

Athletes' career transition out of sport: A systematic review

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- 1 Park, S., Lavallee, D., & Tod, D. (2012). Athletes' career transition out of sport.
- 2 *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 6, 22-53.

Athletes' Career Transition Out of Sport

3
4 Research on career transitions in sport has been growing gradually over the past three
5 decades, and as a result, investigators have found various predictors (e.g., athletic identity,
6 voluntary control over the decision to retire) of the quality of the career transition process for
7 athletes (e.g., Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Lally, 2007). In the early stages, researchers focused
8 on the consequences of athletes' career transition out of sport, but more recently, they have
9 distinguished between specific types of transitions, such as young athletes'
10 disengagement/withdrawal from sport and within sport career transitions. Since the 1990s,
11 researchers have developed appropriate models describing athletes' career transitions (e.g.,
12 Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994), and several review papers have also been published on the
13 phenomenon providing guidance for future research directions (e.g., Baillie & Danish, 1992;
14 Wylleman, Alfermann, & Lavalley, 2004).

15 In recent years, several sport psychology textbooks have published chapters on career
16 transitions in sport (e.g., Lavalley & Andersen, 2000; Wylleman, De Knop, Verdet, & Cecić
17 Erpič, 2007). Lavalley, Wylleman, and Sinclair (2000) briefly reviewed existing publications
18 related to career transitions in sport up to 1998. Their review aimed to provide a descriptive
19 account of each publication and an annotated reference list for readers. It has been more than
20 a decade since Lavalley et al. published their annotated bibliography, and there have been
21 numerous investigations published on the topic of career transitions in sport. In addition, a
22 systematic review methodology has not been used to analyze studies on athletes' career
23 transitions in any previous review. Craig, Dieppe, Macintyre, Michie, Nazareth, and
24 Petticrew (2008) have highlighted the benefits of conducting systematic reviews in
25 developing interventions and designing future studies. According to Craig et al., systematic
26 reviews allow researchers to use the best available evidence and appropriate theories to
27 develop future research directions and intervention strategies, as well as raise awareness of

28 the range of research methods employed in the study area. Therefore, it is useful to conduct a
29 systematic review of career transition studies in order to identify current knowledge of the
30 study area, future research directions, and practical implications for practitioners and sport
31 organizations.

32 The purpose of this study was to provide a systematic review of studies on athletes'
33 career transition out of sport, focusing on sample characteristics, research designs, and
34 correlates focused on psychological predictors associated with the quality of athletes' career
35 transitions. Studies conducted from 1960s to the end of 2010 were included, while
36 publications (e.g., Fleuriel & Vincent, 2009) not containing or examining information
37 associated with the career transition out of sport process were excluded. In addition, although
38 the topic of athletes' within sport career transitions is an important and growing area of
39 research, the current review focused on identifying issues related to athletes' career transition
40 out of sport.

41 Method

42 Sources

43 The search strategy initially included the use of the following electronic databases:
44 Dissertation Abstracts International, Google Scholar, Pubmed, ProQuest, and The World of
45 Knowledge. We then examined the table of contents of the following journals: *Academic*
46 *Athletic Journal*, *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, *Athletic Insight*, *Australian Journal of*
47 *Career Development*, *Australian Psychologist*, *Avante*, *British Journal of Sport Medicine*,
48 *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, *International Journal of Sport*
49 *Psychology*, *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, *Journal of Aging Studies*,
50 *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, *Journal of Personal and Interpersonal Loss*, *Journal of*
51 *Clinical Sport Psychology*, *Journal of Sport Behavior*, *Journal of Sport and Exercise*
52 *Psychology*, *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, *Sport and Exercise Psychology*

53 *Review, Journal of Sports Sciences, Perceptual and Motor Skills, Psychology of Sport and*
54 *Exercise, Quest, Sociology of Sport Journal, and The Sport Psychologist.* Additional citations
55 were subsequently gathered through reading the reference lists of the articles already obtained.
56 Keyword combinations employed in the search strategies included *career transitions in sport,*
57 *career transition out of sport, athletes' retirement, retirement from sport, sport career end,*
58 *sport career termination, withdraw from sport, disengagement from sport, and drop-out from*
59 *sport.*

60 Inclusion criteria for the current investigation were as follows: studies had to be (a)
61 related to athletes' career transition out of sport, (b) based on independent participant
62 populations, and (c) written in English. These criteria included journal articles, published
63 conference proceedings, book chapters, and dissertations, and imposed no limits on
64 characteristics of samples and research designs. If data from a study were published in
65 multiple ways (e.g., a conference proceeding, a journal article), then we reported the study
66 only once in the following order: (a) journal article, (b) dissertation, and (c) published
67 conference proceeding. We excluded publications not containing data on athletes' career
68 transition out of sport.

69 **Procedure**

70 Hard copies of studies were collected and assessed against the inclusion criteria. After
71 identifying the studies, the same systematic review procedure as used by Sallis, Prochaska,
72 and Taylor (2000) and Goodger, Gorely, Lavalley, and Harwood (2007) were applied for
73 analysis. The protocols included the creation of detailed tables (Table 1 and 2) classifying (a)
74 research designs and sample characteristics and (b) correlates of the quality of athletes' career
75 transitions. The reasons for focusing on three features (i.e., research designs, sample
76 characteristics, and correlates) were to: (a) identify detailed methodological aspects of the
77 studies to help researchers develop better methods in the future, (b) examine detailed

78 characteristics of sample populations to help investigators identify sampling gaps, and (c)
79 analyze factors related to the quality of athletes' career transitions across studies and identify
80 evidence base for theories and models to provide practical implications and future research
81 directions.

82 **Assignment of bibliography numbers.** Early in the analysis, we coded each study
83 with a bibliography number. These numbers were based on the number of independent
84 samples. For example, if there was more than one independent sample in a publication, then
85 each sample was given a separate bibliography number. In some instances, when the same
86 data were published more than once (e.g., in a journal article and in a published conference
87 proceeding), they were assigned the same bibliography number.

88 **Research designs and sample characteristics.** Samples were distinguished by size,
89 gender, competitive level, type of sport, age, and location. We also classified studies by data
90 collection method and research design. Additionally, if the same sample was published more
91 than once, but assessed different correlates each occasion, we assigned it the same
92 bibliography number and also a sub-number. For example, the sample associated with
93 reference number 59 was published in three different journals, but each publication examined
94 different variables. So the reports were assigned sub-numbers (i.e., 59/1, 59/2, and 59/3) to
95 identify the publications.

96 **Correlates of athletes' career transition adjustment.** We created a summary table
97 based on the correlates of the quality of career transitions (Table 2). The summary table was
98 created over several stages. Firstly, we selected and classified the career transition variables
99 from each of the studies. At this stage of analysis, only correlates with more than three
100 independent samples were included in the summary table. Correlates with less than three
101 studies were grouped, where possible, with other similar variables (e.g., self-perception
102 includes self-perceived body image, self-confidence, and self-worth) based on previous

103 literature before being included (Murphy, 2009; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Additionally, some
104 studies examined multiple variables, and in these cases, variables were listed separately in the
105 summary table. Secondly, we examined the direction of association of the variables based on
106 study findings. Each variable has its own relationship with athletes' career transition
107 adjustment experiences, whether positive (+), negative (-), no association (0), or
108 indeterminate (?). The last stage of the analysis was the determination of association for each
109 variable through summarizing the state of each correlate by calculating the percentage of
110 samples supporting the direction of association. The guidelines provided by Sallis et al.
111 (2000) for labeling the association were used which include 0-33% = no association, 34-59%
112 = indeterminate or inconsistent and 60-100% = positive or negative association. Throughout
113 the analysis process, three authors had regular meetings to discuss the process of identifying
114 correlates and categorizing the themes.

115 **Results**

116 **General findings**

117 A total of 139 studies met the inclusion criteria, and among them, 13 studies were
118 inaccessible, and four were excluded because of a lack of information (e.g., sample
119 characteristics, methods, or findings). The remaining 122 study papers included 57 published
120 journal articles, 23 published conference proceedings, four published book chapters, and 38
121 dissertations. Among the 122 papers, four contained two independent samples (Alfermann,
122 1995; Fernandez, Stephan, & Fouqereau, 2006; Herman, 2002; Zaichkowsky, Lipton, &
123 Tucci, 1997). A total of 122 papers were reviewed, and in a final bibliography table (Table 1
124 and 2), 126 studies were listed. Among the 126 studies, 10 studies were published before
125 1990, 48 in the 1990s, and 68 between 2000 and 2010.

126 **Research design**

127 Table 1 presents design and sample characteristics. Researchers have used qualitative
128 (55), quantitative (56), or a combination of both (15) methods to examine athletes' career
129 transition experiences. Three studies, which examined the effectiveness of athletes' support
130 program involvement, were conducted via experiments (Lavallee, 2005; Selden, 1997;
131 Stankovich, 1998). Investigators used longitudinal designs in 13 studies, and employed cross-
132 sectional methods in 113 studies. Slightly over half of the studies (68) collected data via
133 interviews and the rest (58) via questionnaires. The questionnaire used can be divided into
134 three categories: (a) questionnaires developed for assessing athletes' career transitions (10),
135 (b) instruments which examine general psychological variables (15), and (c) surveys
136 developed for the purpose of the particular study (33). The most frequently used
137 questionnaire was the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS; Brewer, Van Raalte, &
138 Linder, 1993), employed in nine studies (Blackburn, 2003; Fraser, Fogarty, & Albion, 2010;
139 Grove, Lavallee, & Gordon, 1997; Herman, 2002; Lavallee, Gordon, & Grove, 1997; Shachar,
140 Brewer, Cornelius, & Petitpas, 2004; Selden, 1997; Stronach & Adair, 2010; Zaichkowsky,
141 King, & McCarthy, 2000).

142 **Sample characteristics**

143 The total number of participants was 13,511, and the range of sample sizes was
144 between one and 1,617. Across the samples, 1,909 were current athletes, 51 were athletes'
145 entourage (e.g., families and coaches), 219 were non-athletes, and 11,332 were retired
146 athletes. The number of studies with fewer than 50 participants was 71, and 36 studies were
147 conducted with samples between 51 and 200. Eleven studies had samples between 201 and
148 500, seven studies examined over 500 participants, and one was not identified because of a
149 lack of information. Most studies (121) investigated athletes' career transition experiences or
150 compared experiences between athlete and non-athlete groups, and five included both athletes

151 and their entourages (Gilmore, 2008; Kane, 1991; Redmond, Gordon, & Chambers, 2007;
152 Stambulova, 1994; Zaichkowsky et al., 2000). These five studies aimed to discover how
153 athletes' families, coaches, and administrators influence or are influenced by athletes' sport
154 career termination.

155 Across the studies, 56 contained both genders, 38 contained male athletes only, 24
156 contained female athletes only, and gender was unspecified in eight studies. The studies
157 included a wide range of competitive levels, including student (32), club (7), professional
158 (27), and elite/Olympic level athletes (50). Mixed level athletes were examined in six studies,
159 two studies were conducted with disabled athletes, and in two studies the level was not
160 identified.

161 Researchers have examined team sports (36), individual sports (26), or a combination
162 of both (59), and five did not report the type of sport. In 53 studies the athletes were aged
163 between 16 and 26, in 21 studies athletes were aged between 27 and 40, and in five studies
164 the athletes were over 40. A wide range of age groups (aged between 15 and 84) were
165 examined in 17 studies, two studies were done with athletes aged under 16, and 28 studies did
166 not report the age of participants. The majority of studies were conducted in Western
167 countries (60 in North-America, 45 in Europe, and 10 in Australia). Three studies had been
168 conducted in Asia and South America, and two studies had been done in the Middle East.
169 One study existed with African athletes, and two studies did not identify where data
170 originated.

171 **Correlates and consequences of career transition**

172 Slightly less than half (55) of the studies investigated the psychological, emotional,
173 social, and physical consequences of athletes' retirement from sport. The other studies
174 examined variables which influence the quality of athletes' career transition out of sport.
175 Among the 13,511 participants, 11,332 (84%) of them had experienced termination from

176 their sport, and 1,768 (16%) of them reported that their career transition experiences had
177 accompanied adjustment difficulties or problems. In addition, the majority of studies (86)
178 reported that some of their participants expressed career transition difficulties or negative
179 emotions, including feelings of loss, identity crisis, and distress when they ended their career
180 and adjusted to post-sport life (e.g., Ballie, 1992; Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; McKenna &
181 Thomas, 2007). Four studies reported that the career transition process for athletes was
182 neither a positive nor negative event for them (e.g., Alfermann, 1995; Johns, Lindner, &
183 Wolko, 1990; Schwenderner-Holt, 1994; Torregrosa, Sanchez, & Cruz, 2003).

184 We identified 63 correlates related to the quality of athletes' career transitions. These
185 variables were reduced to 19 during the analysis and categorized into two themes based on
186 two existing models (e.g., Gordon, 1995; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994): (a) factors related to the
187 quality of career transition and (b) available resources during the career transition.

188 **Factors related to the quality of career transition.** Table 2 shows the correlates and
189 their directions associated with the quality of career transition. We identified 15 variables
190 associated with the quality of athletes' career transitions, including athletic identity,
191 demographical issues, voluntariness of retirement decision, injuries/health problems,
192 career/personal development, sport career achievement, educational status, financial status,
193 self-perception, control of life, disengagement/drop-out, time passed after retirement,
194 relationship with coach, life changes, and balance of life. These variables are presented below
195 in the order of the number of studies that examined each of them.

196 ***Athletic identity.*** Athletic identity refers to self-identity in the sport domain (Brewer,
197 Van Raalte, & Petitpas, 2000). A total of 35 independent studies demonstrated correlations
198 between athletic identity and athletes' career transitions. Among them, 34 studies indicated
199 that both a strong athletic identity and high tendency towards identity foreclosure were
200 negatively associated with the quality of athletes' career transitions. These studies have

201 revealed that the retired athletes experienced a loss of identity when they had a strong athletic
202 identity at the time of their sport career termination (e.g., Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Lally,
203 2007), and they needed a longer period of time to adjust to post-sport life (e.g., Grove et al.,
204 1997; Warriner & Lavalley, 2008).

205 ***Demographical issues.*** Although 24 studies examined demographic differences
206 between athletes at the time of career termination, such as gender, age, social status, type of
207 sport, race, marital status, competitive levels, and cultural or national factors, the overall
208 association was indeterminate.

209 Four studies examined differences in adjustment to post-sport life between male and
210 female athletes, and only one study (Stambulova, 2001) reported that female former athletes
211 adapted to post-sport life more quickly than male former athletes. Studies conducted by Cecić
212 Erpič, Wylleman, and Zupančič's (2004) and Leung, Carre, and Fu (2005) indicated positive
213 relationships between retired athletes' ages and experienced transition difficulties, but Chow
214 (2001) and Gilmore (2008) reported that those who terminated their sport career at a younger
215 age expressed higher career transition difficulties. Three studies reported that athletes' social
216 status was positively related to the quality of their career transitions (Conzelmann & Nagel,
217 2003; Houlston, 1982; Koukouris, 1994). Three studies examined relationships between type
218 of sport and transition difficulties, but no differences were found (Fernandez et al., 2006;
219 Gilmore, 2008; Tate, 1993). Two studies, which demonstrated transitional differences
220 between Caucasian student-athletes and African American student-athletes, showed opposite
221 directions (Caucasian American athletes experienced more transition difficulties; Lewis,
222 1997; African American athletes experienced more transition difficulties; Perna,
223 Zaichkowsky, & Bocknek, 1996). Two studies assessed marital status (Fernandez et al.,
224 2006; McKnight, 1996), and both showed that married athletes experienced a higher degree
225 of perceived support from their partners and less difficulties in transitional process. Two

226 studies showed that competitive level is positively related to financial and occupational
227 adjustment (Gilmore, 2008; Leung et al., 2005).

228 In cross-national comparisons among European countries, three studies reported some
229 differences, such as age of career termination, athletic career satisfactions, and use of coping
230 strategies. Researchers, however, concluded that athletes' degree of athletic identity and pre-
231 retirement planning had more influence on the quality of their career transitions than their
232 nationalities or cultural differences (Alfermann, Stambulova, & Zemaityte, 2004; Schmidt &
233 Hackfort, 2001; Stambulova, Stephan, & Jäphag, 2007). Huang (2002) examined cultural
234 differences between Chinese and German elite level athletes' career transition experiences.
235 The study reported differences in several areas of post-sport life, including involvement in
236 sport after retirement (more Germans involved in sport) and current occupations (more
237 Chinese working in sport fields), but no significant differences were found in age of career
238 termination and perspective of sport career termination.

239 ***Voluntariness of retirement decision.*** Voluntariness of retirement decision can be
240 explained as the degree of control athletes have over their decision to retire. The variable has
241 been examined in 21 studies, and 18 indicated a positive association with the quality of career
242 transition, and three found no relationship. Studies (7) with athletes who experienced forced
243 retirement found that participants experienced high levels of negative emotions, such as fear
244 of a social death or dying (Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Fortunato & Marchant, 1999;
245 Zaichkowsky et al., 2000), a sense of betrayal and social exclusion (McKenna & Thomas,
246 2007), and a loss of identity (Butt & Molnar, 2009; Lotysz & Short, 2004; Lynch, 2006).

247 ***Injuries/health problems.*** Ten out of 11 studies found that injuries and health issues
248 were sources of transitional difficulties for retired athletes (e.g., Gilmore, 2008; Kadlcik &
249 Flemr, 2008; Muscat, 2010). Injuries and health problems were negative factors for retired
250 athletes wishing to move towards post-sport life, and the participants who had physical

251 problems needed longer periods of time to adjust after entering post-sport life (e.g., Werthner
252 and Orlick, 1986). In addition, retired athletes' physical condition was one of the most
253 immediate concerns for the quality of their post-sport lives, and some athletes expressed
254 difficulties in dealing with post-sport life because of their physical pains (Gilmore, 2008;
255 Hughes, 1990). In contrast, Perna, Ahlgren, and Zaichkowsky (1999) did not find any
256 relationship between former collegiate athletes' injuries and their long-term life satisfaction.

257 ***Career/personal development.*** All nine studies that examined vocational and life skill
258 development indicated positive associations with the quality of athletes' career transitions.
259 Former professional athletes showed difficulties in dealing with non-sporting situations, and
260 they experienced delayed identity shifts because of a lack of non-sporting life experiences
261 during their sport careers (Kane, 1991; Muscat, 2010). Educational involvement and career
262 planning were also positively associated with post-sport life adjustment among college
263 athletes (Lantz, 1995), and athletes attributed their limitation of life choices after sport career
264 termination to a lack of personal development (Chow, 2001; Stronach & Adair, 2010; Swain,
265 1991).

266 ***Sport career achievement.*** The number of studies measuring sporting goal achievement
267 was nine, and all of them reported a positive correlation with the quality of career transition.
268 Retired athletes who had succeeded in their sport showed stable levels of self-identity, self-
269 esteem, and global self-concept and less occupational difficulties (Cecić Erpič et al., 2004).
270 In contrast, those who had not achieved their expected sporting goals expressed a high degree
271 of psychosocial difficulties, such as loneliness, missing people related to sport, and difficulty
272 in organizing their post-sport lives, including taking a longer period to adjust to post-sport
273 life and having negative evaluations of their adaptation process (Chow, 2001; Koukouris,
274 1994). Additionally, Sinclair and Orlick (1993) revealed that those who achieved more in
275 their sport showed a higher satisfaction in post-sport life.

276 **Educational status.** All eight studies that examined educational status reported positive
277 correlations with the quality of athletes' career transitions. Athletes reported that their
278 educational progress was negatively influenced by their sport career, and low educational
279 attainment was related to vocational difficulties during the career transition process
280 (Marthinus, 2007; Stonach & Adair, 2010). In addition, athletes' educational and college
281 graduation status influenced both short-term and long-term adjustment after retirement (e.g.,
282 Williams, 1991).

283 **Financial status.** Financial status has been reported in eight studies, and all indicated
284 positive associations with the quality of career transition for former athletes. The studies
285 found that some former athletes experienced financial problems, which caused transition
286 difficulties and limited their post-sport life choices (e.g., Lotysz & Short, 2004; Menkehorst
287 & Van Den Berg, 1997).

288 **Self-perception.** Self-perception incorporated athletes' perceived body image, self-
289 confidence, and self-worth. Eight studies discovered a positive correlation between self-
290 perception and the quality of athletes' career transitions. Five studies revealed that athletes'
291 body image can be influenced by their retirement and their negative perceptions of their body
292 can be a source of distress during the career transition process (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000;
293 Lavalley & Robinsin, 2007; Sparkes, 1998, Stephan, Bilard, Ninot, & Delignières, 2003a,
294 2003b; Stephan, Torregrosa, & Sanchez, 2007). In addition, findings indicated that athletes'
295 feelings of loss of control over their bodies can be sources of identity crisis during the career
296 transition process (Sparkes, 1998). Three studies discussed athletes' perceived self-worth and
297 self-confidence (Missler, 1996; Newell, 2005; Stephan et al., 2003a). Missler's (1996) study
298 suggested that gaining self-worth without sport performance was positively related to former
299 golfers' quality of career transition. Stephan et al. (2003a) revealed that former Olympians
300 showed a significantly lower mean physical self-worth and self-perceived physical strength

301 than active athletes. Newell (2005) indicated that retired athletes, who had a high self-
302 confidence, also showed positive perspective on their post-sport career, in terms of self-belief
303 in their abilities to achieve new career goals.

304 ***Control of life.*** Control of life refers to athletes' perceived autonomy and power over
305 their decisions while competing and during the career transition process. Seven studies
306 examined control of life, and all of them indicated that athletes who had less control over
307 their life expressed more negative emotions during the transition process than those who had
308 more control (e.g., Kane, 1991; Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000). College athletes who showed more
309 control over their lives had greater self-esteem, higher life satisfaction, and were more
310 positive about the future (Webb, Nasco, Riley, & Headrick, 1998). Some athletes attributed
311 their forced retirement and negative emotional experiences during the career transition to
312 unbalanced power in their sporting system, which they could not control (Blinde & Stratta,
313 1992; Parker, 1994).

314 ***Disengagement/drop-out.*** Koukouris (1991, 1994, 2001) applied the term
315 "disengagement" to examine Greek adolescence and young adult athletes' drop-out
316 experiences, and four other studies (Alfermann, 1995; Alfermann & Gross, 1997; Butt &
317 Molnar, 2009; Johns et al., 1990) also explored athletes' drop-out experiences. Drop-out
318 refers to the premature sport career termination among young athletes before they reach their
319 full potential (Alfermann, 1995). Findings indicated that athletes who dropped out mostly
320 terminated their sport careers voluntarily. The decision might have been premature and
321 related to lack of control over their situation and decisions (e.g., anticipation of deselection,
322 conflicts with coaches; Butt & Molnar, 2009; Koukouris, 1994). Feelings of failure, therefore,
323 can be sources of career transition difficulties (Alfermann, 1995; Butt & Molnar, 2009). For
324 this reason, researchers have distinguished "drop-out" from the term "retirement" (e.g.,
325 Alfermann, 1995; Wylleman et al., 2004).

326 Among seven studies examining athletes' disengagement/drop-out, six indicated a
327 negative association between disengagement/drop-out experiences and the quality of career
328 transition, and one showed no association with the quality of career transition. Alfermann's
329 (1995) and Alfermann and Gross's (1997) studies reported that some athletes who dropped
330 out from their sport experienced identity problems and negative emotions, and they also used
331 more passive coping strategies than those who experienced retirement from sport. Butt and
332 Molnar (2009) revealed that athletes who dropped out expressed a loss of social networks
333 similar to retired athletes, but they also reported feelings of rejection from former friends who
334 were still in sport teams. Transition difficulties were found among disengaged athletes in
335 Koukouris's (2001) study as well. The study highlighted that athletes' disengagement from
336 sport could lead to social, psychological, and medical difficulties during their post-sport life
337 adjustment. In contrast, Johns et al. (1990) showed that young gymnasts, who dropped out
338 from the sport, perceived their sport career termination in both positive and negative terms,
339 including changes in social relationships and lifestyles.

340 *Time passed after retirement.* Seven studies reported positive associations between
341 time passed after retirement and former athletes' perception of the quality of their adjustment
342 to their post-sport life. Five of those seven studies used a longitudinal design, and the results
343 revealed that retired athletes perceived less transition difficulties over time (Douglas &
344 Carless, 2009; Lally, 2007; McKenna & Thomas, 2007; Stephan et al., 2003b; Wippert &
345 Wippert, 2008). Stephan et al. (2003b) found that post-sport life adjustment difficulties
346 reduced as time passed, and in the other studies, the participants started to experience a
347 balance in their lives after 18 months (Douglas & Carless, 2009; McKenna & Thomas, 2007)
348 of their sport career end. Lally (2007) reported that athletes appeared to have new roles and
349 identities a year after sport career termination. Wippert and Wippert (2008) also revealed that
350 retired athletes' self-perceived stress levels significantly declined 3 months following the end

351 of their career compared to after 10 days of retirement.

352 ***Relationship with coach.*** All six studies that investigated coach-athlete relationships
353 revealed that conflict between both could be a source of athletes' career transition difficulties.
354 Retired athletes who did not have a good relationship with their coaches expressed more
355 difficulties during the career transition process (Chow, 2001; Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000;
356 Muscat, 2010), and the participants in the studies blamed their coaches for an unsatisfying
357 retirement (Lavalley & Robinson, 2007). The studies also indicated that unbalanced power
358 between coaches and athletes and an unpleasant coach-athlete relationship were associated
359 with injury or disengagement from sport (Johns et al., 1990; Werthner & Orlikck, 1986).

360 ***Life changes.*** Life changes refer to changes in lifestyles and daily routines (Stephan et
361 al., 2003a). Five studies indicated that changes in former athletes' lives had negative
362 associations with the quality of career transition among retired athletes. Former athletes
363 reported feelings of anxiety associated with their new routines and feelings of being lost
364 resulting from no more competition and training (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Schwenk,
365 Gorenflo, Dopp, & Hipple, 2007). In addition, accepting a new lifestyle was one of the
366 transitional difficulties for athletes (Stephan et al., 2003b).

367 ***Balance of life while competing.*** A total of three studies reported positive correlations
368 between the balance of sporting and non-sporting lives prior to retirement and the quality of
369 career transition. Harrison and Lawrence (2003, 2004) found that student athletes perceived
370 balancing academic and athletic activities during their sport participation was a significant
371 predictor for post-sport life adjustment. Kerr and Dacyshyn (2000) revealed that retired
372 gymnasts, who had found the right balance between sporting and non-sporting lives during
373 their athletic careers, reported higher life satisfaction after their retirement compared with
374 those who did not have a balanced life while competing.

375 **Available resources during the career transition.** We examined four correlates in the

376 available resources category with respect to the quality of athletes' career transitions,
377 including coping strategies, pre-retirement planning, psychosocial support, and support
378 program involvement.

379 ***Coping strategies.*** A total of 32 studies examined the frequency of coping strategy used
380 during the career transition process and found no clear evidence that certain strategies are
381 more effective than others, except for searching for new careers or interests. Additionally,
382 studies have shown that finding new careers or interests was closely related to identity shift
383 processing because of role changes following the end of a sport career (e.g., Kerr &
384 Dacyshyn, 2000; Lally, 2007). Six studies reported that athletes employed keeping
385 themselves busy as a way of coping. Furthermore, results from two studies revealed that
386 keeping busy during the career transition period was one of the beneficial coping strategies
387 for athletes to reduce career transition difficulties (Kadlcik & Flemr, 2008; Lotysz & Short,
388 2004).

389 Searching for psychosocial support and getting support from others (29 studies; e.g.,
390 Barners, 2002; Gilmore, 2008; Lotysz & Short, 2004; Schwenk et al., 2007; Stephan et al.,
391 2003b) have been reported more than other coping strategies among retired athletes. Other
392 coping strategies include searching for new careers or interests (12 studies; e.g., Butt &
393 Molnar, 2009; Clemmet, Hanrahan, & Murray, 2010; Douglas & Carless, 2009; Sinclair &
394 Orlick, 1993; Shachar et al., 2004), avoidance/denial (six studies; Alferman et al., 2004;
395 Barners, 2002; Grove et al., 1997; Lally, 2007; Stambulova et al., 2007; Weiss, 1992),
396 keeping busy (six studies; Barners, 2002; Brandão, Winterstein, Pinheiro, Agresta, Akel, &
397 Martini, 2001; Kadlcik & Flemr, 2008; Lotysz & Short, 2004; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993;
398 Winterstein, Brandão, Pinheiro, Agresta, Akel, & Martini, 2001), and acceptance (five
399 studies; Alfermann et al., 2004; Grove et al., 1997; Stambulova, 2001; Tinley, 2002; Weiss,
400 1992).

401 Some researchers (e.g., Grove et al., 1997) attempted to investigate associations
402 between certain variables (e.g., athletic identity, nationality) and the use of coping strategies.
403 Grove et al. (1997) reported higher athletic identity was positively associated with the use of
404 denial, venting emotions, and searching for social support. Alfermann and Gross (1997)
405 discovered that athletes who dropped out from their sports used more passive ways of coping
406 than retired athletes who did not drop out from their sport. Stambulova et al. (2007) found
407 that French former athletes used a denial strategy more than Swedish former athletes. In
408 addition, six studies noted maladaptive coping strategies among retired athletes, such as
409 alcohol dependence, increased smoking, committing suicide, or drug use (Douglas & Carless,
410 2009; Koukouris, 1991; Mihovilovic, 1968; Schwenk et al., 2007; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993;
411 Wippert & Wippert, 2008).

412 ***Pre-retirement planning.*** Pre-retirement planning included vocational, psychological,
413 and financial considerations following the end of a sport career. Twenty nine studies
414 described pre-retirement planning as a variable, and 28 of them reported that it was positively
415 associated with the quality of athletes' career transitions. Planning for post-sport life included
416 psychological preparation before sport career end and having a clear goal outside of sport
417 gave retired athletes a comfortable feeling (e.g., Warriner & Lavalley, 2008; Young, Pearce,
418 Kane, & Pain, 2006). Pre-retirement planning was also related to former athletes' vocational
419 adjustment to post-sport life (Coakley, 2006), and financial planning was one of the
420 influential factors in the quality of athletes' post-sport life adjustment (Fortunato & Marchant,
421 1999).

422 ***Psychosocial support.*** Psychosocial support incorporated all kinds of support from
423 non-sporting (e.g., spouses, families, friends, and significant others) and sporting sources
424 (e.g., coaches, trainers, and teammates). Investigators have reported various kinds of
425 psychosocial support, including emotional, esteem, information, network, and tangible

426 support. Among 29 studies, 27 reported that support from others had a positive influence on
427 the quality of career transition. The results showed that being supported by close others eased
428 transition difficulties during the post-sport adjustment period (Alfermann, 1995; Werthner &
429 Orlick, 1986; Young et al., 2006). Participants in two studies (McKnight, 1996; Schmid &
430 Seiler, 2003) discussed more than one kind of psychosocial support (i.e., emotional,
431 information, and tangible), and seven studies did not specify the kind of support which
432 participants had received from close others.

433 Among 29 studies, 10 reported the value of emotion and esteem support for athletes'
434 career transitions. Emotion and esteem support included encouragement and help for
435 emotional challenges through storytelling, account-making, and mentoring. Studies revealed
436 that greater amounts of account-making were related to decreases in athletic identity, and
437 completion of account-making procedures was associated with greater overall success in
438 coping with retirement (Barners, 2002; Lavalley et al., 1997). Studies that examined
439 mentoring effectiveness found that higher mentoring scores were positively associated with
440 intimacy levels among athletes and athletes' demands of mentoring during the career
441 transition process (Lavalley, Nesti, Borkoles, Cockerill, & Edge, 2000; Perna et al., 1996).

442 Information support has been examined by four studies and included supportive
443 transition (i.e., providing information prior to a transition; Fernandez et al., 2006; Wippert &
444 Wippert, 2008) and information from organizations, former teammates, and coaches during
445 the career transition (McKnight, 1996; Stephan et al., 2003b). Fernandez et al. (2006) and
446 Wippert and Wippert (2008) discovered that athletes who had been given pre-retirement
447 information from coaches or trainers before being cut from the team expressed less transition
448 difficulties or negative emotions during the career transition process compared to those who
449 did not get the information. Results from McKnight's (1996) study showed that the
450 recognition of guidance on post-sport life or preparation within organizational policies was

451 positively associated with athletes' career transitions, and participants from Stephan et al.
452 (2003b) perceived teammates' and coaches' support during career transition was helpful for
453 post-sport adjustment.

454 Six studies reported that social networks played an important role in athletes' career
455 transitions. Studies revealed that a loss of social networks after a sport career termination was
456 one career transition difficulty (e.g., Kane, 1991), and athletes who experienced less
457 difficulty in career transition had a stronger social support network (Schwendener-Holt,
458 1994).

459 Tangible support was discussed in two studies (Leung et al., 2005; Schmid & Seiler,
460 2003). The study by Leung et al. (2005) showed that tangible support from national
461 organizations mediates the quality of athletes' career transitions, and participants who had
462 such opportunities when seeking a career after retiring from sport (e.g., funding) experienced
463 a relatively healthier transition than athletes who did not receive organizational support.
464 Schmid and Seiler (2003) revealed that tangible support from athletes' close others was
465 positively related to successful transitions.

466 ***Support program involvement.*** Eight studies indicated positive associations between
467 athletes' support program involvement and their life skills development and the quality of
468 career transition. Albion (2007) and Redmond et al. (2007) evaluated the effectiveness of the
469 Athlete Career and Education (ACE) program in Australia and found that the ACE program
470 helped athletes become less inclined towards identity foreclosure and increased motivation to
471 make career decisions. Gilmore (2008) examined Scottish former athletes in a performance
472 lifestyle program and found that they perceived job seeking and interview skills development
473 as useful institutional support. Four studies examined college student-athletes' support
474 program involvement and revealed that the program helped them develop their life skills,
475 including leadership skills, decision-making, career planning, and communication skills

476 (Goddard, 2004; Selden, 1997; Stankovich, 1998; Torregrosa Mateos, Sanchez, & Cruz,
477 2007). Lavallee (2005) revealed that providing Life Development Interventions (LDI; Danish,
478 Petitpas, & Hale, 1992) had a positive influence on athletes' career transition experiences
479 because it helped them to develop appropriate coping skills.

480

Discussion

481 The present study aimed to provide a systematic review of athletes' career transition out
482 of sport. A total of 126 studies met the inclusion criteria, and results demonstrated that the
483 study area has been growing steadily. Investigators have used both qualitative and
484 quantitative methods, and the number of studies that employed longitudinal designs has
485 increased since 1990. A wide range of competitive levels, both genders, and various types of
486 sports have been examined. The current review identified 19 variables related to the quality
487 of athletes' career transitions, and the correlates were categorized into two themes: Factors
488 related to career transition (e.g., athletic identity, voluntariness of decision, and degree of
489 individual development) and available resources during the career transition (e.g., coping
490 strategies, psychosocial support, and pre-retirement planning).

491 Lavallee et al. (2000) reported 80 independent sample studies in their review, and the
492 present review found 126 studies documenting the study area has grown significantly over
493 the past 10 years. The findings from the current review also revealed that studies conducted
494 via qualitative methods (44% compared with 29% reported by Lavallee et al., 2000), with
495 female athletes (19%, compared with 11% in 2000), and with participants from non-Western
496 regions (9 studies compared with no studies in 2000) have increased gradually over the past
497 decade. These results can be interpreted as a diversification of the methodologies used and a
498 broadening of sample populations in the study area.

499 Early reviews (e.g., Baillie & Danish, 1992; Crook & Robertson, 1991) pointed to the
500 importance of individual development, self-identity, voluntariness of retirement, and social

501 support in the career transition process. The current review supported the significance of
502 these factors. Indeed, to review existing studies from the early stages up to 2010 made it
503 possible to examine changes in research trends. As Wylleman et al. (2004) highlighted, in the
504 early stages of investigation, researchers focused on causes and consequences of athletes'
505 retirement and then moved on to identify predictors for the quality of athletes' career
506 transitions. Since then, researchers have also refined well-known variables (e.g., athletic
507 identity) and examined a broader range of correlates. For example, a number of previous
508 studies (e.g., Sparkes, 1998) discussed athletes' identity shift after leaving their sport, but a
509 more recent longitudinal study (Lally, 2007) revealed that athletes experience decreases in
510 athletic identity in the latter stages of their sport career, not just after actually retiring. These
511 findings from longitudinal studies (Lally, 2007; Stephan et al, 2003a) have documented
512 detailed changes in athletes' perceptions and attitudes through the career transition process,
513 including the latter stages of their sport careers and post-retirement. They have also made
514 recommendations for how to support athletes not just in terms of the kind of support they
515 need, but also when this support should be provided.

516 Although previous literature has highlighted the importance of social support in
517 athletes' career transition experiences (e.g., Baillie & Danish, 1992), past reviewers have
518 typically not stratified research according to specific kinds of support. Social support is
519 conceptualized in many different ways across psychology. Recently, in sport and
520 performance psychology, Murphy (2009) introduced five types of social support (i.e.,
521 emotional, esteem, information, network, and tangible), which help interpret existing data.
522 Some researchers (e.g., Cutona & Russell, 1990) have claimed that certain forms of social
523 support (e.g., tangible, emotional) may have more beneficial influence on specific kinds of
524 stress (e.g., losses, transitions) than others. Therefore, identifying types of social support and
525 examining the forms of support athletes received during the career transition out of sport may

526 help practitioners design appropriate social support-based interventions.

527 This review has several limitations. Only English language studies were included;
528 during the search process four foreign-language studies (two Chinese [Liu & Li, 2007; Wang,
529 2008] and two Korean [Chung, 2010; Hong, 2010]) were excluded. The exclusion of these
530 non-English studies might influence sample characteristics (e.g., location of study) and lead
531 to the omission of potential correlates, such as cultural or sport system related issues. Finally,
532 the review could not present all examined correlates individually, due to limited space. In line
533 with previous and accepted guidelines (Goodger et al., 2007; Sallis et al., 2000), correlates
534 with less than three individual studies were either grouped into similar predictors during the
535 analysis process or dropped from the summary table. Providing categories with conceptually
536 similar variables might lead to more robust results for the review, in terms of suggesting
537 directions for examining similar correlates.

538 Based on previous findings, several future research directions can be identified. There
539 has been a growing body of interest on the development of conceptual models in athletes'
540 career transitions, but these models have not been systematically tested. Only two studies, for
541 example, examined Taylor and Ogilvie's (1994) model (Coakley, 2006; Munroe et al., 1999),
542 and one study developed theories through the grounded theory method (Torregrosa, Boixadós,
543 Valiente, & Cruz, 2004). Testing available models and developing sport specific theoretical
544 frameworks might help researchers to clarify the conceptualization of athletes' career
545 transition out of sport.

546 In terms of research design, the majority of investigators have employed retrospective
547 data collection methods, and many of them have noted memory and recall bias as a limitation
548 (e.g., Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Lavalley & Robinson, 2007). Employing prospective
549 longitudinal research designs to study athletes' career transitions might allow researchers to
550 examine the dynamic processes over time. Therefore, more prospective longitudinal studies

551 are needed in the study area.

552 Nearly half of the studies used a qualitative research method, and most researches
553 employed individual interviews for data collection and thematic analysis of transcripts.
554 Investigators analyzed data in different ways, including interpretative phenomenological
555 analysis (e. g., Warriner & Lavalley, 2008) and narrative analysis (e.g., Gearing, 1999), yet
556 there are more ways to explore athletes' career transition phenomenon from a qualitative
557 perspective. Since various types of research designs provide different methodological
558 advantages and limitations, we recommend future researchers build upon this research by
559 employing diverse methods, including focus groups, case studies, and action research
560 methods.

561 Several investigators (e.g., Cecić Erpič, 2000; Lavalley & Wylleman, 1999) have
562 developed measurement tools to investigate athletes' career transitions, but these available
563 questionnaires have not been validated with a range of samples. Further validation research of
564 the questionnaires may assess their utility in athlete populations.

565 The results from the present review showed that there are many different variables
566 which influence the quality of athletes' career transition adjustment. Since findings revealed
567 that coach-athlete relationships (e.g., Chow, 2001; Lavalley & Robinson, 2007) and athletes'
568 physical health (e.g., Gilmore, 2008) were positively associated with the quality of athletes'
569 career transitions, employing relevant issues from other study areas (e.g., burnout, coach-
570 athlete relationships, and injury) may help to explain the multidimensional aspect of the
571 career transition process.

572 Regarding sample characteristics, although several studies have attempted to discover
573 demographic differences, such as gender, age, types of sport, and marital status, no consistent
574 evidence has been found except for a positive association between marital, social, educational,
575 and financial status and the quality of career transition (e.g., Lotysz & Short, 2004; Marthinus,

576 2007). Research findings across studies have indicated that athletes who are of different ages
577 during their career transitions showed different needs post-sport career, because of diversities
578 in individual development stages and life plans. For example, studies with student athletes
579 who terminated their sport career in their teens or early 20s showed that they often chose to
580 become students rather than find employment (e.g., Lally, 2007; Lavalley & Robinson, 2007).
581 In contrast, the majority of professional or elite level athletes who retired in their late 20s or
582 30s made a transition into the world of work (e.g., Lavalley et al., 1996; Marthinus, 2007).
583 Some studies (e.g., Alison & Meyer, 1988) did not report specific details of sample
584 characteristics (e.g., age, type of sport), and only four studies examined athletes from more
585 than one country in order to identify cultural or social differences in the quality of their career
586 transitions (i.e., Alfermann et al., 2004; Schmidt & Hackfort, 2001; Stambulova et al., 2007;
587 Wheeler, Legg, Hutzler, Campbell, & Johnson, 1999). Examining differences in demographic
588 variables might help practitioners to provide appropriate support for each athlete, whether the
589 differences are based on individual factors (e.g., age, gender) or environmental factors (e.g.,
590 culture, sport context). Future research needs to focus on examining sport specific or life span
591 and age related issues in the quality of career transitions.

592 As Stambulova, Alfermann, Statler, and Côte (2009) noted, athletes' career transition
593 studies have been conducted mainly in European countries, North America, and Australia.
594 Findings from the current review confirmed this trend and revealed that eight out of nine
595 studies from non-Western countries (i.e., Africa, Asia, Middle East and South America) were
596 conducted between 2001 and 2007. We agree with Stambulova and Alfermann (2009), who
597 have called for more cultural studies in the career transition area, in terms of investigating the
598 influence of sport systems and environmental contexts on the quality of athletes' career
599 transitions. Moreover, as several researchers have suggested (Berry, Poortinga, Segall, &
600 Dasen, 2002; Si & Lee, 2007), investigating cultural similarities and differences could assist

601 in testing the generality and validity of existing knowledge and theories and lead to practical
602 implications, such as providing suitable and appropriate support in applied work.

603 Few studies mentioned the importance of the decision making-process for post-sport
604 life adjustment (e.g., Cecić Erpič, 2007b; Kirby, 1986; McPherson, 1980). Kerr and
605 Dacyshyn (2000) indicated that the sport career termination decision-making process is
606 multifaceted and complex. Athletes' sport career termination decision-making processes
607 usually occur over an extended period of time (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000) and are considered
608 different from retirement itself (Kirby, 1986). Recently, investigators have tried to specify
609 aspects of the decision-making process, both athletic and non-athletic elements, that lead to
610 sport career termination (Cecić Erpič et al., 2004), and the (anti-) pull or (anti-) push factors
611 related to sport career retirement decision-making (Fernandez et al., 2006). According to
612 Fernandez et al. (2006), a better understanding of the retirement decision-making process is
613 useful for applied work, when practitioners assist athletes who are planning for post-sport life.

614 Numerous authors (e.g., Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994) have discussed intervention strategies
615 to support athletes' career transitions. However, only one published study (Lavalley, 2005),
616 three published conference proceedings (Albion, 2010; Redmond et al., 2003; Torregrosa et
617 al., 2007), and four dissertations (Gilmore, 2008; Goddard, 2004; Selden, 1997; Stankovich,
618 1998) have tested the effectiveness of a specific intervention strategy or program for
619 supporting athletes' career transition out of sport. In order to evaluate effectiveness of
620 interventions, further research is required into whether specific psychological interventions
621 can assist practitioners in supporting athletes in transitions. For example, although
622 researchers have frequently examined coping strategies employed by athletes during the
623 career transition process, no study has been conducted on how sport psychologists can
624 support athletes in developing effective coping strategies.

625 None of the previous reviews divided the voluntariness of the retirement decision and

626 disengagement/drop-out factors into different categories. However, the current review
627 supports the suggestion by Wylleman et al. (2004) to separate the two factors, in terms of
628 differences in the processes between athletes' voluntariness of retirement decisions and
629 disengagement/drop-out issues. The processes involved in disengagement and dropping-out
630 from sport participation are non-normative and occur without individuals' intention, but they
631 are still different from forced retirement. Disengagement and drop-out processes are not as
632 uncontrollable as forced sport career termination because athletes often have a choice to
633 continue or stop their sports career (e.g., Piffaretti, Schnyder, Mahler, Barbat, & Keller,
634 2003). In addition, findings have suggested that disengagement/drop-out can be related to
635 burnout (Smith, 1986). Research examining disengagement/drop-out and forced retirement
636 might extend knowledge on outcomes of specific transitions.

637 Several practical implications for sport psychologists, advisors working with athletes in
638 transition and sport organizations emerged from the present review. The findings provided
639 positive associations between the quality of athletes' career transitions and athletes' program
640 involvement. In addition, results from longitudinal studies (e.g., Douglas & Carless, 2009;
641 Lally, 2007) indicated that athletes showed changes in their degree of athletic identity and
642 required certain periods of time to adjust to their post-sport lives. Therefore, to assist athletes'
643 career transitions, practitioners need to provide both proactive (e.g., career planning,
644 providing education of transferable skills) and reactive support (e.g., coping with emotions,
645 supporting identity reformation process) programs to athletes to help them prepare for their
646 career transition out of sport and adjust to post-sport lives.

647 Findings indicated that coach-athlete relationships influenced the quality of athletes'
648 career transitions, in terms of coaches' influences on athletes' retirement decision-making
649 and athletes' expectations for coaches' support (e.g., Chow, 2001). Practitioners may need to
650 examine coach-athlete relationships and consider using coaches' support to assist athletes'

651 career transitions.

652 Studies (e.g., Alfermann, 1995) revealed that dropping out from sport without reaching
653 their full potential could lead to young athletes feeling like failures and requiring special
654 attention. Practitioners may need to employ different kinds of assistance to support these
655 young athletes as they withdraw from their sport, such as helping them to reduce feelings of
656 failure or self-disappointment through building positive self-image and self-confidence.

657 Researchers (e.g., Albion, 2007; Lavalley, 2005) revealed that many athletes did not
658 participate or use career transition intervention programs even if they had opportunities to
659 receive such services. Previous literature (e.g., Petitpas, Danish, McKelvain, & Murphy,
660 1992) also highlighted athletes' resistance to such programs while actively competing and
661 attributed this attitude to their perception that involvement would be a distraction from their
662 sport performance. For active athletes with negative perceptions regarding support program
663 involvement, practitioners need to provide education related to the importance of pre-
664 transition planning and life skills development.

665 **Conclusion**

666 Research in the area of career transitions in sport has increased gradually over time, as
667 reflected in the growing number of studies and reviews. The investigations to date have
668 contributed to a better understanding of the athletic career transition process, but further
669 research is needed. This systematic review reported the current status of athletes' career
670 transition study and also highlighted limitations in its knowledge. In addition, the present
671 review suggested several future directions, including diversification in research design (e.g.,
672 employing longitudinal designs), sample characteristics (e.g., examining demographical
673 differences), correlates (e.g., discovering roles of coach-athlete relationships in career
674 transitions), and practical implications (e.g., providing proactive intervention).

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