

TRANSITION OR WITHDRAWAL FROM THE SPORTS CAREER

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Abstract: Withdrawal (retirement) from a sports career is a period or phase that every athlete must face at some point in their career. This phase represents a key point of study in sports psychology, in terms of what is generated for athletes going through in this type of situation. A lot of writers compare withdrawal from sports altogether to retirement, which is something people plan for a very long time. However, the fact is that there is a difference between these two things. Top athletes may withdraw or give up their sports careers for several reasons caused by various factors. Once they retire from professional sports, they usually enter the world of work like everyone else. However, for the professional athlete who is about to enter the working world, leaving behind years of sports work, he is now faced with a new and often different situation. Not all professional athletes extend their working lives as athletes. This is the first side, when withdrawal or retirement occurs voluntarily, with age-reaching, performance reduction as part of the process and not as an isolated event. The other side that we will also talk about below in the text is, if the withdrawal happens suddenly, caused by several factors: injury, incorrect relationship with the trainer, insufficient support from the family and the environment, lack of motivation for training, which typically manifests in younger athletes when they quit competition before reaching their optimal level of performance (Cervello et al., 2007). According to some previous scientific research, athletes go into depression, resort to banned substances, eating disorders, and low self-confidence appear, as a reason for suddenly leaving the sport. It has been shown that quitting sports can be a very challenging and complex process as it depends on various interpersonal, intrapersonal, structural and social factors. (Crane and Temple, 2015; Wilson et al., 2019). Facing the end of a career is a very sensitive phase that any elite athlete can face and which is the subject of interest and study by many authors in sports psychology (Battaglia et al., 2021; Crane and Temple, 2015; Diaz et al., 2018; Persson et al., 2020). With any of these ways of withdrawal that the athlete faces, the goal is to work on identifying the concept of accepting the new situation. Working or planning in advance and transferring sports skills to other areas of life will reduce the level of trauma from the end of the sports career. However, the question arises as to what are the most important factors that can cause the abandonment of a professional sports career and how the individual himself experiences them. Transitions are defined as a substantial shift in a person's life that forces them to modify their routines and behavior to meet their “new way” of living. (Van Houten et al., 2019).

Keywords: retirement, sports career, transition, professional sport

1. INTRODUCTION

A large number of authors have studied and are certainly still studying the withdrawal from professional sport or the transition from top sport to the so-called retirement from sports, as well as entering in a “new life” after that. Life transitions that have a significant impact on physical and mental health, as well as social and professional development, are the result of withdrawal from high-performance sports. High-performance athletes have a lot of drive and a willingness to put in as much effort as they can. Even though playing sports has many good effects, quitting can be hard and have negative physical, social, emotional, and financial effects (Voorheis P., Silver M., Consoni J., 2023). After an individual from an early age invests a part of herself in an activity that often grows into a sport that she continues to do professionally, it also becomes part of her identity. When the period of giving up comes, be it voluntary or involuntary, caused by several factors, the individual himself may feel useless and powerless and ask the question of who he is or what will happen to him further in life. Although a large number of studies have identified different factors of withdrawal, there is still a gap in the literature about the factors that cause withdrawal in youth sports, i.e. in the adolescent period, and how it is experienced by the athletes (Persson et al., 2020; Witt & Dangi, 2018; Krauge & Pederson, 1999). Retirement from professional sports is a phase or period that a top athlete must inevitably face and go through. During career transitions, social support from friends, family, teammates, and coaches is also important, according to other authors. A study by Alferman & Gross, (1997), and Kane's (1991) of retired professional athletes, spouses also faced challenges associated with career shifts. There have also been studies (Lally and Kerr, 2008) that looked at the effects of sports retirement on the parents of athletes. These studies found that a career break can have a big effect on the personal and social relationships between parents and athletes.

2. CONTENT

Participation in sports in general and especially in professional sports there are many positive influences and because of that athletes can experience a difficult transition when they withdraw or retire from sports because it forces them to reevaluate their identity away from their athletic focus (Voorheis P., Silver M., Consoni J., 2023). Depending on the different circumstances, most authors characterize the transition processes as: voluntary/involuntary or gradual/abrupt and normative/non-normative. Schlossberg (1981), also when talking about sports transitions, distinguishes between two types: normative and non-normative transitions. O. Stråhlman (2023), in his study of elite athletes and their retirement, also talks about voluntary or involuntary and abrupt or gradual retirement. Authors such as Alfermann and Stambulova (2007) have conducted a series of studies on sports retirement and have identified four factors that influence adaptation during the transition to sports retirement: sports identity, freedom of decision, post-career planning and social resources. support when withdrawing from sports.

Types of withdrawal:

1. Normative/voluntary – are those that can be foreseen such as when athletes finish one phase of their life, in this case their sports career, and start the next phase, i.e. their post-sports or academic working life (Schlossberg 1981). Normative transitions, such as the beginning of sport specialization or the transition between compulsory education levels, are relatively predictable based on the athlete's development in sport and life (Stambulova Citation 2007). Gradual transitions are characterized as a decision made by the athlete in a certain period of time of the sports career as a result of free will and which should be implemented in the future. Research by Wylleman, de Knop, Menkehorst, Theeboom and Annerel (1993) showed that a significant reason for withdrawal from sport was that of voluntary choice. For a variety of personal and psychological reasons, many people have freely chosen to end their sports careers. Some athletes may decide to end their careers due to financial difficulties, racial or gender issues, or a general lack of fulfillment in life. Others may want to spend more time with their loved ones. (Baillie, 1993). The fact that, in contrast to male athletes, the physical process of pregnancy and childbirth unavoidably disrupts female athletes' careers for some time is especially significant. A comparison of the genders reveals that female athletes are more likely than male athletes to choose to become parents after completing their sports careers (McGannon et al. citation 2015); (Moesch, Mayer and Elbe citation (2012); (Reints Citation 2011). While the willful choice to resign from sport is maybe the most alluring decision, it is important to understand that voluntary retirement also facilitates a career transition (Taylor et al., 2005). Thus, voluntary decision-making is thought to be less likely to lead to psychological problems.

2. Non-normative/involuntary or unplanned retirement is linked, in part, to identity loss, to a more difficult and negative transition from active sports life in a future “new life”, especially for those without a transition plan. In non-normative transitions, on the contrary, withdrawal is not planned in a preconceived way, but due to subjective certain issues, withdrawal is inevitable. Certain circumstances that an athlete may find themselves in that may lead to the decision to withdraw are: injuries, loss of a coach they were close to, non-renewal of contracts due to a change in performance level, divorce or sudden death of a loved one, etc. (Schlossberg 1981). Unplanned retirement is more likely to be difficult for athletes than planned retirement. When associated with prolonged injury-induced pain or prolonged post-injury rehabilitation with no hope of returning to sport, forced retirement may necessitate a longer period of adjustment to post-sport life. (Coleman, Nailah MD, FACSM; Roberts, William O., 2021). Non-normative transitions are less predictable (eg, injuries, de-choice, death in the family) and are risky in terms of the outcome of the crisis (N.,B. Stambulova, T.,V., Ryba, K. Hendriksen 2020).

As Schlossberg wrote in her study (1981), the transition is a time when relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles shift. One must take into account the type, setting, and impact of the transition to comprehend its significance for a particular person. The extent to which the transition alters day-to-day life, determines impact. According to Schlossberg, there are four main groups of factors that affect a person's ability to adjust to the change. The four pillars—situation, self, support, and strategies—are also referred to as the 4S.

In the context of all of this, I will state that in the literature and research so far, there is still a gap when it comes to withdrawal during adolescence or youth sports. For example, many athletes give up sports because they no longer find it fun and enjoyable in it (Persson et al., 2020); (Witt & Dangi, 2018); (Krauge & Pederson, 1999) – taken from J. Jooste (2021), but of course other factors lead to the decision to withdraw. Other career transition researchers have also documented the significance of social support from teammates, friends, and coaches in recent years. Alfermann & Gross, 1997). Planning retirement from sport is not an issue that coaches should avoid, fearing the possibility that athletes will not focus enough on achieving performance if there is advance planning. Another factor that opens up a lot of discussion is the dual career factor. Many athletes give up sports in or after the adolescent period due to the impossibility of training and working together or training and studying as well.

Several authors have divided the models that study withdrawal from sports: theoretical models, sports trajectory models and structural models.

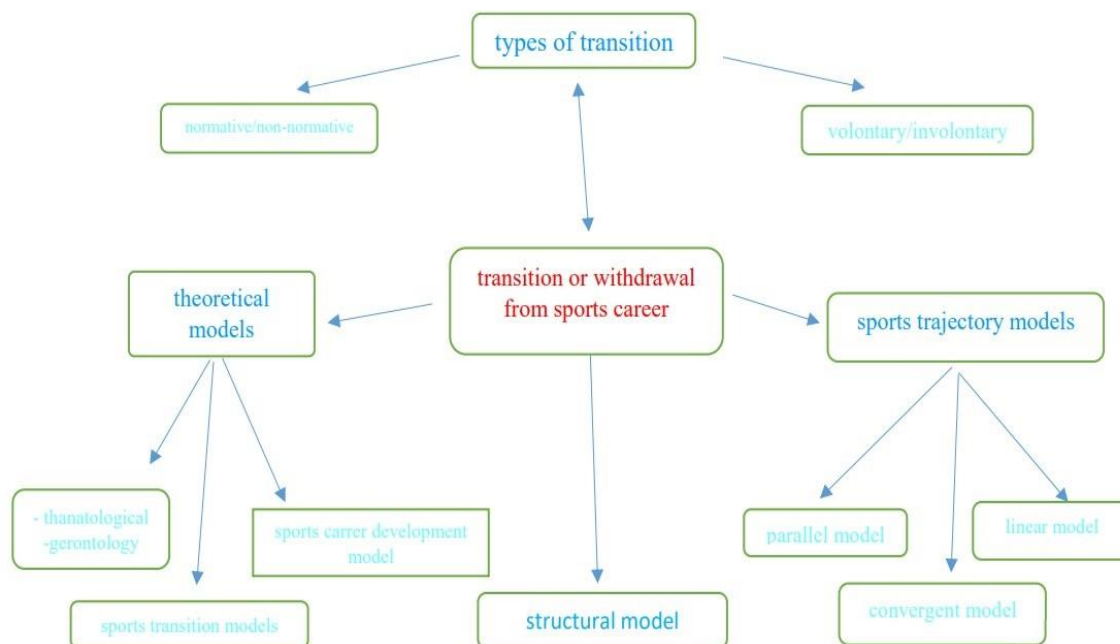
Crook and Robertson (1991) present two types of theoretical models that lead to sports withdrawal: **thanatology** defined as social death, loss, psychological suffering, physical pain, etc., and **gerontology**—a science devoted to the study of the various aspects of aging, including psychological, social, economic, and cultural factors.

Stambulova (2003), designs the **sports transition model**, whose purpose is to organize the sports career in several stages

Crawford & Godbey, (1987) present the sports retreat through the **structural model** that implies free time and open participation in recreational activities.

In the study presented by Susana Palleres, Fernando Azocar, Miguel Torregrosa, Clara Selva and Yago Ramis (2011), sports career models in the sport of water polo were examined. They try to determine how athletes manage after retiring from their professional careers. Those models are: **Linear** – the withdrawal comes without prior planning which carries significant importance during the decision process, where athletes extend their career to the maximum because they have no clear work alternative. **Convergent** - a model in which the athlete places a high value on sports in their lives and where the athlete tries to combine work outside the sport. **Parallel** – where the athlete builds a sports career while studying at university and where the withdrawal from the sport is experienced less emotionally because he has security and is academically ready to start working.

Picture 1. Types of transition and withdrawal models



Author of mind map: Elena Soklevska Ilievski

3. CONCLUSION

This subset of the above quantitative studies in the field of sport withdrawal provides a critical analysis of transition outcomes, factors, patterns, and causes that lead to withdrawal from professional sports. Although extensive research work has been done to date, successful withdrawal from sports is still a matter of debate (Frank, Stambulova, & Weibull, 2016). Future examinations might profit from creating and assessing more projects to help competitors during the change to retirement. Stepwise programming can help athletes in the following ways: to recognize their athletic experience and view retirement as a continuous interaction; to build their character, comprehend how to apply their special abilities in new ways, to assume command over their change into retirement by utilizing an unmistakable arrangement and adjusting to new schedules and open doors, normalizing the progress insight by "living in the following" and building trust in new life paths. It is important to note that in some countries, understanding the reality and importance of withdrawal from top sport, there are social sectors that are preparing

certain programs to solve and more easily face the consequences arising from the same. Examples include: Olympic Athletics Center (Canada), Retired Athletes (Netherlands), Sports Career and Education (Australia and Great Britain), Career Assistance Program for Athletes (America), etc. Programs offered by these centers are selected for their flexibility and adaptability. They, through specific types of workshops, seminars, educational modules, individual tutoring, offer a multidisciplinary approach to support groups that are targeted as athletes. Today, there are many opportunities for athletes to earn a university degree, also or degree for their own sports, so that they have other career options left when they retire.

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