



Career transitions in sport

Johan Fallby & Sverker Fryklund
Malmö 20101017

Overview

- Career transitions in sport defined
- Case & Career phases
- Summary

Career transitions in sport defined

- **Athletic career** is a term for the multiyear competitive sport involvement of the individual aimed at achieving his/her individual peak in athletic performance in one or several sport events
- It is also can be seen as a sequence of **stages** and **transitions**
- **Career transitions** are the **turning points/phases** in an individual/ athlete's development
- Subjectively, they are associated with **stress and uncertainty** about whether the situation will change for the better or for the worse

Career transitions in sport defined

- Objectively, they come with **a set of new demands** and require additional **resources to adjust/cope**
- Career transitions can be **normative** and **non-normative**
- A transition has a potential to become **a crisis** under condition that the athlete is not able to cope with the demands on his/her own and needs psychological assistance

Developmental Model of Transitions faced by Athletes (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004)

AGE	10	15	20	25	30	35
Athletic career	Initiation		Development	Mastery/Perfection		Discontinuation
Individual development	Child-hood	Puberty	Adolescence	Young adulthood	Adulthood	
Psychosocial development	Parents Siblings Peers	Peers Coach Parents	Partner Coach		Family (Coach)	
Academic - vocational development	Primary education	Secondary education	Higher education	Vocational training Professional occupation		

The case of Lina

1. Initiation

“However, the family has always had a lot of sport gadgets and balls to play with at home”

“Practices contains a lot of play/.../”

“The coaches are always careful that the children and their parents shall feel at home at the club during practice sessions”

“The only thing Linas’ parents emphasise is actually that she shall think that handball is fun and that she always shall do her best”

“Lina has many friends within handball and floorball”

“Lina is quite skilled and always at practices. It’s the best thing she knows”

“Linas’ dad also starts to show more and more interest in her sports, and thinks that he, after all, knows quite a lot after all his years of training and competing”

1. Initiation

Athletes' perceived demands:

- Adults – pressure and expectations
- Results ?
- Early specialisation

Factors facilitating the transition:

- Adults – focus on joy and play through social support
- Deliberate play
- Positive feedback
- Focus on performance, not result
- 8-1 rule

The case of Lina

2. Specialisation

- “Lina is not really used to that kind of hard practice, but still she thinks it is fun”
- “Her handball coach and dad says its time to choose which sport to focus on, but the problem is that she is not ready to choose”
- “Her mom and dad argue over dads increasing involvement in Linas' sport”
- “Friends are important during this phase and a lot of things happen in life outside sports as well”
- “Lina applies for handball–NIU /.../ It is over 150 kilometers away, and she has to move from her parents /.../ she also change to another club”
- “Enjoyment, excitement, and friendship in the handball team is after all what motivates Lina”
- “It proves to be a severe knee injury, despite of that it is a relief”
- “I have always believed that the players learn more when they are allowed to try and succeed by themselves, then they will learn faster”

2. Specialisation

Athletes' perceived demands:

- Increased intensity in training and competition
- Relationships within sport
- Adaption to demands in school

Factors facilitating the transition:

- Motivation through self-determination
- Identity (athletic/civil)
- Goal setting and planning
- Motivational climate
- Social support

The case of Lina

3. Junior – senior

“Stop practice with us or sign for the next season now”

“She gets good advice and support from a national team player, poor game experience but fantastic training”

“She works as mailman early in the morning, only to be able to practice in the afternoon and evening”

“Lina is the first pick in the U-19 national team”

“Lina is quite sure to be selected to the national team for the championship /.../ she is not in the team”

“With new determination she sets a new goal, to become first pick in the national team in her favourite position”

3. Junior - Senior

Athletes' perceived demands:

- Recovery, overload and burn-out
- Negative motivational climate

Factors facilitating the transition:

- Motivation through self-determination
- Coping skills
- Identity (athletic/civil)
- Goal setting and planning
- Motivational climate (motivational interviewing)
- Social support and the organisation

The case of Lina

4. Mastery/perfection

“Lina play for a Swedish club for another year, then she moves abroad to become full time professional. New country, new culture, new people, and new demands”

“Training load increases gradually during the years”

“She works with a sport psychologist with a lot of things from performance anxiety, identity, future planning (in- and outside sports), roles in different environments, relaxation, to goal-setting”

“Her grades are not enough to enter university. She therefore needs to study distance courses to complete them”

“Pressure to perform, studying, having a relationship, living abroad, media, sponsors, and agents. Lina doesn't know how to handle everything, and it doesn't really provide any real earnings”

“She has been full time professional for some years now. At this point the only thing she can think of as her goals in life is beside sports”

4. Mastery/Perfection

Athletes' perceived demands:

- Injuries
- Lack of support functions
- Academic and vocational demands
- Life balance

Factors facilitating the transition:

- Athletic/civil identity
- Coping skills
- Transferable skills
- Motivational climate
- Social support
- Organisation (career transition programs e.g. Malmö Sports Academy)

The case of Lina

5. Discontinuation

“She has been a professional player for some years, but is now going to move to the city where the university is, and play with a young, talented, inexperienced team, and also decline to continue in the national team”

“Now she understands other older players that has made the same decision before her”

“To Lina, the greatest reward with sports is to set, realize, and reach goals together”

“After the game Lina feels it is wrong to end the career /.../ even though she has planned to stop for a long time, it feels empty and as a difficult decision”

“Despite she planned for the ending of the career and she had her education, she missed the joy from sports, the challenge, friends, the thrill, practice and the energy”

“It took a while before the energy came back /.../ Life, that before was filled with sports activities, slowly starts to include other things that feels fun, challenging, and meaningful”

5. Discontinuation

Athletes' perceived demands:

- A non-normative transition
- Lack of organisational support
- Lack of preparation before commencing the discontinuation
- Bad coping skills
- Identity issues

Factors facilitating the transition:

- Athletic/civil identity
- Coping skills
- Transferable skills
- Goal setting and planning
- Social support
- Organisation (career advisor/sport psychologist)

Summary

- There are **normative career transitions** in sport that we can prepare and plan for.
- An athlete needs a **balanced identity**, and to make use of transferable skills.
- The transition from junior to senior is difficult, and needs to be addressed with **career planning, life balance, recovery and social support**.
- By **educating** athletes, coaches, parents and organisations an athlete can be better prepared for the transitions.
- A career transition is an **individual experience** and the support should be adapted to the individual as much as possible.