas City Studies during the 1950's in an attempt to understand and codify human development over the life course. In fact, the Kansas City studies were originally conceptualized in the assumptions of the un-formalized activity theory, first described in 1953 by Havighurst and Albrecht (Katz, 2000; Marshall, 1999). This basic theory suggested that idleness following retirement led to illness and decline in health not aging itself. A major concern for social scientists and policy makers were what impact would the retired elderly have on society, and how would society meet the challenges as a result of a graying population.

As researchers themselves began to study older adults they were primarily separated into two camps – one that focused on macro-level processes and the other on micro-level processes. A macro-level approach refers to the study of larger, more invisible, and often more remote social processes that help to shape the micro world – these processes include political, economic, cultural, and other institutional social forces that can not be seen directly (Appelbaum and Chambliss, 1997). Researchers using a micro-level approach looked at social relations that involve direct social interaction with others including families, friends, and coworkers, and the meanings that individuals give to these relationships (Appelbaum and Chambliss, 1997). Not

before too long, gerontologists began to combine both of these approaches to help construct a more complete picture of the impact social forces have on the retirement process and the meanings older adults gave to their experiences, relationships, and roles. These macro-level and micro-level are explained further and how they eventually led to a macro-micro level approach known as the life-course perspective.

### **The Kansas City Studies: A First Generation of Gerontological Theories**

The outcomes from the University of Chicago's Kansas City studies served as the tipping point for gerontological theory. Two opposing but crucial theories emerged from these studies: Cumming's and Henry's (1961) disengagement theory and Neugarten's and Havighurst's (1961) activity theory (Katz, 2000). Disengagement theory came from a structural functionalism approach and asserted that "aging is an inevitable, mutual withdrawal or disengagement, resulting in decreased interaction between the aging person and others in the social systems he belongs to" (Cumming and Henry, 1961). Disengagement served as the mold for future works because it set the bar with explicit and testable hypotheses with a link between micro- and macro-level perspectives (Marshall, 1999). However disengagement theory, despite its comprehensiveness, explicitness, and multidisciplinary use by social and behavioral gerontologists, lost ground over time with little empirical support (Achenbaum and Bengtson, 1994). Other researchers and theorists (Achenbaum, 2009; Katz, 2000; Marshall, 1999) agree that disengagement theory was heavily criticized for being narrow in scope, one-dimensional, and ungeneralizable which resulted from the homogenous sample of individuals the results were derived from – middle-class, white males living in the Midwest. Another critique of disengagement theory dealt with the possibility that individuals typically withdrew from society as a result of social and economic constraints leading to a lack of opportunities in later life, rather than personal choice (Richardson and Barusch, 2006). As the criticism mounted, Cumming and Henry slowly withdrew from their own theory as they moved on to other interests, leaving the field of gerontology in search of another a unifying paradigm. It should be noted that overtime, a few individuals, such as Neugarten's "Disengagement Reconsidered", have revisited disengagement theory to further flesh out its successes and failures.

While one research camp from the Kansas City studies introduced the idea that individuals and society mutually disengage, another set of researchers (Neugarten and Havighurst, 1961) maintained the basic premise that individuals look to maintain high levels of

activity, similar to one's life in middle age, after retirement. Activity theory, which stemmed from a symbolic interactionism perspective, was more centered on a micro-level view of aging (Marshall, 1999), whereas disengagement worked on both macro/micro-levels. Activity theory further assumed that older adults, who maintained higher levels of activity compared to less active older adults, would exhibit higher levels of self-esteem and well-being; however, this theory placed impractical expectations for those living more sedentary life-styles in later life as a result of health and economic conditions (Bengtson et al., 2009; Richardson and Barusch, 2006). Despite the stark contrast between disengagement theory and activity theory, these first generation theories spurred a great deal of discourse among emerging social gerontologists; resulting in a new generation of theories, such as Atchley's (1971) continuity theory, Kuypers' and Bengtson's (1973) social breakdown theory, and Riley's (1971) age stratification.

### **A Second Generation of Gerontological Theories**

As the dust settled in the wake of both disengagement and activity theory, gerontological theory continued to evolve on a symbolic interactionism level. Atchley's (1971) continuity theory, a theory that would evolve over time, contended that individuals sought continuities throughout life and this became ever important as they transitioned into retirement. Atchley's theory began with a premise that individuals primarily sought out internal continuity (an internalized structure of ideas from prior memories) to maximize life satisfaction and wellbeing. However, Atchley (1989) later incorporated a component of external continuity (a person's social and interpersonal surroundings) to complete the theoretical framework (Richardson and Barusch, 2006). Ideally, with continuity theory, an individual could reallocate the time and energy of prior roles into new roles, to maintain levels of life satisfaction and wellbeing. As with activity theory, criticism arose that continuity theory was unable to tap macro-level variables as a causal mechanism for continuity or discontinuity (Bengtson et al., 2009). A separate framework stemming from a micro-level perspective was the social breakdown theory of aging, which highlighted how ageist perspectives were formalized.

Kuypers and Bengtson (1973) postulated that the change in roles following retirement were associated as being negative, and individuals internalized this negative evaluation leading to a withdrawal from activity. In terms of social exchange, once an individual stops working they have less to offer the larger society and a shift in power, leaving older adults vulnerable (Richardson and Barusch, 2006). Kuypers and Bengtson further contend that older adults are

more susceptible to social labeling because of the “nature of social reorganization in late life” (i.e., role loss, vague or inappropriate normative information, and a lack of reference groups). Therefore some adults view themselves as inept, sick, and ineffective to society – believing and behaving accordingly. Given the layout of social breakdown theory, an individual’s ability to foster a sense of control, autonomy, and worth becomes key to avoid these negative evaluations.

Based on their inherent design both continuity theory and social breakdown theory made strides to incorporate a longitudinal perspective to understand how individuals change across time; disengagement and activity theories relied on a cross-sectional approach. While gathering data in a cross-sectional manner give us an insight for a specific point in time, it does not adequately account for changes. To overcome such limitations, a shift in empirical testing and theoretical assumptions eventually gave way to a more holistic perspective to understanding later life. Matilda Riley’s (1971) age stratification approach incorporated a longitudinal design. The theory highlighted a multitude of shared characteristics among age groups for identifying changing perceptions about sex roles, race relations, and economic and social forces. These perceptions could be crystallized through demographic attributes (sex ratios, racial/ethnic compositions, age), historical and social contexts, and shared intergenerational relations of various age cohorts – especially cohorts in later life. However, as with continuity theory, this theory was modified over the years and even suggested by Riley (1996) to be renamed to Age and Society theory to reflect the dynamic, rather than static, relationship between individuals and society (Bengtson et al., 2009; Marshall, 1999; Richardson and Barusch, 2006). The versatility and constant development of age stratification is what propelled it to be considered a third generation theory by most scholars within the field of gerontology, despite its early beginnings (Marshall, 1999).

### **A Third Generation of Gerontological Theories**

Both age stratification and the life course perspectives serve as theoretical models reflecting micro- and macro-level processes that affect human development into later life. Similar to age stratification / age and society theory, the life course perspective has evolved over the years to reflect various conceptualizations and alternative perspectives. For the purpose of this paper, Angela O’Rand’s Life Course Capital model is summarized within the context of the development of a life course perspective.



O’Rand’s (2006) Life Course Capital model, primarily a framework for understanding cumulative advantage and disadvantage across the life course, synchronizes several decades of scholastic work on inequality over the life course. Perspectives surrounding the life course as a center of attention, according to Dale Dannefer and Peter Uhlenberg (1999), are traced back to the 1960’s when the concept of cohort as a testable variable was introduced to the social sciences and broadened the cohort perspective, as researchers analyzed cohorts using new empirical techniques to capture variations among cohorts. Over time, the life course perspective flourished. O’Rand spent several years theorizing and conceptualizing how the life course model could not only capture trends, but also reveal patterns of inequalities that existed for certain populations and the reasons why. O’Rand eventually developed a system to understand how accrued forms of resources could explain an individual’s life course trajectory.

In introducing the life course capital model, O’Rand (2006) states, “Life course capital is conceptualized as multiple stocks of resources that can be converted and exchanged to meet human needs and wants . . . these interdependent forms of capital accumulate over the life course and include: human, social, psychophysical, personal, cultural capital, and moral capital – but other forms might also exist.” As an individual moves through the life course and obtains various forms and degrees of capital, they can position themselves to utilize these forms of capital to ease into life-stage transitions, such as retirement. Six primary types of capital are introduced in the model:

- Human Capital – years of education, years in the workforce – acquisition of skills and knowledge;
- Social Capital – stock of direct and indirect social relationships – social integration into society;
- Psychophysical Capital – stock of one’s health, psychological and physical well-being;
- Personal Capital – cumulative efficacy and competence of an individual, role identity, ego development;
- Cultural Capital – level of proficiency in dominant socially valued codes and practices – linguistic, aesthetic, and interaction styles;
- Moral Capital – worth that society and others ascribe to the individual.

These interdependent forms of capital and their characteristics are discussed more in-depth as a framework for understanding a professional athlete's retirement transition from sport, following a review of prior frameworks, and the variables that impact retirement.

### III. Retirement From a Thanatological Perspective

Several introspective studies, such as Bookbinder's (1955) and Haerle's (1958; 1975) research of former professional baseball players or Weinberg's (1952) research on former boxers suggested retirement from sport as primarily positive, yet these studies never achieved prominence in the field. On the other hand, within popular media, first-person accounts and third-person accounts on retirement from sport, such as Jim Bouton's *Ball Four* and Roger Kahn's *Boys of Summer* during the 1970's, fueled interest in athletic retirement (Rosenberg, 1982). In particular, these two anecdotal accounts hinged on the experience of former baseball players as they experienced a downward slide in their careers before being released by their ball clubs. Additionally, most of these experiences were described in the same manner as if the athlete was experiencing a long, painful, and ostracized death. Because the language and outcomes within these popular accounts paralleled 'death' it comes as no surprise that Elisabeth Kubler-Ross's (1969) five stages of grief, which she laid out in her book *On Death and Dying*, drew comparisons from those exploring the retirement process from sport.

The discrete stages proposed by Kubler-Ross – denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance – were originally used to describe the manner by which people purportedly dealt with grief and tragedy, especially when diagnosed with a terminal illness or experiencing a catastrophic loss. An important caveat related to the stages is that individuals do not necessarily go through all stages and it may be possible for an individual to skip a stage(s). Interestingly, sport retirement scholars (Baillie and Danish, 1992; Blinde and Stratta, 1992; Hill and Lowe, 1974; Rosenberg, 1980a, 1980b, 1982) discussed why the Kubler-Ross model of grief has been associated within the literature and whether its application is justified. Rosenberg (1982) suggested that the social death framework for describing retirement difficulties in professional sport was merely a literary tool used by the popular media to make their accounts more compelling to the public. Regardless, the social death comparison is compelling and still appears in the sports retirement literature.

Blinde and Stratta (1992) found the Kubler-Ross model as an appropriate framework for their qualitative study of former college-level athletes who unexpectedly left sport because of injury, de-selection, or their program was terminated. Kerr and Dacyshyn (2002) found similar findings in their study of former elite-level gymnasts, as have other scholars (Alfermann, Stambulova and Zemaityte, 2004; Torregrosa, Boixados, Valiente and Cruz, 2004; Yannick,

Bilard, Ninot and Delignieres, 2003) who have looked at elite-level and professional athletes. Accounts from these studies as told by the athletes, were melancholic in nature and hinged on death related themes such as the ‘grim reaper’ coming to put the final nail in their coffin. A common theme also seen in these studies was the strength of an individual’s athletic identity and if the individual retired voluntarily or involuntarily – a strong identity to sport coupled with an involuntary exit typically meant he/she expressed behavioral characteristics outlined by Kubler-Ross. Ultimately, these two themes have emerged merely as a small part of a larger apparatus at work. Today, scholars continue to explore athletic retirement as a transitional process composed of multiple components, but like the field of gerontology this was not always the case.

The Glasser and Strauss (1965) model of awareness originally used to describe the relationship between dying patients and caregivers have also crept into the sports retirement literature by Lerch (1982) and Rosenberg (1982). The model is composed of four states: closed awareness, suspicion awareness, mutual pretense awareness, and open awareness. During the closed awareness context a caregiver knows the patient is dying, but keeps this information away from the patient. According to Lerch (1982) this would be similar to an athlete being demoted or receives less play by management, but the athlete internalizes this as ‘bad breaks’ or ‘misfortune’. The patient becoming aware of their situation but the caregiver evades the truth marks the suspicious awareness stage. When both parties know the inevitable is going to happen but put up false fronts is considered the mutual pretense stage. Lerch (1982) likens these two stages to the athlete being pushed out to make room for younger talent and then trying-out for a chance to stay on the team. The final stage, open awareness, occurs when information is exchanged between the caregiver and the patient – there is an understanding that the end is near. This final stage reflects the athlete coming to terms that the end of their sport career is near, as they wait for management to make the final decision. Rosenberg (1982) contends that most of the time an athlete and management never move past the first two stages – only veteran or star players might reach the final stage as management looks for a way to allow the athlete to leave gracefully.

Rosenberg (1982) suggests higher status athletes typically experience a slower social death, given that they tend to stay on the team longer despite slowed ability and inconsistent play, and this is the best way out of sport because it gives the athlete time to unwind and prepare for a career. On the other hand, Rosenberg (1982) stipulates that younger athletes who

experience a quick exit from sport will be less prepared and experience a traumatic retirement. However, future scholars (Brewer, 1993; Messner, 1993) would suggest neither of these depictions as accurate, and that an athlete's withdrawal experience from sport depends on their athletic identity and vested ego development. It could be the case that allowing athletes to withdraw slowly could actually exacerbate problems, giving athletes false pretenses that they could still play. Furthermore, athletes who experience a longer career are not more likely to plan accordingly for retirement. A needs assessment by Blann and Zaichkowsky (1986) revealed although 98 percent of professional hockey players in the National Hockey League think about life after hockey, less than half actually prepare for it. As a result of poor preparation, athletes can find themselves in a vulnerable position as their exit from sport nears.

While sports scholars have deemed thanatological perspectives to be mostly extraneous in describing an athlete's retirement, the proportion of both scholastic and anecdotal accounts has materialized over the years to suggest thanatology may have more merit than previously thought. Descriptions of athletes experiencing denial, anger and depression following retirement does seem to parallel social death and cannot be disregarded as superficial. Moreover, instead of debating whether or not retirement from sport is a form of social death, scholars should be focused on what antecedents are responsible for why an athlete struggles with retirement and how these negative effects and experiences following retirement can be minimized. The field of gerontology has been able to provide a framework to provide insight to such questions for the general population, which sport retirement scholars have drawn from.

#### **IV. Retirement From a Gerontological Perspective**

No account, scholastic or popular, has loaned itself more to the study of retirement from sport, than Miro A. Mihovilovic's (1968) descriptive study of former first-tier football stars from Eastern Europe. Mihovilovic's exploratory analysis of the former sportsmen, that came not long after disengagement theory and activity theory arose, served as a catalyst for future research on sports retirement. During this time, Mihovilovic specifically called on social gerontologists to study the unique retirement situations athlete's experience: "The problem of the retirement of sportsmen from active participation in sport can be of greatest interest for the gerontologist as well. Because what is involved here is not an especially typical phenomenon: it is a matter of the retirement of people from a specific sphere of social life, people who nevertheless are in a quite good physical state and are still fully efficient in life." Unfortunately, this request went unanswered; regardless Mihovilovic's study soon became the epicenter of inquiry.

Based on interviews and surveys with 44 former players and over 100 coaches and managers, Mihovilovic suggested that retirement from sport is primarily a sudden and traumatic event filled with frustration, confusion, and resentment for former athletes. Some of these athletes in the study turned to deviant behaviors, such as drug use and excessive drinking and gambling as a way to cope with the stress of changing one's role from a professional athlete to a non-athlete and reduced support network (losing friends on the team). Additionally, some of the athletes mentioned suicidal thoughts as they struggled with their identity. At the same time, while a portion of the sample exhibited a traumatic retirement experience, others had a less traumatic experience – navigating the retirement transition into another career more smoothly. Mihovilovic noted that these athletes strived to stay on their team as long as possible – making retirement a gradual process – and were able to find a separate career. Surprisingly, these positive transitions were seldom highlighted in the study. Most of the attention was centered on negative outcomes that athletes experienced. Although sparingly, Mihovilovic does emphasize that athletes need vocational training during their tenure with sport clubs to help them prepare for a career after sport and management should encourage such training. Additionally, he suggests that management should be more inclined to incorporate former athletes in team functions as a way to maintain their social network. Based on Mihovilovic's findings, once an athlete leaves his or her sport they lose their status as an athlete and the support network of fellow teammates.

Like Cumming's and Henry's findings that led to disengagement theory, the outcomes from Mihovilovic's study brought ire and praise from different scholars, but more importantly brought needed attention to the field of study. A whole host of scholars (Hill and Lowe, 1974; Lerch, 1980; McPherson, 1980; Rosenberg, 1980a, 1980b, 1982) concluded that any conclusions drawn from Mihovilovic's study should be taken with caution given the small sample size. However, these same scholars noted the study was important because it highlighted various mechanisms associated with retirement from sport and the transition out of sport. Specifically, the study underscored the idea that whether an athlete leaves their sport voluntarily or involuntarily is critical to the transition process out of sport. McPherson (1980) emphasized the fact that Mihovilovic's findings and popular media descriptions support behavioral patterns seen in Sussman's (1972) analytical model of retirement for the general public. Individuals who retire involuntarily are less prepared than those who retire voluntarily and Sussman contends that professional athletes retire voluntarily. Surprisingly, despite this insightfulness, Sussman (1972) is guilty of the assumption athletes know their careers will be short-lived, therefore they prepare accordingly and fame will bring them opportunities in the workforce. Given the strong attention towards Mihovilovic's study, albeit his only contribution to the field, it clearly helped spark the study of retirement from sport and remains an integral piece of work.

As Mihovilovic did, others (Hill and Lowe, 1972; Lerch, 1980; McPherson, 1980; Rosenberg 1980a) called on social gerontologists – to no avail – to shed light on this field of study. Lerch (1980) suggests gerontologists have made few attempts because: the discipline's understandable concentration on social problems of the aging population (health care, institutionalization) and the narrow definition of the word 'retirement' – transition from the position of the economically active to the economically inactive – does not fit the retiring athlete. Rosenberg (1980a) notes that retirement from sport is not a conclusion associated with chronological age, but often a major jarring shift in occupational status and mobility. With no framework of their own to draw upon and mostly anecdotal accounts, they turned gerontological retirement models in an attempt to better understand the retirement of professional athletes and borrow a framework to guide research. First-generation gerontological theories disengagement theory and activity theory and second-generation gerontological theories such as social breakdown theory and continuity theory were initially examined as possible models to work with.

Cumming's and Henry's (1961) disengagement theory was seen as an appropriate model on the surface, because it appeared that athletes had a mutual withdrawal from their sport, leaving the professional community and its fans behind, but further inspection revealed by anecdotal accounts this was rarely the case – which has been seen by athletes who retire only to un-retire and return to the sport. Only some get the opportunity to leave sport on their own accord, usually chance and circumstance (injury, managerial decisions, and age) decide for a majority of professional athletes. Lerch (1980), Reynolds (1980) and Rosenberg (1980a) suggest disengagement is non-applicable because athletes will eventually move on to some other form of work outside of athletics. Furthermore, Rosenberg (1980a; 1982) and Baillie and Danish (1992) advocate the idea of 'competitive spirit' goes directly in the face of disengagement because athletes try to hang on as long as possible, and disengagement theory which is from a structural functionalist perspective unrealistically assumes society tells the athlete how to leave the game without making waves for the sport establishment. As a result, disengagement theory was deemed an inappropriate model to study athletic retirement.

Neugarten's and Havighurst's (1961) activity theory, although in opposition to disengagement, fared no better as a possible framework, receiving little attention. Lerch (1980), Rosenberg (1980a), and Baillie and Danish (1992) quickly disregard the model concluding activity theory based on the assumption that a smoother transition into retirement occurs when an individual can maintain the same level of activity is nearly impossible, because the regimen in professional athletics is hard to replicate. However, Lerch (1980) noted that if better-adjusted individuals were those who can replace lost roles with new ones then younger athletes unexpectedly forced into retirement would benefit from such a transition. Unfortunately, none of these scholars attempted to explore this route in-depth as they moved on to other frameworks.

Atchley's (1971) continuity theory and Kuyper's and Bengtson's (1973) social breakdown theory each held their own better than disengagement or activity. Lerch (1980) states that individuals strive to maintain continuity in their lifestyle as they age; those with positive pre-retirement life pattern are characterized by minimal changes in life. To test continuity, Lerch (1980) looked at life satisfaction levels of 511 respondents who retired from Major League Baseball prior to 1970. He found those with higher levels of life satisfaction following retirement had high levels of post-retirement income, higher education attainment, positive attitudes pre-retirement, and were still in good health. The amount of time spent in the majors



and a crude measure of fame index were not significantly related to levels of satisfaction. However, one limitation of the study depended on participant's recall of pre-retirement attitudes. Additionally, the study did not measure the time spent before second career attainment or life-satisfaction recall during initial stages of retirement. Rosenberg (1980a) notes continuity might explain why some athletes try to cling to their sport as long as possible – typically seen with older players bouncing around a minor league system or smaller leagues leading up to retirement. This behavior of being unable to let go might eventually bring about dire consequences for the athlete, as described by Kuyper's and Bengtson's Social Breakdown theory. At the same time, sticking around the professional circuit as long as possible maybe a matter related to finances. As long as the athlete continues to play, they can maintain a stable level of income.

Rosenberg (1980a) favors Kuyper's and Bengtson's (1973) Social Breakdown theory because a professional athlete is identified with positive validation, but once retired the athlete will have to redefine oneself. According to Rosenberg (1980a) redefining one's role can be a negative experience and once an athlete's skills have diminished due to age or injury, the athlete may feel inferior to their sport peers. This trend may continue following sport because the former athlete may find him or herself socially behind compared to their non-sport peers, who have been working steadily to build a career. Additionally, unfavorable labeling by the public, could lead some athletes to further withdraw from society, if a form of role reconstruction does not present itself to the former athlete. As a result, this negative redefinition of a former athlete could contribute to other problems following retirement.

The identity conflict experienced by athletes could become a central tenet in the future as a way to understand the retirement transition and to understand how a former athlete navigates such a transition based on self and public expectations. Baillie and Danish (1992) emphasized the need for pre-retirement seminars or counseling efforts to help athletes prepare for retirement as they enter a time period of identity confusion. While scholars focused on Continuity and Social Breakdown theory, important markers such as athletic identity and time investment began to emerge as crucial factors leading to positive or negative transition out of sport. Furthermore, these examples of negative transitions, usually highlighted by the public media, do in fact reflect a thanatological approach of social death. Unfortunately, thanatological frameworks do not help scholars understand the development of athletic identity and social factors that influence the

identity. Nor, do they help explain what happens following the retirement transition or whether an athlete becomes stuck in a transition.

## **V. Retirement as “Rebirth”**

One critique of gerontological theories and thanatological models was that they painted an overly negative perception of retirement (Baillie and Danish, 1992; Coakley, 1983; Greendorfer and Blinde, 1985). An alternative critique raised the possibility for an athlete to retire voluntarily, given the varying circumstances when an athlete retires – it may seem voluntary, but in reality is an involuntary decision because of outside pressures to retire (McPherson, 1980, 1984). Demands leading to an involuntary retirement not due to injury, may stem from family commitments or managerial decisions that allow the athlete to leave honorably before getting cut or waived. Scholars (Coakley, 1983; Greendorfer and Blinde, 1985) began to argue that because the manner in which an athlete retires is far different compared to the general public, gerontological frameworks were inadequate; application of disengagement theory assumes that athletes will not acquire new roles, while activity theory assumes an athlete will need to maintain a similar level of activity. Both of these assumptions were deemed as unrealistic. Additionally, they felt the prior literature was mostly inaccurate and non-representative – playing into the romanticized desires of the media. Opting to take the field of study in a more positive direction, Coakley (1983) suggested that retirement from sport was rebirth and not social death.

Specifically, Coakley (1983) proposes that, “retirement is most accurately conceptualized as a role transition through which a person disengages from one set of activities and relationships to develop or expand other activities and relationships.” Additionally, he suggests that if the literature’s portrayal of a lack of autonomy in competitive sport, rigidity of sports organizations, and the length of athletic seasons as being long and strenuous, are accurate, then athletes would welcome retirement. He concludes that, “it seems reasonable that leaving sport is not inevitably stressful or identity shaking, nor is it a source of serious adjustment problems. In fact, adjustments are necessary - just as they are in any role transition - and it seems most top level athletes make them in a relatively constructive manner.” So what might explain negative experiences?

Interestingly, although Coakley emphasizes a positive transition into retirement, he does delve into why adjustment problems might exist for an athlete. They most likely stem from former athletes: whose sport careers have seriously restricted the development of credentials and attributes that others like them were able to form in coping with normal developmental tasks

through life; whose relationships have been restricted to other athletes, involving interaction based primarily on sport-related issues and activities; whose families have provided little social and emotional support for any involvement outside the physical dimensions of sport activity; whose backgrounds have provided little access to activity alternatives and role models outside of sport; and whose lack of material resources and social contacts have restricted their transitions into careers, expressive non-sport relationships, and satisfying leisure activities (Coakley, 1983).

Only two years following Coakley's proposal that withdrawal from sport is mostly positive, data appeared supporting this claim. Greendorfer and Blinde (1985) agree with Coakley that retirement from sport is too often reported as being a traumatic process, while maintaining criticism towards the limitations of previous studies. They argue that previous studies primarily employed mostly cross-sectional data as opposed to longitudinal data, and homogenous samples, typically devoid of females and an under representation of minorities. Therefore they directed their study toward a more diverse sample – 1,123 male and female former intercollegiate athletes who participated in a wide variety of sports during a six-year span. The conclusions in their study upheld Coakley's view that retirement from sport was a relatively easy transition, with new opportunities following sport. Their findings highlighted several aspects: once in college, athletes focus most of their attention on sport as first year and second year students, but as time goes by a decrease in sport importance and an increase in other aspects such as social integration and education appears. While this may be an accurate reflection of most intercollegiate athletes who never make it to the professional level, it maybe an inaccurate reflection of those who become professional athletes; these individuals may retain a high level of sport importance all the way through intercollegiate athletics. The athletes in this study did not experience strong feelings of leaving sport - but perhaps that is why they never made it to the upper level of play resulting from a lack in desire or skill. Although this study consisted of 1,123 respondents the overall response rate was well short of half (40 percent) suggesting caution towards representation. A few years later, a study investigating the retirement process of junior league hockey players fostered a rebirth approach. Curtis's and Ennis's (1988) findings on 109 former elite-level male hockey players compared to matched non-athlete males supports Coakley's rebirth thesis to an extent. The hockey players noted several positive aspects after leaving hockey, one being more time for other pursuits, and felt their status as a former athlete led to more opportunities. Differences in life, leisure, and job satisfaction levels between the

retired hockey players and the matched sample were not statistically significant, suggesting that retired hockey players were neither more or less satisfied in all three categories. Importantly, although the sample of hockey players indicated enjoying retirement and the opportunity of new pursuits, these players also mentioned that they maintained a connection with hockey after retirement such as coaching, scouting, or operational responsibilities. Because of this continued involvement, it appeared that continuity theory might work, but the authors still found fault with the gerontological approach as a whole, stating: "Continued activity in occupations or work is an element of the situation that must be ignored if we apply a gerontological theory of retirement, such as continued activity or social death and disengagement, of leaving the elite sport role. There is neither cessation of work activity nor total retirement from sport. These gerontology theories have been conveniently available for extrapolation to leaving elite sport roles. However, they could seem to provide a poor fit; they result in a rather incomplete understanding of sport role disengagement. These theories were intended for, and best apply to final retirement from the work role."

Allison and Meyer (1988) held a similar viewpoint as their predecessors (Coakley, 1983; Greendorfer and Blinde, 1985) that retirement from sport was rebirth and not social death, but were curious if individual sport athletes not part of a team, such as golfers or tennis players, exhibited similar patterns given the different environment for individual based athletics. According to Allison and Meyer (1988) individual sport athletes may retire with a different set of circumstances; athletes must carry the burden themselves leading to extra stress that they can't share or defray with teammates leading to isolation. Because the researchers felt that too few studies focused on individual based sports, as well as the experiences of female athletes, they utilized retrospective questionnaires and key informant interviews to investigate the retirement experience of 20 former professional female tennis players in the United States Tennis Association.

Findings revealed that most athletes did not think about injuries or their tennis careers ending during the early stages of their professional career. For this sample the reasons for retirement ranged from being frustrated with the daily grind as the highest reason (40 percent) to being tired of the travel required (25 percent) to injury (15 percent). Decreases in skill because of age (10 percent) and league displacement as a result of younger athletes (10 percent) were the other reasons cited for athletic retirement. Only half of the sample said they thought about life

after tennis, and their exit from sport seemed to “snowball” or “unfold” quickly leading to a very frustrating and stressful experience immediately following their decision. Following some time away from tennis (generally less than a year), a third of the sample indicated feelings of isolation and identity loss following retirement. However, half of female tennis players indicated they'd never return or go back to professional tennis and were actually relieved to move in a new direction, which seems to be consistent with Coakley's rebirth hypothesis. After a few years away from the league almost the entire sample felt satisfied (50 percent) or stable (40 percent) with their retirement decision. However, the respondents were required to recall their feelings before, during, and after retirement and the retrospective accounts might be inaccurate.

The conclusions from these studies paint athletic retirement as a fairly non-traumatic event, with some athletes regarding retirement as a relief allowing them to follow other pursuits. Given these outcomes, albeit with strong limitations, it appears that Coakley's hypothesis of social rebirth was gaining momentum in the literature, but still needed additional empirical support to crystallize this claim. However, not every study published since Coakley's (1983) rebirth position always reflected athletic retirement as a non-traumatic, positive event.

A few studies, such as Werthner's and Orlick's (1986) in-depth personal interviews with 28 successful Olympic athletes, pointed towards a difficult retirement transition more in sync with the social death perspective. After a thorough analysis of Olympians' response to various questions surrounding their athletic career, Werthner and Orlick identified several inter-dependent factors leading to a difficult transition out of competitive sport. Unaccomplished goals, involuntary retirement because of injury, coaching and management disputes, being financially unprepared, a support network, and encountering daily reminders of the missed opportunities were some of the factors determining whether an athlete experienced a positive or negative transition. Three-quarters (78%) of the sample experienced a difficult transition out of sport. Given the differing conclusions drawn by various scholars, regardless of data collection techniques – both quantitative and qualitative – evidence seemed to support both hypotheses.

Although Riley's (1971) age stratification theory is often considered a third generation gerontological theory, its conception occurred fairly early, during a time when continuity and social breakdown theory were the center of debate. The stratification theory evolved over time becoming a major framework in the field. Similarly, during a time when scholars debated whether athletic retirement was social death or social rebirth, Danish and D'Augellie (1980) and

McPherson (1984) introduced a different way of conceptualizing athletic retirement, each borrowing directly from a gerontological framework. Both believed a life course approach was best suited to understand athletic retirement, regardless if it was a negative or positive event, because understanding the factors (life histories) that lead to such an experience was important. As a result, common themes seen in previous studies could be better understood through an investigative lens such as the life course perspective, providing answers to the question “what happens to an athlete after they retire?” as well as “why does retirement happen?”, “what factors influence retirement and the retirement experience?”, and “how can athletes best prepare for retirement?”. Unfortunately, it would take some time before these life-span/life-course approaches caught on. It was not until the early 1990s when scholars began to focus on retirement from sport as a transitional process, and outcomes were influenced by inter-related factors and mechanisms – no longer was retirement being seen as only social death or social rebirth. Scholars (Crook and Robertson, 1990; Danish, Petitpas, and Hale, 1993; Swain, 1991; Taylor, and Ogilvie, 1994) started putting a strong emphasis on a transitional retirement framework, while other scholars (Baillie and Danish, 1992; Brewer, 1993; Messner, 1992) investigated athletic identity and ego development starting from a young age. Suddenly, much of the literature was reverberating tones very similar to the life course perspective.

## **VI. Retirement as “Transition” and the Effects of Athletic Identity**

The Schlossberg (1981) Model of Human Adaptation became a focal point for athletic retirement scholars (Crook and Robertson, 1990; Swain, 1991), because of its ability to frame retirement not as a single event but as an ongoing process with several catalysts. The work of Schlossberg hinges heavily on human and social development philosophies by Levinson, Neugarten, and Piaget, as well as, Sussman’s (1971) social retirement model. Specifically Sussman’s model was composed of three components - individual, situational, and environmental – and each layer composed of interrelated variables. The individual component was constructed by a person’s life-style, needs, goals, and personal values. The situational and structural component was composed of factors involving the circumstances surrounding the retirement decision – pre-retirement preparations, post-retirement variables such as retirement income and other forms of financial support. The final component of Sussman’s model was based on environmental processes usually out of the individuals’ control – societal definitions and professional organizational postures.

Building on Sussman’s (1971) model and the work of Neugarten (1979), Schlossberg was focused on off-time transitions and their affect on individuals going through them. Schlossberg’s conclusions closely aligned with the assertion that off-time events are stressful, and the amount of stress experienced is tied to how much their social networks fluctuated and whether they were able to harness proper supports to cope with the transition. Schlossberg (1981) stipulated that the transition itself might affect how the individual perceives him/herself, their abilities, and overall quality of life for an unknown length of time. Furthermore, Schlossberg believed that a change in assumptions about oneself (spurred by role confusion) and changes in assumptions about their social world could also correspond to changes in one's behavior and social relationships. As a result, individuals would experience personal growth or deterioration during this off-time transition. To capture how the transitional shift is experienced, Schlossberg identified three main components, very similar to Sussman’s model, responsible for the transition adaptation. These three components were the characteristics of the transition itself, characteristics of the individual, and characteristics of the individual’s environment.

The characteristics of the transition itself was then divided into six parts: perceived role change; the mood of the role change; source of the transition (internal and external); timing of the transition (on-time or off-time); the on-set of the transition (sudden or gradual); and the



duration of the transition. Characteristics of the individual include several factors such as: race/ethnicity, age, gender, socioeconomic status, health status, perceived identity, coping skills, etc. Environmental characteristics include social supports such as family and friends, and other supports such as social services and programs. According to Schlossberg, the three main components of a transition and their individual characteristics are interdependent but influence the transition process differently – exacerbating or relieving transitional stress. While Schlossberg's adaptation model closely parallels Sussman's (1971) model of social retirement, it should come as no surprise that others (Crook and Robertson, 1991; Danish, Petitpas, and Hale, 1993; Taylor and Ogilvie, 1994) introduced their own models, some more analogous than others, which reflected Schlossberg's model but tailored towards athletes.

Crook and Robertson (1991) analyzed the Schlossberg's adaptation model and from it comprised five interdependent factors that they felt were the most critical for a *successful* transition out of sport. The five factors are: anticipatory socialization preparation; athletic identity; personal management skills; social support systems; and whether the athlete's exit from sport was voluntary or involuntary. Crook and Robertson (1991) and Swain (1991) argued that athletes who are better equipped for making a transition out of sport were those who pursued career / vocational training outside of sport during their athletic career, built an identity not solely tied to sport, maintained a support network outside of sports, remained autonomous and independent during their athletic career, and left on their own terms. Although this model seems relatively straightforward – there are a few factors the athlete does not always have complete control over, and an unexpected change in one may hinder other factors. Primarily, exit from sport is seen as an involuntary decision - most athletes are forced into retirement whether because of injury, age, or de-selection. Only when an athlete comes to the realization that their career will end eventually, they might consider proper preparations – such as seeking vocational training and preparing for the financial offset. While this intuitively makes sense, unfortunately, by the time an athlete will reach sport's highest pinnacle (the professional realm) there is little time left to devote towards other interests. If anything, athletes may need to increase their commitment to sport just to maintain their status in the league as they age. The biological deterioration of the body is a natural phenomenon and thus aging athletes might find themselves putting in more time to maintain their physique and competitive edge. Assuming aging athletes

go down this path of increased commitment, they may further isolate themselves from the realities and expectations of the world outside of sport.

Danish, Petitpas, and Hale (1993) integrated the Schlossberg (1981) model and the life-span model introduced in the sports retirement literature by Danish and D'Augellie (1980). This model, based on a life-span development perspective, revolves around the assumption that individuals experience continuous growth and change across their life course. Life transitions, such as retirement, requiring an individual to navigate inter- and intrapersonal relationships, are affected by previous transitional experiences and buffered within the micro and macro contexts of perceived roles. Therefore, an individual's ability to harness all of these factors in a constructive manner is crucial for a positive transition. Unfortunately, Danish's and D'Augellie's (1980) work lay mostly dormant in the literature before it became a focus nearly a decade later, when scholars recognized the value of such a model.

Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) introduced an all-encompassing five-step model, which built upon many of the philosophies seen in the models presented by Sussman (1971), Danish and D'Augellie (1980), and Schlossberg (1982). Moreover, Taylor and Ogilvie were the first to incorporate several components that described the transition process – level of athletic membership, causal mechanisms for retirement, transitional barriers – as well as, available resources to buffer athletes from a negative transitional experience.

Step one of their model accounts for the various reasons why an athlete retires (both voluntary and involuntary mechanisms were listed) and their potential impact. One reason an athlete retires is simply a result of natural biology. As an athlete advances in chronological age it is customary to see a decline in one's ability to perform at such a high level, or more time needed to return from an injury. Given this scenario, aging athletes must sustain, or increase their training regimen to remain competitive with younger athletes. The paradox within professional sports is that older (veteran) athletes typically receive larger contracts than their younger counterparts despite this potential decline in performance, or less time spent playing and more time on the injured list. As a result, the increased time spent training and looking over one's back for upcoming, younger athletes can lead to a mental falling out in a sense. This might explain why some athletes lose the motivation to keep up with the daily grind to maintain the edge. Accompanying this biological deficiency is how the public might change their once-positive valuation of athlete when they were in their prime to a devalued perception if the athlete

no longer performs at a high level. Therefore, an athlete must deal with his self-perception of his/her abilities compared to the public's perceptions. Another reason an athlete might retire, often seen when a lesser-known athlete matures is the potential of being deselected.

De-selection, often the consequence of survival of the fittest, comes in many forms, whether it is being cut or let go in team-based sports, while individual-based sports is the result of not qualifying, or being dropped by a sponsor. De-selection can sometimes be masked as a voluntary decision when veteran players are approached by management and informed their contract will not be picked up or extended, therefore an athlete might retire before being cut or waived. Although many see this as a form of natural attrition, the athletes who experience such an event are left questioning their abilities (if they still have what it takes) at a fairly young age as they make every effort to remain on a team or within a league. An athlete's moving from team to team, or between leagues, is often a sign that their sports career is coming to an end. Typically de-selection is a slow process in which the athlete is aware of the impending outcome, therefore, some athletes might take this opportunity to leave sport permanently and move on to other opportunities outside of sport, but this should not be considered an athlete's voluntary choice, which is typically the best outcome.

When an athlete has the luxury to voluntarily decide when they want to retire, it has often been cited as the most desirable ways to end one's sport career – the least traumatic and resulting in a quicker adaptation to life after sport. Making the decision to retire voluntarily is often due to new opportunities outside of sport that provides a new sense of challenge and excitement. Other reasons have been connected with wanting to spend more time with friends and family – a refocusing of values – or the opportunity to construct a new identity outside of sports. Unfortunately, it would appear very few athletes have the ability to retire on their own terms, which can be a pleasant experience. Instead a sudden injury often cuts the career of athlete well short.

According to Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) the physical and repetitive nature of sport can and often does lead to an unexpected injury. Depending on the circumstances and needs surrounding the organization, the athletes may suddenly find themselves on the outside looking in following a debilitating injury. Moreover, athletes can face serious distress, depression, and trauma following a career-ending injury or series of injuries; substance abuse, suicidal thoughts,

identity crises are a few outcomes stemming from such a traumatic and unexpected withdrawal from sport.

In Taylor's and Ogilvie's (1994) model, the second step is composed of factors affecting an athlete's ability adjusting to the retirement transition. Developmentally, the amount of time and devotion needed to perfect the skills needed to become a professional athlete often comes at the expense of other life skills - restricting one's growth in other important areas, such as educational or vocational training. This isolation can result in a one-dimensional self-concept where the athlete only knows one thing: their sport. Likewise, these perfected skills usually cannot carry over to a traditional career. Knowing how to hit a curve ball or shaping a golf shot does not necessarily translate into applicable career skills. However, team sports require an individual to learn how to work as a unit and can help build interpersonal skills. Additionally, the strong emphasis on winning could breed unrealistic expectations, so when an athlete fails (involuntarily forced out of sport) there is greater difficulty to cope with this perceived failure. Furthermore, an athlete's self-identity is often directly tied in terms of athletic success, and the longer one is in sport, the more they will be associated with that role, and what they have achieved during their tenure. Therefore, once an athlete retires, they might question their self-worth post-sport once they enter a society where being able to hit a homerun has little social value, but that is what they are remembered and associated with. Another major issue facing athletes is the idea of autonomy and control. Through much of an athlete's career, decisions and tasks are made for them; all they have to do is show up and play. Without being able to take part in the decision making process and constantly having things done for them, athletes have few opportunities to build autonomy. Other factors buffering adaptation issues are an athlete's socio-economic status (both growing up and at the time of retirement), minority status, gender, marital status, number of children, and the athlete's health condition.

The third component of Taylor's and Ogilvie's model accounts for the resources to assist an athlete with the retirement transition. Individual coping skills typically learned over one's life course may not be fully developed for an athlete. Underdeveloped coping mechanisms, in conjunction with the athlete's available social support network, are both key to the athlete's ability to leave sport in a fluid motion. If an athlete has a small or no support network to surround him or her with and they do not reach out for help, an athlete might further isolate oneself, exacerbating a negative transition. According to Taylor and Ogilvie, borrowing from

the Schlossberg (1981) model – if an athlete found time to invest their money wisely (pre-retirement planning) and sought an education during the off-season, such avenues would properly prepare an athlete for a life following sport. However, the ability for a young athlete to invest their money properly and the ability to find the time to obtain an education during the ‘off-season’ are unrealistic. Therefore, Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) account for such impracticable situations, by placing accountability on the sporting leagues and athletic associations.

As the fourth component of their model, Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) challenges sports institutions to provide athletes with an outlet to express feelings of doubt, concern, or frustrations with a certified sports counselor or psychologist – which are available to the athlete during the retirement transition. If a team or league is unable to find such personnel, then they could consider the creation of a mentorship program to assist younger athletes and keep them from making ill-advised decisions. Furthermore, they call for educational opportunities to be provided for athletes, so they can learn skills that go beyond the field of competition. In combination with these educational opportunities and access to counselors, retirement planning seminars should be provided to athletes also. These services and supports would bolster an athlete mentally, emotionally, behaviorally, and socially so they can best prepare for retirement transition difficulties.

The final part of Taylor’s and Ogilvie’s retirement transition model delineate the differences between team based and individual based sports, as well as athletes who went to college (although not always finishing) prior to a professional career and those who did not. Most individual based sports whether amateur or professional do not have an educational requirement so an athlete may begin competition as early as the age of 18 and declaring oneself as a professional disqualifies them the opportunity to attend a college or university on an athletic scholarship. On the other hand, typically, team based sports (such as the NFL, NBA, WNBA) require an athlete to be at least one to three years removed from high school before they are eligible to play professionally, while other leagues (MLB and the NHL) do not. Requiring athletes to play at the collegiate level before they are eligible for the professional level has both pros and cons. While it gives an athlete the opportunity to further his or her education, athletes destined for a professional career typically forego the final years of schooling and may never complete a degree (Coakley,) and returning back to finish becomes much more difficult each passing year spent away. Furthermore, some colleges and universities have a predetermined

curriculum that best suits the athlete's schedule, therefore limiting the athletes' ability to explore a curriculum that fits their interests.

In terms of athletic retirement, it has been hypothesized that athletes participating in college athletics are more aware of the timetable they are working under, and assuming they do not turn professional or maintain elite amateur status, the end of their collegiate eligibility is known allowing for athletes to properly prepare (Webb, Nasco, Riley and Headrick, 1998). Often, such a luxury does not exist in professional athletics – retirement is rarely voluntary. According to Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) the different paths between collegiate athletes and professional athletes is often overlooked; these different paths are critical in the identity development process and might account for the positive transition findings (Greendorfer and Blinde, 1985) seen in collegiate athletes. The collegiate experience provides athletes the opportunity to realign their career goals if it appears their athletic career will not continue at a professional level. On the other hand, while some collegiate athletes will make it to the highest stage of competition – as a professional – it could be possible that these athletes were very cocooned from experiences in college and never had the opportunity to develop autonomy or self-agency. Therefore, despite some formal educational training, even professional athletes with a collegiate background can still go through a negative retirement transition. Given the multiple layers and components of athletic retirement, which seemed to be interrelated with athletic identity, it may come as no surprise that recently, a plethora of studies have focused on the construction of athletic identity and its development over time.

### **The Role of Athletic Identity**

While scholars were focused on expanding the basic premises of the Schlossberg model, they also began conceptualizing the important role of athletic identity in the retirement transition. In many instances athletic identity formation begins at a young age, as early as five years of age, and builds as an individual moves up the ranks (Brewer, 1993; Webb, Nasco, Riley, and Headrick, 1998). Therefore, this prolonged creation of athletic identity can lead to a dominant and narrowed self-concept (Baillie and Danish, 1992). As a result, the societal expectations and definitions associated with this role can further mold one's athletic identity – possibly intensifying the burden following retirement (Baillie and Danish, 1992). Some athletes who make the professional ranks are viewed as heroes and role models (whether they aspire to be or not) because of their athletic abilities. Additionally, the public typically views sport as a zero-

sum outcome with only winners and losers. Therefore, this greater evaluative weight on an athlete's successes and failures can add to one's identity development. Moreover, athletes struggle with the public's perception of their identity versus a self-perception of their own identity. Messner (1993) attributes much of an athlete's post sport athletic identity conflict as a result of a key trait most professional athletes possess, which is not being seen as a quitter. Making it to the professional level requires an individual to cultivate a combination of natural talent, hard work, and determination. Unfortunately, failure in sport is equated to an athlete no longer possessing such qualities anymore. In fact, an athlete who sees their skills decline due to age or injury might refuse to voluntarily retire for the fear of being seen as a quitter in the public's eyes (Messner, 1993). Therefore, they invest more time into their role to maintain their athletic status, by spending more hours training harder to keep an edge on the competition.

Brewer (1993) found a correlation between higher levels of perceived athletic identity and depressive symptoms following involuntary retirement from sport, as a result of a catastrophic injury. Brewer hypothesized that following their exit from sport, athletes with a higher level of perceived athletic identity placed a stronger emphasis on their loss and the missed opportunities of such a loss – while those with a weaker sense of athletic identity were able to focus on new ventures. Other variables possibly explaining the correlation were not looked at and as a result athletic identity could be a small piece of the puzzle. Additionally, the athletes from this study were intercollegiate athletes and had not reached the professional ranks.

Grove, Lavalley, and Gordon (1997) measured financial, occupational, emotional, and social adjustment to retirement from sport, in addition to self-identity and various coping mechanisms of 48 former elite level athletes. They found the strength of athletic identity at the time of retirement exhibited significant correlations to coping processes, emotional and social adjustment, pre-retirement planning, and anxiety over career decisions. Athletic identity was also correlated with emotional and social based problems but not occupational or financial based adjustment problems. Athletes with strong athletic identities also exhibited denial based coping strategies and withdrawal behavior (both mentally and socially) as they went through the retirement transition.

Webb, Nasco, Riley, and Headrick (1998) further emphasized the connection between athletic identity and the involuntary nature of athletic retirement. Specifically, they state there are at least two reasons why injury-related retirement may be more problematic for athletes with

strong athletic identities. First, the unexpected nature of injuries may preclude opportunities for the athlete to psychologically prepare for retirement - locking them into their athletic identity. Second, injuries are seldom recognized immediately as career ending. Athletes often rehabilitate the injury and believe they will play again. During this time, a strong sense of athletic identity is needed to focus attention on returning - creating unrealistic expectations. Therefore, athletic identity is not just maintained, but strengthened.

Weiss (2001) focused on the athletic identity through a symbolic interactionist perspective, and stipulates athletic identity and recognition is maintained and reinforced by the values and norms of the surrounding society. Part of this identity reinforcement comes through recognition and adoration athletes receive, even at a young age, often in the form of awards (i.e., Most Valuable Player, All-Star, All First-Team, etc), exorbitant contracts or sponsorships, because of their unique abilities and qualities. Weiss (2001) also notes that athletic identity is often tied to attributes that are often quantifiable. Most often performance in sport is simply reduced to a number or statistic, which is a universal measuring stick, and can be understood by everybody. As a result, some athletes are remembered simply for their records or feats (i.e., hitting homeruns, points scored, fastest relay time, etc.), while other athletes might not be as well remembered because they never obtained such achievements. On the contrary, some athletes, despite having a very successful career, maybe forever remembered by a negative athletic experience (i.e., missing a game winning shot, striking out, or dropping a pass, etc.). Unfortunately, the public's observation of these events might impinge upon the athlete's own perceptions causing identity confusion for the athlete following retirement. As a result, an athletic career recognized through personal records or awards is directly attached to the meaning such achievements have in the eye's of the public. Therefore, while athletic identification comes across as simplistic in nature, the after-effects it can have on an athlete is quite complex based on the perceptions of both the athlete and identity scripted by the society they live in.

Stier (2007), Torregrosa, Boixados, Valiente and Cruz (2004) based on qualitative interviews with elite level athletes concluded that the increase in heightened media presence surrounding athletics has created a stronger public opinion towards the social role of an athlete. Therefore, as more emphasis is placed on an athlete's skills and abilities their athletic role slowly fuses with their identity. In turn, their self-worth is simply a reflection of their accomplishments on the playing field and the positive or negative valuation by the public. Additionally, the



control exercised over an athlete, through mandatory training camps, schedules, diets, workout routines, etc., limits the athlete's autonomy and ability to grow beyond sport and restricts their role (Torregrosa et al., 2004). As a result, these learned behaviors and perceptions can affect an athlete's retirement transition, but both sets of scholars also concur that an athlete's retirement experience seldom reflects 'death' or 'rebirth', but rather an indistinct experience. According to Stier (2007) this inability to create a role / identity for oneself is a consequence of role restrictions over the years coupled with designated identity athletes assume based on the perceptions of the media and those who watch the athlete compete. While this lack of autonomy and role restriction would appear to lead to a difficult transition following retirement from sport, both sets of scholars conclude that the retirement transition from sport is primarily ambiguous during the initial steps.

## **VII. Life Course Capital: a Model for Understanding Retirement Transition**

As the Life Course model gained prominence in the field of gerontology, McPherson (1984) noted its potential as a workable framework within the sports retirement literature. The Life Course Capital model (O'Rand, 2001; 2006) is a framework used to understand how cumulative advantages and disadvantages build across the life course and ways individuals utilize various resources (such as learned coping skills, education attainment, social supports, etc.) to overcome hardships. The Life Course Capital model shares many of the common themes seen with more traditional retirement models. However, the capital model provides not only a basis for scholars to understand how various social mechanisms work across an athlete's life, but it provides a framework to analyze how these forms of capital were developed and could be leveraged to the athlete's advantage – creating a seamless transition out of sport. By following the social, physical, and psychological sequence of events from an early age, this model also creates a better understanding of athletic identity development and its impact following retirement from sport. By gaining a better understanding of these various mechanisms, it provides tangible areas for players' leagues and associations to create programs or opportunities designed to help an athlete optimize and control various forms of capital following retirement.

Shultz's, Morton's, and Weckerle's (1998) investigation on push and pull factors and the influence they have on retirement for the general public – is also reflective of life course capital attainment (both negative and positive). According to the researchers, based on a review of the literature, push and pull factors were important differentiators when deciding to retire, but after retirement, the push (negative) factors were more salient. Those who perceived their retirement to be voluntary had higher life satisfaction scores; and rated themselves as healthier (both physically and mentally) than those who retired involuntarily. Fernandez, Stephan, and Fouquereau, (2006) developed a sophisticated scale, which was tested by 239 professional athletes to assess both the reason for sports career termination based on push and pull factors, and the transitional experience as a result of the type of termination. They found that the retirement process is very complex and multifaceted with no one single indicator pointing towards a negative transition or a positive transition. While proper pre-retirement planning and positive capital attainment can be a pull factor into retirement, inadequate planning and low levels of capital attainment can negatively intensify the transition out of sport. At the same time, individuals pulled (considered more positive) into retirement with adequate financial

planning still struggled with retirement because of identity confusion. With this information, it becomes more apparent that the retirement transition for athletes can appear to reflect various aspects of retirement for the general population; involuntary retirement coupled with inadequate forms of capital can lead to poor personal well being and uncertainty or vice-versa. One of the central points is that the under development of various forms of capital has crept into the spotlight for understanding why an uneasy transition out of sport occurs. By understanding how and why various forms of capital become undeveloped or underutilized over the life course, scholars can propose new mechanisms to assist athletes in optimizing capital development to best prepare for life after sport. The following sections investigate O’Rand’s (2001; 2006) model with an emphasis on human, social, psychophysical, and personal capital opportunities and barriers. Although in less detail moral and cultural capital will also be discussed, followed by the introduction of spiritual capital and its possible role in the retirement transition.

### **Human Capital**

The first form of capital introduced by O’Rand (2001; 2006), human capital, is the acquisition of skills and knowledge from the time spent gaining an education and years in the workforce. Educational attainment begins at a young age and is interdependent on other factors, such as your parent’s income, access to a good school, and qualified teachers. The first concern with human capital in relation to a professional athlete is whether the skills obtained playing football, basketball, or any other sport translates to other domains of life. Does the ability to throw a football fifty yards or run a great forty-yard dash (a measure of speed), or hitting a game winning shot under pressure mean the athlete can use these skills in another profession or life situation to overcome hardship(s)? Furthermore, do athletes take full advantage of the learning opportunities presented to them as they move through various educational settings (from high school to college) as they strive to become a professional athlete?

Danish, Petitpas, and Hale (1993) argue that the amount of time it takes to refine an athletic skill to reach a professional level leaves little time for an athlete to focus on other life skills – whether it is in the classroom or on the job training. This skill refinement begins at a young age, as those with a special athletic talent are identified. Brewer (1993) concludes that from an early age these children are insulated from outside pressures and encouraged to perfect their athletic skills at the expense of other opportunities. Those who continue to perform and succeed on the field of play are further isolated to keep working on their athletic development,

and it is considered acceptable. It should be noted that this type of pathway, might not be typical for every athlete who goes on to a professional career. The take home message is that some athletes will miss out on developing and bolstering forms of human capital. Even institutions of higher education, where an individual can broaden human capital have come under fire for maintaining this constrictive pathway for student athletes, as have professional sport leagues that empower such characteristics, such as learned helplessness.

The NBA came under scrutiny for allowing high school seniors to declare for the NBA draft, especially after a few of the prospects became the poster child for a failed jump from high school to the NBA. To make the situation worse for those who failed at the professional level is that they forfeited their opportunity to play college athletics, where they could have further refined their athletic skills in addition to receiving an education. As a result of the negative attention the NBA instituted a rule that requires an individual to be at least one year removed from high school before they enter the draft. This rule was designed to encourage athletes to attend a college or university to further their skills both on and off the field of play. However, while some would agree that the opportunity to gain a higher level of education in exchange for athletic performance is an excellent way to gain human capital, an issue that still exists is whether collegiate athletes who go on to be a professional athlete actually take advantage to broaden their human capital. In fact, scholars (Benford, 2007; Coakley, 2007) have suggested that the rules and regulations between the National Collegiate Athletic Association and universities and colleges actually create a structure that limits the athlete's ability to develop autonomy and self-agency.

The perceived notion that collegiate athletes receive an enriching college experience might be more blurred than once thought. Benford (2007), Coakley (2007), McCormick and McCormick (2008), and Sage (1998) all suggest that while the opportunity to gain an education for sport performance is an excellent way for an athlete to gain experience and skills outside of sports, unfortunately, athletic programs can actually isolate student athletes from gaining a holistic and enhanced education. It might come as a surprise to those not familiar with collegiate athletics, that a large proportion of student athletes are funneled into various disciplines and majors, which are customized around a sport schedule, allowing the student athlete to focus more attention on cultivating their athletic talents. The creation of such a system limits the athlete's ability to earn a degree in the field of their choosing. In addition to a smaller cache of scholastic

options, the daily schedule for athletes is prepared by others (when they will eat, where they will travel, etc.) and leaves little room for an athlete to develop independence and autonomy. This inability to develop autonomy continues if the athlete turns professional.

Moreover, while many professional leagues (NFL, NBA) require an athlete to complete at least one year to three years of collegiate sport, that leaves little incentive to actually graduate with a degree. If a player has the ability to turn professional, they can choose to relinquish finishing their college education to pursue the chance to play at the top level. However, once a player makes this commitment (declaring oneself eligible) to play at the professional level (they do not necessarily actually have to play) they forfeit their athletic scholarship – if they want to return to school and finish a degree it will cost them out of pocket. McCormick and McCormick (2008) suggest that while the opportunity of a free education is the collegiate athlete's payoff for their services, the possibility of a greater payoff (upwards of a million dollars) can easily dissuade players from finishing their degree. Conversely, the possibility of attaining hundred of thousands to millions of dollars can act as an excellent buffer from previous hardships.

What is intriguing is despite the fact that most professional leagues will advocate for the completion a college degree, none of them require the completion of a college degree for eligibility. Ironically, the NFLPA emphasizes the importance of an education on the official website: "Education is crucial for success to become an NFL player or a success at any career. Completing a college degree will not only prepare players for life after football, but it also seems to pay off during a player's career. Players with degrees earn 20 to 30 percent more than players who don't have degrees. They also have a career that lasts about 50 percent longer. While there is not one answer for why players with degrees have stronger careers, one theory is that players who show the intelligence, concentration, and mental discipline to complete a degree show these qualities on the field more. Doing well in school from an early age also helps players develop the concentration they will need to memorize plays and avoid eligibility problems in high school and college." However, the NFL does not require the completion of a degree or a set limit of semesters or quarters at the college level before becoming eligible, the same can be said about the NBA, WNBA (Women's National Basketball Association), MLB, PGA (Professional Golf Association), LPGA (Ladies Professional Golf Association), and ATP (Association of Tennis Professionals). Furthermore, while an education may assist an athlete on the field, it will carry more weight off the field.

Other forms of human capital are also present, but vary from sport to sport. One such example is a retirement pension program or healthcare coverage. Because of the high levels of income associated with professional athletics, scholars Kaplan and O'Reilly (2008) were curious if professional athletes were compensated in a similar pattern compared to some of the world's top chief executive officers of fortune 500 companies. What they found was a stark contrast in player compensation and benefits, and that a majority of athletes are actually underpaid for their services, and receive fewer benefits leaving them vulnerable following retirement from sport. Most professional sport leagues and player associations offer some form of a pension program that is typically tied to performance, years of service, or a combination of the two. The NFL and NBA requires a player to be vested at least three seasons, the NHL requires two seasons, and MLB requires forty-three days of service before a player is eligible (Kaplan & O'Reilly, 2008). The PGA and LPGA offer a pension program that is largely tied to an athlete's performance – such as the number of tournaments played and cuts made in a season. Within each league are various tiers of investment options, such as annuities, 401-k's, or stock options. Today, some pension payouts are as high as federal law will allow, reaching \$175,000 a year, not including other potential retirement investments. However, these higher figures typically reflect the athlete who had a longer stay at the professional level, and not all pension payouts are equal. For example, a professional football player who retired before 1993 will receive a considerably smaller pension for the same amount of vested seasons compared to a 1994 retiree. This is a result of collective bargaining agreements between the league and player's union, which restructure payment rules and procedures.

While a pension can be a great resource of capital, it is still dependent on whether or not an athlete qualifies – given the likelihood of injury and season averages – and if they live long enough to see it. If the athlete does qualify for a pension and retires at the age of 30, they still would have anywhere from twenty-five to thirty-two years before collection. According to data from the NFL, linemen have a life expectancy of only 53 years of age, while other position players have a range from 56 years to 63 years (Halchin, 2008). Based on these averages, such an athlete might die before collecting their pension. Another common concern besides pension collection is how an athlete can pay for medical bills following sport, especially if they have multiple lingering ailments from previous injuries. Some leagues such as the National Football League have begun to offer a health benefit or allowance for players who suffered an injury

while playing. However, such benefits are based on injury types and are offered only three to five years following an athlete's retirement. Once this time is up, the athlete is forced to pay from their pocket, and the onslaught of medical bills can quickly deflate an athlete's savings. Therefore, an athlete's health can not only impact their finances following sport but other important areas too.

### **Social Capital**

O'Rand's (2001; 2006) next form of capital, social capital, is the stock of direct and indirect social relationships an individual develops and maintains within society. As with human capital development, an athlete's social capital can also be stifled as a result of the progressively more insulated nature of sport. At a younger age, the introduction of a sports network can be beneficial to a young child as they go through the ranks. They learn communication skills, how to play fairly with others and the concept of teamwork to achieve a goal. However, scholars (Brewer, 1993; Messner, 1992) have noted that Athletes can find themselves so occupied with their sport that they are unable to develop relationships outside of the team or league. This limited interaction can lead to suppressed communication skills, as well as limiting the opportunity to broaden one's social network. Even the unique subculture that an athlete belongs to, can make it difficult to relate with those outside of the athletic circle. Therefore, following retirement an athlete becomes shutout from the daily interaction with teammates, managers, and those associated with the league. This sudden disconnection, being seen as an outsider may hinder an athlete's ability to cope successfully following retirement because they are unable to communicate with those who can relate with their circumstances. However, if an athlete is able to surround him or herself with a strong support system early in their athletic development, it can be used to help an athlete going through the retirement transition.

More recently, some professional athletes have been known to travel with an entourage of childhood friends and family (now that player salaries can pay for such expenses), leading to the creation of a more stable traveling kin network. In fact, some professional athletes have relied on their parents, guardians, or family friends to help them handle the jump to professional athletics, which can include the handling of their finances and other personal matters. While this can be a positive factor for an athlete to surround him or herself with a close social network, it comes with possible consequences too – there is always the risk of poor fiscal management by inexperienced individuals not use to having large sums of money at their disposal. Also, if a

professional athlete requires someone else to manage their finances while they practice, train, and play, they may never develop fiscal responsibility which will be very important once the large athletic contract comes to an end.

Another concern is the direct relationships (especially for their partner or children) an athlete has while playing professionally also becomes altered. Much of the family's day-to-day routines maybe facilitated around the schedule of an athlete, who might be on the road for more than half of the year or more. Suddenly, the athlete is cast into a new familial role once they retire, as they are spending much more time around the house, creating a disruption in the social life of their family members and the social roles they are responsible. The sudden interjection into everyday family life can be a shock for everyone and could lead to marriage problems. Some athletes have described feeling like a stranger in their own home following retirement, because they are unfamiliar with the daily activities their spouse and children go through, as well as dealing with the notion they are no longer the breadwinner. Friendship networks can also change following retirement. Suddenly, you are away from some of your closest friends who you lived half of the year with and the ability to converse with an individual about personal problems may disappear until a replacement is found.

At the same time, playing professional sport may open an athlete's social network to incorporate other high-level athletes with who they can empathize and relate. Furthermore, athletes come in contact with other high profile individuals, who could serve as a resource following retirement if an athlete is searching for a job or connection. The star quality of many athletes allows them to gain access to various social networks not attainable to the everyday workingman or woman, therefore opening up doors of opportunity following sport. As the saying goes, "it is not what you know, but who you know".

### **Psychophysical Capital**

The stock of one's health and psychological well-being can also have a subtle role on the transition out of sport, but may carry a bigger consequence decades following retirement. All athletes, regardless if they retire because of an injury, will eventually feel the burden of repetitive motion and movement, and blunt physical contact over the many years. The constant wear and tear on an athlete's body adds up and the consequences of weight training and conditioning can have consequences such as early diagnosis of arthritis, stiffness, joint damage, and a limited range of mobility, appearing many times only a few years following retirement. Nutritional



habits have also become a concern for retirement scholars. A major fear involves an athlete's eating habits post play. Professional athletes have access to the best strength coaches, dieticians, and clinicians while playing, however, once they leave sport these connections tend to disappear. No longer is a dietician telling you what to eat and when, nor a fitness coach telling you when to work out and for how long. This can put an athlete in a precarious position once they leave their sport. A prime example has been seen with former NFL linemen who have maintained the same eating habits, yet are working out far less than when they were playing. Maintaining unhealthy eating habits coupled with fewer to no workout sessions can lead to high rates of diabetes, obesity, sleep apnea, cholesterol and heart disease; as a result, there is almost a twenty-year gap in life expectancy rates for some professional athletes compared to the general population (Halchin, 2008; Living Heart Foundation, 2008).

The direct opposite has been seen in other sports, where remaining petite in size is considered more ideal for competition. Both female and male gymnasts and ice skaters have reported body image issues that carried over from their days of competition and led to severe eating disorders following retirement (Kerr and Dacyshyn, 2000). Because of the strict dietary habits and prolonged eating disorders, some female professional athletes run the risk of losing their ability to bear children in addition to compromising their own health. Those who retire because of traumatic injury tend to cite chronic pain as a result of such a debilitating injury(s), despite physical therapy and surgical repairs. Furthermore, some athletes have developed addictions to pain medications or even other substances such as drugs and alcohol to numb the pain, which can impact quality of life several years after sport (Halchin, 2008).

However, this is not to suggest all athletes will leave sport in tip-top shape and whittle away to nothing. Athletes with the expertise to maintain a healthy diet and appropriate exercise regimen can enjoy the benefits that come along with these things as they age. In fact, daily exercise can act as a natural mood enhancer as well as a good way to release tension. Of course, much of this also depends on the athlete's willingness to maintain some level of activity and the knowledge of what constitutes a healthy diet.

Aside from health, the psychological development during sport and following retirement can have either negative or positive consequences too. In particular, athletes who have left sport feeling as if they obtained or reached the goals they set out may feel comfortable leaving sport and feeling capable of excelling in other sections of life (Lavalley, Grove, and Gordon, 1997).

On the other hand, athletes who never reached their full potential may enter retirement feeling ashamed, embarrassed or as if they failed. As a result, they can become hung up on these failures, limiting their full potential following sport.

It is only natural that as the body ages, it forces an athlete to train harder so they can maintain a physical advantage. This natural deconstruction of the human body has pushed some athletes to depend on performance enhancing substances in order to prolong the inevitable, as they try to keep a foot up on the competition. While the short term risks and benefits of using performance enhancing drugs is unknown, specifically whether it actually can prolong a career by helping an athlete bounce back from an injury quicker or maintain their edge, the long-term risks are known. Bodily damage such as liver damage or kidney failure, chronic severe mood swings, hormone deficiencies are just a few effects from improper use. Furthermore, if an athlete is caught or even suspected of cheating through the use of a performance enhancing substance they are forever labeled as a cheater or crook. Major League Baseball along with other professional leagues are currently embroiled with steroid use by players at all levels, and a majority of attention given to those found to be using enhancing substances has been largely chastising and negative. It leaves some to wonder how the consequence of such negative labeling will affect an athlete, especially star athletes, following retirement, if outsiders value the athlete's career to be nothing but a sham.

A separate issue that has been raised deals with the medical care an athlete receives after sustaining an injury, such as a significant blow to the head. Improper medical diagnosis and quick decisions coupled with the desire of an athlete to return to the field of play, can lead to the exacerbation of a serious medical problem. The long-term effects of such a haste decision to return to playing could haunt the player several years later. New research from Schwenk, Gorenflo, Hipple, and Dopp (2007) shows a correlation with levels of depression, anxiety, and other psychological disorders as a result of repeated concussions and head trauma from playing high impact sports, specifically football. Athletes in the study also reported that many times the coaches decision to put a player back in after an injury would override the team doctors advice, and many of these athletes felt they had no choice but return, because if they did not they would be letting their teammates, coaches, and fans down. Fortunately, many professional leagues with the assistance of player's associations have worked to limit such events from happening through

a more rigorous medical protocol, thereby protecting an athlete from inflicting further harm or damage on their body and mind.

### **Personal Capital**

Personal capital encompasses a wide variety of forms, and ranges from the cumulative efficacy and competence of an individual, to their role identity and ego development (O’Rand, 2001; 2006). This form of capital also relates closely to human capital, social capital, psychophysical capital, as well as, other pertinent experiences an individual goes through. It is similar in many ways to the basic premises of athletic identity development as previously discussed. While athletics can build confidence in an individual at an early age, as well as the ability to think and act quickly, and create a strong work ethic, as they mature – the key question is whether these skills and the identity associated with them translate to a traditional work setting and at what degree?

Scholars have expressed concern that athletes, particularly professional athletes, rely on others to do everything for them – arranging their travel, scheduling their daily routine, taking care of financial matters such as bills and investments – therefore limiting their autonomy and self-reliance. If this is the case, their self-efficacy to handle day-to-day situations and tasks could be negatively impacted, as well as their ability to make more significant decisions on their own when no one is there to do it for them anymore. Other possible problems associated with professional athletes are being treated differently from their peers because of their athletic talent, which can lead to ego confusion after an individual retires, or even role confusion. If an athlete derives total value from their athletic ability, once that is diminished or disappears, will athletes consider themselves to be of little or no value to society? How will the public view them?

According to Stier (2007), so much emphasis has been placed on role of professional athletes and their status during their playing days that they have difficulty relinquishing their athletic identity following sport and can struggle with discovering a new identity. Then again, such experiences as moving from one team to another, or moving from the professional league to the minor league system could be an excellent experience for an athlete to gain an understanding of setbacks in life and ways to overcome them or cope. The same goes with returning from an injury to play again, when it was thought not possible. The building of personal capital that comes from being flexible and resilient during an athletic transition could be of great use once an athlete retires.

## **Moral Capital**

The value and role ascribed to an individual by society is known as moral capital (O'Rand, 2001; 2006). Currently, society puts professional athletes on a pedestal and are often revered as heroes, icons, and role models (Sage, 1998; Steir, 2007). Few professions can offer an individual celebrity status like professional sports can, whether it is recognition in an athlete's hometown, the cities they played in, their country or globally, professional athletes can use the role and status ascribed to them in many ways. Some athletes have gone on to earn a living endorsing products and businesses well after their playing career simply because of name recognition. George Foreman, a former heavyweight-boxing champion, has made a very profitable second career out of selling mini cooking grills. While becoming a professional athlete can carry major benefits, it also comes at the mercy of society and how the media and fans will label athletes. Just ten years ago, professional baseball players Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa rejuvenated America's pastime in an epic season where they went toe-to-toe, homerun-to-homerun against one another, captivating the hearts of baseball fans everywhere. Today, the media and fans have labeled these beloved heroes as cheats, frauds, and imposters because of their suspected steroid use. Both McGwire and Sosa were expected to be inducted into the Baseball Hall-of-Fame their first time on the ballot – today, it seems unlikely either will make it in. Professional athletes can also be stereotyped as individuals incompetent in skills outside of sports.

## **Cultural Capital**

According to O'Rand, cultural capital is the level of proficiency in dominant socially valued codes and practices, such as linguistic, aesthetic, and interaction styles. But as seen within personal capital, specifically identity development, the public's sense of value and worth displayed towards an athlete can greatly alter the athlete's view of him or herself following retirement. Some former athletes might worry whether they will be remembered as a hero or a choke, or whether they bring value to society once they stop playing. Much of this is dictated by society and ultimately out of the athlete's control; however, if an athlete understands and is capable of disentangling others' perceptions he or she will be able to create their own identity outside of sports.

The opportunities for extensive travel and cultural engagement provided through professional athletics can be a major benefit for athletes, as well as the chance to become

competent with varying cultural customs can be an indispensable experience. However, much of this development is dependent on whether or not an athlete takes advantage of such opportunities to enmesh him or herself with the different cultures. If an athlete takes part in an event that is located in diverse cities with cultural opportunities, will that athlete have enough time to escape the hotel and sport's venue or arena to experience outside activities not related to sports? Whether it is visiting a museum, experiencing and learning about the local culture through interpersonal interactions with different individuals, can be a positive skill to both possess and build upon – leading to an awareness, while continuing to create a curiosity. The ability for an athlete to move outside their comfort zone, allows this individual to break away from their daily routine and norms. A concern, as discussed in the literature is whether or not the reported isolation an athlete experiences, because they are so involved with athletics, might actually limit their cultural capital attainment.

### **Spiritual Capital**

Spiritual capital, not discussed by O'Rand, could be another resource for an athlete to employ. Although undetermined, athletics and religion appear tied together in many situations, whether it is a team gathering for pre and post-game prayers or athletes thanking and giving glory to a higher being for their achievements, victories, and accomplishments. Whether or not the athlete who credits their spirituality for their performance on the field will rely on the same spiritual capital following retirement, is largely unknown. However, it could be possible that athletes turn to their religion or spirituality as a way to cope with the retirement transition and adjust to a new lifestyle that does not revolve around athletics. Religious institutions are known to provide counseling services for individuals whether it is personal, spousal, or familial. Furthermore, a religious institution can provide an individual with a supportive network of friends, helping nurture an individual going through a difficult time. Again, it is largely unknown what proportion of athletes utilizes their spiritual capital to assist with retirement transition difficulties.

Understanding how an athlete's social capital, human capital, psychophysical, personal capital, and cultural capital are developed and how they use these resources during the transition into retirement is essential. Although athletics may seem very different from other professions, using a comparative life course capital model allows for scholars to discern similar patterns leading to retirement, the consequences of such patterns, and recognizing how an athlete copes

with the transition, using various forms of capital. By gaining a stronger conception of capital development and utilization, scholars can assist athletes struggling with the retirement transition out of sport.

## **VIII. Conclusion**

As the study of athletic retirement progressed from the late 1960's until the mid 1980's, scholars focused on several key gerontological and thanatological frameworks, ranging from disengagement and activity to continuity and social breakdown theories in an attempt to make sense of retirement from sport. However, as the field of gerontology was rapidly evolving itself, many of these sport retirement scholars had trouble adapting passé first and second-generation gerontological theories that were intended to describe and explain the behaviors older adults, to such a unique and relatively young group of individuals. Because of the disconnect between such distinct age groups, scholars moved away from gerontological and thanatological frameworks and shifted their center of attention towards athletic identity development and its role in retirement. As scholars teased apart the complex components and multiple layers of athletic identity and the micro and macro forces, the study of retirement from sport strongly reflects the field of gerontology. Both the field of gerontology and the study of sport retirement have moved from a viewpoint that retirement and its after effects was merely a singular event not tied to one's past experiences, to the view that retirement is a much more intricate process composed of multiple micro- and macro- mechanisms interacting with each other over the life course. Currently, now that sport retirement scholars have a better understanding of why an athlete retires and how their transition of sport can unfold, they have begun to focus on ways to help athletes better prepare for retirement and avoid unfavorable experiences as athletes reenter society. Despite being reflective of the field of gerontology, the study of retirement from sport is still slow moving in its general conceptualization.

Gerontology has been fortunate to have expansive longitudinal data sets to provide core information; scholars who study retirement from professional athletics still do not have such detailed levels of data available to them and this problem does not appear to be resolved in the foreseeable future. Many of the problems in obtaining better data, as noted by McPherson (1980), are simply having access to athletes before, during and after retirement. Many sport leagues, whether professional, collegiate or amateur, and players' associations, act as gatekeepers, limiting empirical researchers and scholars direct access to athletes. As a result gaps remain in the conceptualization between frameworks seen in the literature, especially with regards to athletic identity development from a young age through the high school level and beyond. Until such data exists, a better understanding of the retirement transition and the factors

that are associated with it will be limited. This is significant because, while most public accounts tend to focus on the athlete whose retirement experience was traumatic and negative, there are other accounts of athletes whose retirement from sport was seen as a pleasant relief from the daily grind of competition. Much more information is needed about what the typical athlete retirement looks like if the extremes are atypical, and more importantly what factors facilitated these positive and/or negative experiences. Furthermore, previous accounts have blurred the experiences of amateur athletes, collegiate athletes and professional athletes, and it is still unknown how closely related these levels of sport participation are to each other. Therefore, individuals should be cautious how to interpret retirement transition findings from one group to the other. The typical retirement transition (if such a thing exists) for a professional athlete, juxtaposed to a minor league athlete, collegiate athlete, or amateur athlete maybe very different for one combination of mechanisms or very similar for another combination of mechanisms.

The Life Course Capital model stands as framework that allows researchers and scholars alike to not only understand the retirement transition, but also investigate how various forms of life course capital are attributed to transitional routes, whether it is negative, positive or a mix of both. By understanding what forms of capital can be leveraged by an athlete to overcome hardships, professional leagues working with collegiate associations can create transitional programs to assist athletes reentering a social sphere outside of sports. This is important if a majority of professional athletes, who have devoted their entire lives to athletics, may leave competitive sport with capital deficiencies in key areas such as education attainment, social network development, and personal identity development. They will be in need of capital development to ease the transition out of sport as they begin a new life away from athletic competition.

Clearly, the retirement transition out of professional sport is a very complex and multifaceted phenomenon with no single characteristic being solely responsible for the way an athlete retires and how they will handle retirement. However, by creating an organized model for understanding how an athlete develops their identity, social networks, and various forms of capital, one could explain how an athlete copes with retirement and other struggles they might face following retirement. One such debate focusing squarely on human capital is whether professional leagues should limit an athlete's earning potential by requiring more time spent playing at the collegiate level. The prospect of becoming a professional athlete carries a lot of



responsibility and the opportunity for some individuals to help pull themselves out of poverty and a life away from drugs and alcohol. Becoming a professional athlete might be their lone shot, therefore, some have argued that requiring an individual to obtain a college education maybe unjust, putting them at a higher risk for injury possibly limiting their chances of turning professional. Another debated issue is that some individuals, especially those from impoverished backgrounds, are not as capable to handle the rigor of higher education in order to remain academically eligible, mostly because of an inadequate high school education; some argue that such rules adversely discriminates against minorities from poorer backgrounds and failing school districts. The question then becomes, what is best for an athlete as a person, both long-term and short-term?

By giving an athlete the opportunity to attend college, whether it is for only one year or all four or five, they athlete can make gains in human capital, diversify their social capital, and build upon their personal capital and other forms of capital, which can carry them once their sporting career is over. Although some may argue that such opportunities may keep an athlete from reaching the professional level (possibly because of an injury while in college) and earning their payoff, those who fizzle out in the professional league may very well wish that they finished their education, as they attempt to pursue a career outside of sport. While most would suggest such a plan is ideal and in the long-term is best for any athlete, it isn't deemed rational given the way society is structured and the rules and regulations of athletic institutions. The quick payoff can come with a suffocating end as well, if the money and fame disappears. Furthermore, why are some sports such as basketball eligibility more scrutinized than other professional sports? You can become a professional golfer, baseball player, tennis player, gymnast, or skater younger than 18 years of age, yet less attention is given to the outcomes of these athletes.

While most would agree the opportunity to reach a life-long dream should never be hindered, does the same rule apply for athletics, where this dream is anything but life-long. Therefore, is the opportunity to make a large sum of money upfront more ideal than earning an education and diversifying one's skills beyond the field of play? What are in the athlete's best interest – solely focusing on a successful athletic career or also an education – and who has it – is it the professional leagues, the colleges and universities, their parents, or social networks? These are the questions that must be asked and empirically tested to better understand how the current

system molds athletes and if it prepares them for retirement. Much has been learned over the years about what leads to retirement from sport and how it can impact the athlete, as well as, other intertwined factors possibly accounting for a negative or positive transition out of sport. While it is uncertain whether the transition will be traumatic or a relief, by making note of various characteristics attributed to one or the other, scholars can propose ways to avoid such traits that lead to a negative transition and emphasize the ones that are associated with a positive transition.

Professional leagues and player's unions could also address the problems athletes may face as retirement looms by providing them with access to trained professionals who specialize in retirement transition planning. The NBA instituted a program to help young rookies have an easier transition into the league, yet they have no system in place to help these athletes out of the league, which can be another major adjustment. Whether or not such leagues should be held responsible for helping shape and facilitate a smooth transition out of sport, on the athlete's behalf regardless of time vested, is still debatable. The United States Olympic Committee initiated a program in 1988 to help athletes make the transition out of sport. A major part of the program allowed athletes to discuss their feelings, anxieties, and fears with other athletes about retirement, as well as working with athletes who have already retired. The participating athletes considered the program to be a success; unfortunately, the program was terminated in 1993 because of a lack of funding. The US Olympic Committee later worked with the Home Depot, a large retail store, to create an employment program that provided their athletes with skills and job training, and a flexible work schedule so, they could prepare for the Olympics. Unfortunately, a weak economy in 2008 forced Home Depot to sever ties with the US Olympic Committee and this unique program that gave athletes the opportunity to gain skills outside of sport has since ended.

As the study of sports retirement moves forward, it will be integral for scholars to collect data across the lives of athletes to truly get a deep understanding of the various mechanisms responsible for a clean and non-disruptive transition out of sport. Furthermore, by shedding light on the negative transitions out of sport experienced by athletes and why it occurs, could lead to the reformulation of league rules and policies that put an athlete's best interests at the forefront; this could come through restructuring collaborations with entities from player unions and associations to working with the NCAA, college athletics governing body. Professional leagues,

could hire an independent review board of scholars and specialists to make recommendations based on past research and current data and trends to implement policy standards and regulations that benefit an athlete long-term. One such issue is whether it is more beneficial for an athlete to be eligible to declare for the draft at any age or after completing a few years of college? Perhaps the best situation might be requiring an athlete to finish a degree or certificate program before becoming eligible to turn professional. Other issues ranging from whether college entrance examination requirements are too discriminatory towards various individuals or if college curriculum for athletes is substandard, to reformulating pension vestment requirements and medical-malpractice protections are topics that also need to be addressed in a more serious manner. However, to answer these questions, data and access to players are needed and until high schools, colleges, universities, and professional leagues are willing to disclose information and grant more access to athletes, many of these issues, which could affect an athlete's retirement transition, will go unresolved.

While professional athletics is a staple of American culture some might assume the literature largely reflects the experiences of American athletes and Americanized societal norms. However, an equal portion of the literature has come from many different continents and societies, each having their own individualized cultures and norms. According to Cecic-Erpic, Wylleman, and Zupancic (2004) and Wylleman, Alfermann, and Lavallee (2004), a cross-cultural examination of various studies, coming from all sides of the globe, have shown very similar findings, for analogous reasons. Therefore, not only do athletes retire for similar reasons but they have parallel experiences following retirement as well.

The ebb and flow of the sport retirement literature has suggested retirement from sport is a negative and traumatic experience, as well as a positive and opportune stage. This might merely be a reflection of the questions scholars seek to expel or accept, in an attempt to leave their mark on the field. However, as with the field of gerontology, which has constantly sought out an overarching paradigm, there might not be one clear cut answer or a best approach to reach this elusive conclusion. But as the study of retirement from sport slowly settles on a more holistic approach, such as exploring the intricacies of athletic identity development coupled with a life course approach, the overall composition and process of athletic retirement will become clearer. Although sport retirement scholars unsuccessfully called on gerontologists to assist with the development of the field and literature, and these same scholars would eventually dub

gerontological theory as extraneous, both fields of study align nicely with one another. Furthermore, both disciplines could use each other to further understand life course trajectories, especially at a much younger age, and the influence these trajectories and acquired capital can have on an individual's retirement transition.

On a final note concerning the use of the word retirement and professional athletes, both scholars and journalists need to understand that professional athletes leaving the realm of sport is not the same type of retirement an older adult goes through. In actuality, professional athletes are typically changing careers, which is more in line with an expression called 're-careering' by retirement scholars (Johnson, Kawachi, and Lewis, 2009). This term has been used to describe older adults who involuntarily retire from a career in later life and move into a completely different career before actually retiring in a traditional sense. Re-careering compared to retiring appears to be more appropriate when describing professional athletes who have withdrawn from sport, because the majority of these athletes will move on to a career outside of their athletic profession.

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