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**CAREER TRANSITION:
THE SPORT RETIREMENT EXPERIENCES
OF NEW ZEALAND ATHLETES**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Science
in
Psychology

at Massey University, Albany,
New Zealand

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1999

ABSTRACT

This study explored the sport retirement experiences of seventy-four New Zealand athletes who were identified as having retired from high performance sport participation. During the peak of their sport careers, these athletes achieved regional, national, or international competitive representation. The Athlete Career Transition Inventory, a 47-item instrument, was developed for this study. The inventory was divided into sections that examined: motivation for sport participation, reasons for retirement, adjustment to retirement, pre-retirement career planning, social networks, athlete identity dimensions, and life satisfaction. Analysis indicated the majority of athletes adjusted to their sport retirement with minimal difficulty. Although significant differences between the gender groups were only observed for sense of personal control at transition $\chi^2 (2, n = 72) = 6.66, p = .036$, there appear to be differences between male and female athletes with regard to social support prior to transition. Neither goal achievement nor the causal factors involved in the retirement decision predicted the quality of the athlete's adaptation experience. Practical implications for coaches and sport bodies are discussed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The process of researching and writing this thesis has provided me with many experiences and challenges. I would like to take this opportunity to thank those people whose unique contributions made the completion of my Masterate thesis possible.

Firstly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr Jennifer Stillman for her supervision, support, encouragement, and patience throughout my thesis year.

I would like to thank Sue Dennehy and Glenda Rodger at Sport North Harbour for their help with athlete contacts. I would also like to acknowledge those athletes who took the time to contribute to this research.

I am grateful to Simon and Shirley Cairns for their care, attention, and support over the past year, and to Auntie Yvonne for her heartening advice and the late nights spent proof reading.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents, Carl and Dianne for the unwavering support and encouragement they consistently provide me with.

Thank you all very much.

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INTRODUCTION

Retirement from elite level sport participation is an inevitable part of the life span of every top athlete. Depending on the sport, athletes can remain at their highest level of competition from as few as three years, to as many as twenty years or more (Cramer-Hammann, 1995). However, for the majority of athletes, sporting excellence is a short-term venture. The average competitive life expectancy of sports people at the highest level of performance is thought to be just six years (Orlick, 1990). Due to such a short competitive life span, most athletes retire, voluntarily or involuntarily, during their mid to late twenties (McPherson, 1984; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993).

Coakley (1983) defined sport retirement as “the process of transition from participation in competitive sport to another activity or set of activities” that may be related or distinct from the athlete’s previous sporting career (p. 10). This view of sport retirement envisages a role/career transition that progresses through several stages of withdrawal from a competitive sport career, and which leads the former athlete into other areas of activity or relationships (Coakley). It is not assumed that contact with sport, or sporting participation, ceases completely following sport retirement. Former athletes may move into coaching, or administration within the sport, or they may pursue a new career or activities within a completely different area (Allison & Meyer, 1988; Curtis & Ennis, 1988).

Sport retirement comes earlier in an athlete’s career, and indeed life span, than is the case for retirement in the general population (Baillie, 1993). Upon retirement many elite athletes must cope with the uncertainty of moving out of an area in which they are

very accomplished into something unknown, or something in which they have yet to prove themselves (Orlick, 1986). Whilst the majority of their non-sporting peers have already established themselves in careers, retired athletes may find themselves beginners in the occupational world. They may be competing with individuals much younger than themselves (Drahota & Eitzen, 1998), and embarking on a new career that is often not as psychologically or emotionally rewarding as their previous sporting career (Denison, 1997).

Any type of transition, whether rough or smooth, will require a degree of adjustment from the individual (Coakley, 1983). Although previous studies conducted on different athlete populations have produced some conflicting results, more recently researchers have indicated that it is the minority, rather than the majority, of athletes who suffer serious problems upon sport retirement (Strang & Hodge, 1996,¹ cited in Hodge, 1997; Ungerleider, 1997).

Chapter one of this thesis explores a selection of studies investigating the degree to which sport retirement is an issue for athletes, and the difficulty or ease with which athletes adjust to the transition. A range of different theories and models that have been applied in an attempt to better understand the processes involved in sport retirement, are also examined.

It is important to understand that the act of ending a sporting career will not necessarily cause an athlete distress (Coakely, 1983). Rather, each athlete will adjust and cope differently with the transition experience as they bring their own personal resources (e.g. self identity), coping strategies (e.g. continued training), social networks (e.g. family members, friends), social differentiation factors (e.g. class, gender, race),

¹ Attempts to obtain a copy of this reference from one of the authors or any other source were unsuccessful.

and factors of life circumstance (e.g. financial circumstances), to bear on the transition experience (McPherson, 1984; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993).

The different ways in which variables can potentially influence an individual's adjustment to sport retirement are discussed in depth in chapter two. Chapter two is structured in accordance with the five stages of Taylor and Ogilvie's (1994) conceptual model of adaptation to career transition. This chapter includes, the investigation of different variables identified as potentially causing the sport retirement decision, personal and social factors related to adaptation, the resources available to aid adaptation, quality of the career transition, and the structured interventions sometimes necessary.

Although sport retirement has received very little empirical consideration within New Zealand (Denison, 1997; Hodge, 1995), the continued development and advances being made within the sports arena (e.g. professionalism) indicate that athlete retirement will become an increasingly important part of sport management and athlete development (Hodge, 1995; Stronach, 1993).

The Research

The central intent of the present study was to explore and describe the experiences of those New Zealand sports men and women who have completed their sporting career and moved into a new and different stage of life. Focus areas included:

- The relative ease or difficulty with which New Zealand athletes adjust to sport retirement.
- Potential interactions between athletes' adjustment experiences and the determinants of sport retirement.

- The possibility of an interaction between the degree of sport goal achievement and adjustment to sport retirement.
- The exploration of possible differences in the responses of male and female athletes.
- Athletes' perceptions of desirable content and delivery mode of pre- and post-retirement interventions.
- Life satisfaction of retired athletes.

Both overseas, and where available, New Zealand literature relevant to the focus questions is discussed in the appropriate sections of chapters one and two. There is no doubt a large expanse of research investigating retirement from the work place and aspects of ageing can provide useful insights into, and possible explanations of, athlete retirement experiences. However, within the scope of the present study the majority of the discussion will focus on sport-specific literature, and the social psychological theories that have been applied to sport retirement.

CHAPTER ONE

SPORT RETIREMENT: AN ISSUE FOR ATHLETES?

This chapter reviews literature relevant to the question “is sport retirement an issue for athletes?” For coherence, the literature is separated by athlete populations; in particular high school and collegiate athletes versus elite amateur and professional athletes. Following this discussion, various models and theories applied by researchers are introduced to explain the process of sport retirement.

IS RETIREMENT FROM SPORT AN ISSUE FOR ATHLETES?

Studies investigating the extent to which sport retirement is a problem for athletes have been conducted on various athlete populations, examining many different variables. Thus, not surprisingly, they have produced some conflicting results concerning the process of disengagement. In the following discussion studies are examined under a number of sub-headings in an attempt to summarise the diverse findings arising from research within this area.

Journalistic case studies of famous athletes whose lives deteriorated dramatically following their sport career's end (e.g. see Johnson, 1972; Morrow, 1978) may provide compelling reading about the negative consequences of sport disengagement. However, one must question the degree to which these reports truly represent the retirement experiences of famous athletes and the experiences of retired competitive athletes in general (Curtis & Ennis, 1988). Despite recent empirical interest in the study of athlete

retirement, and the increasing amount of literature focusing on this issue, there is still considerable debate surrounding the proportion of athletes who experience distress due to sport retirement, and how this distress manifests itself (Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993a).

Studies examining this issue fall into two main categories: those that find little negative effect for sport disengagement and minimal adjustment difficulties (Curtis & Ennis, 1988; Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985), and contrasting studies that indicate career termination can be a source of distress for athletes. This distress may manifest itself in a variety of psychological and behavioural ways (Arviko, 1976, cited in Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998; Mihovilovic, 1968; Ungerleider, 1997; Vamplew, 1984). Those athlete populations most commonly studied include high school and college athletes, and elite amateur or professional athletes. A number of these studies have included an investigation of the relationship between sport retirement and athlete life satisfaction.

Collegiate athletes

McPherson (1984) commented, “withdrawal from elite sport during or following high school or college probably represents a relatively normal transition from education to partial or full involvement in the labour force” (p. 218). Such a “relatively normal” transition would be expected to cause an individual little distress, and this is confirmed by much of the research examining scholastic and collegiate athlete populations.

Greendorfer and Blinde (1985) identified very few adjustment difficulties among a large sample ($N = 1,123$) of male and female ex-college competitors. Their study indicated that 55% were either very, or extremely, satisfied at the end of their sport careers and 90% of the respondents looked forward to life after college. Similarly, in a sample of former Canadian junior hockey players ($N = 109$), Curtis and Ennis (1988)

found no negative effect for sport disengagement. The former athletes, along with a comparison sample of males from the general population, were examined with respect to three dependent variables: life satisfaction, employment status, and marital status, either no differences were found between the former athletes and the sample of males in the general population, or the former athletes were more advantaged.

Earlier comparative studies had likewise provided very little evidence of negative effect with regard to sport retirement. In fact, several studies comparing high school athletes with their non-athlete counterparts indicated athletes were more likely to attend college, obtain under-graduate and graduate degrees, achieve greater occupational status, and earn higher incomes. (Otto & Alwin, 1977). In addition, no differences were found in life satisfaction and attitudes towards work between former athletes and non-athlete counterparts (Snyder & Baber, 1979).

However, a study by Blinde and Stratta (1992) runs contrary to these findings. A sample of collegiate athletes who had either been cut from their sports team, or whose whole sports programme had suddenly been eliminated, experienced trauma and disruption in their lives due to their sport retirement. They were frequently reported as equating their feelings with those of death and dying. Similarly, nearly half of the 92 athletes surveyed by Schell (1995) reported enduring a difficult transition away from college sport.

Although there are conflicting results regarding the transition experiences of college athletes, a common opinion is that they are less susceptible to problems during sport disengagement than older elite athletes. For many school age athletes the transition away from sport occurs at a predictable time such as at the end of high school, as the individuals are entering college, or at the end of college, as they begin a new career (McPherson, 1984). It has been suggested that older athletes may be more

vulnerable to stressors related to career transition, due to the greater investment they have in their sport, and their commitment to sport participation as a career (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998).

Elite amateur and professional athletes

Sussman (1971) believed that professional athletes did not experience transition difficulties because, from the onset of their sports careers, they knew their life span as an athlete would be short and thus they prepared appropriately. There are several studies focusing on elite amateur, Olympic, and professional athletes that provide support for Sussman's belief. These studies conclude disengagement from sport to be a relatively smooth straight-forward experience for the majority of athletes (Allison & Meyer, 1988; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993). In a survey by Allison and Meyer (1988) 50% of a sample of 20 female former tennis professionals perceived retirement as a relief and an opportunity to re-establish traditional lifestyles and social roles.

Contrary to such findings there have also been reports of extreme social, emotional, and behavioural problems present in former athletes. Mihovilovic's (1968) study of Yugoslavian former professional soccer players was one of the earliest athlete retirement studies to raise concerns regarding the athlete's ability to adjust to sport disengagement. The major concern for many players, once retired, was their inability to obtain post-athletic employment and the lack of skills needed to establish successful careers. In a domino effect, a lack of work led to increased levels of frustration in the former players, which in turn led to higher levels of smoking, drinking alcohol, and neglecting physical activity. Arviko (1976, cited in Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998) has reported similar behavioural responses to sport retirement. Retirement from sport has

also been associated with more serious behavioural and psychological manifestations including incidences of alcohol and drug abuse, financial difficulties (Newman, 1991; Vamplew, 1984), participation in criminal activities, acute depression, and attempted suicide (Hare, 1971, cited in Taylor & Ogilvie 1998).

Following evaluation of similar examples of traumatic sport disengagement experiences, McPherson (1984) concluded, “it is not known to what extent if any these outcomes or examples represent normative behaviour. In fact, a similar number of cases could likely be cited for those who attain higher status positions than would be expected of former professional athletes (e.g., become successful doctors, lawyers, politicians or businessmen)” (p.217).

There appears to be a tendency for some researchers, when reporting results, to de-emphasise the percentage of participants who struggle with sport disengagement. Although Allison and Meyer (1988) concluded their study to be a positive depiction of the sport retirement process, 30% ($n = 6$) of the former players surveyed expressed feelings of isolation and loss of identity immediately following retirement, and 10% who retired unexpectedly due to injury, felt they had failed to achieve their competitive goals.

Other studies that have reported substantial minority difficulties include a study of 57 U.S. Olympians by Ungerleider (1997). Forty percent ($n = 23$) of the athletes interviewed had either serious or very serious problems with making the transition and were unable to make a full transition out of sport. Similarly, in a New Zealand study of retired swimmers by Strang and Hodge (1996, cited in Hodge, 1997), 64% ($n = 58$) of the retired swimmers reported having a “smooth”, relatively trouble free, transition into retirement. The remaining 36% ($n = 31$) regarded their sport retirement transition as a difficult experience.

Impact of sport disengagement on life satisfaction

Several studies have specifically focused upon the impact retirement from sport can have on the athlete's life satisfaction. In general, research indicates that sport disengagement has very little negative effect on life satisfaction. Both collegiate and professional athletes have been studied and the majority of retired athletes report being satisfied with post retirement life (Curtis & Ennis, 1988; Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Werthner & Orlick, 1986), nevertheless, there are some individuals whose life satisfaction is compromised by their career transition.

A comparative study between former athletes and non-athletes by Snyder and Baber (1979) indicated that very few, if any, differences existed between these populations in terms of life satisfaction or attitude towards work post-sport retirement. In a later study, higher job, leisure, and general life satisfaction scores, were reported by ex-players than by their general population counterparts (Curtis & Ennis, 1988). Sixty percent of the former athletes in that study reported high life satisfaction compared with 48% of the comparison sample.

Werthner & Orlick (1986) retrospectively investigated athletes' levels of life satisfaction, self-confidence, and personal control, during three different phases in their life: their competitive sport years, during the sport retirement transition, and at the time of the interview (no more than eight years since the athlete's sport retirement). The athletes reported having high levels of self-confidence and life satisfaction during both their competitive years and at the time of the interview. During the transition out of sport, however, the athletes experienced a drop in levels of self confidence and life

satisfaction. This suggests that although transition out of sport does impact on the life satisfaction of some athletes, it may be a temporary state.

THEORIES AND MODELS OF ATHLETE RETIREMENT

Various researchers have attempted to provide a formal conceptualisation of the athlete disengagement process by drawing upon retirement theories and models developed outside of sport (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998). Models and theories investigating the ageing process, retirement from the workforce, the process of social death, the stages of grieving, and responses to death and dying, have all contributed in some way towards an understanding of the sport retirement experience.

A collection of models and theories that have contributed to descriptions of the process of sport retirement and athlete adjustment are introduced below. These are by no means inclusive of all models and theories used in sport retirement literature, but have been selected to exemplify the contrasting range of models that have been utilised in the study of sport retirement.

Social Gerontology: Activity, Continuity, and Disengagement theories

Those researchers who have utilised the social gerontological approach to understand the problems and processes that retiring athletes may confront, have likened retirement from sport to the process of retirement from the work force. When applied to athlete retirement, the social gerontological view considers life satisfaction to be dependent upon various characteristics of the sport experience (Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985; Rosenberg, 1981). Three prominent social gerontological perspectives that have

been applied to sports retirement include activity theory, continuity theory, and disengagement theory. These are outlined below.

The underlying notion of activity and continuity theories is that high activity and role maintenance are positively related to self concept and life satisfaction (Gordon, 1995). Activity theory maintains that the sporting roles lost through retirement are immediately replaced by new roles, maintaining the overall activity level of individuals as they make the transition from one stage to the next (Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998).

In common with activity theory, continuity theory assumes the maintenance of a certain level of activity. However, in contrast to activity theory, new roles are not necessarily substituted for those that are lost. Rather, the extra time and energy available from the previous role is either redirected among remaining roles, or invested in new roles (Atchley, 1980; Gordon, 1995; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998). However, neither activity theory nor continuity theory provides a satisfactory solution if the lost role played a pivotal part in the individual's life. In that case, increased involvement in other activities may not provide the individual with the same foundation for a satisfying existence (Gordon, 1995).

Disengagement theory views the process of athlete retirement as one in which the athlete and the sporting environment withdraw from one another for the mutual benefit and satisfaction of both (Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985). Disengagement theory assumes that, once retired, individuals completely sever their ties with their job and work place or, in this case, their chosen sport. This allows younger people to enter the work force or sporting arena and the retired individuals to enjoy their remaining years. (Gordon, 1995; Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998). Disengagement theory does not appear to cross successfully from work retirement to athlete retirement

because, unlike retired members of the workforce, a large number of retired athletes maintain some form of contact and involvement with their sport (Curtis & Ennis, 1988).

Three empirical studies highlight some potential inadequacies of social gerontological approaches when applied to sport retirement. Lerch (1981) and Reynolds (1981), each applied a social gerontological perspective and found no relationship between sport-related factors and adjustment or life satisfaction. Utilising continuity theory, Lerch (1981) analysed retired baseball players. No relationship was found between life satisfaction and adjustment, or life satisfaction and the three continuity variables (career connected with sport, income following retirement, and continued commitment to sport). Reynolds (1981) found that role transfer following retirement from football did not appear to be sport related in nature. Not only do these findings not accord with social gerontological theory, but they also raise questions regarding an association between the act of disengaging from the sporting role and the individual's adaptation to sport retirement (Coakley, 1983).

Thanatology

Thanatological theory likens retirement to a form of "social death". It focuses on the reaction of current group members towards an individual who has recently left the group (Greendorfer, & Blinde, 1985). The term "social death" has been used to describe "individuals who are biologically or legally alive" but who may be suffering from social isolation, ostracism, and rejection from remaining group members (Greendorfer & Blinde, p. 102). Applied to sport retirement, an athlete's social death could be associated with the termination of a sporting contract, not being re-selected

into a team, or a downward slide during a sporting career (Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985; Rosenberg, 1981).

Thanatological theory has received criticism for the overtly negative way in which it characterises the athlete disengagement experience and its reliance upon the athlete being forced into retirement for its validity. Although there is some evidence indicating that athletes who retire involuntarily face greater retirement difficulties than those retiring voluntarily (Lavalley, Grove & Gordon, 1997; Mihovilovic, 1968), evidence available does not support such a negative depiction of the sport retirement experience and the notion of social death (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985).

The lack of equivalence between work disengagement and athletic career disengagement casts doubt on the relevance of these theories (Allison & Meyer, 1988). Both thanatological and social gerontological theories are also criticised for their assumption that retirement is a singular, abrupt event (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998), rather than part of a transition process that involves development and change throughout one's lifetime (Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993a).

Kübler-Ross Grief Response

A related, but separate, approach that derives from literature dealing with loss and the grieving process (Kübler-Ross, 1969), has been applied effectively to explain the various stages of adjustment a retiring athlete may go through if he/she were having difficulty with sport retirement. For those who work with retired athletes, the five stages of the Kübler-Ross grief response (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance) provide a useful tool for understanding the stages a retiring athlete may progress through (Baillie, 1993).

As with grieving, an athlete has no set schedule for these reactions, nor is there just one way to pass through the stages. An athlete will move through the different stages of adjustment at his/her personal rate, spending longer at some than others, with shifts back to earlier stages also occurring (Baillie). For some athletes the transition may be smooth and trouble free, however, prevalent responses for individuals not ready to retire, or who perceive retirement as preventing them from achieving their goals may include, denial, (I can still play), anger (what a stupid coaching decision), bargaining (Give me one more chance to play) or depression (I can't do anything anymore) (Baillie, 1993).

Retirement as a transition

Viewing sport retirement as a transition emphasises the continuation rather than cessation of certain behaviours, and encourages the progressive alteration of goals, identity, and behaviours, rather than an immediate and final end. Athletes who perceive their sport retirement in this way are believed to encounter fewer difficulties during the adjustment process (Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985).

As characterised by Greendorfer and Blinde (1985), the primary focus of such a developmental perspective would include: continuity and continuation of behaviours (rather than termination), transition as a process (rather than event), a gradual shifting or reprioritising of interests (in contrast to complete abandonment), and mild (rather than severe) adjustment. This approach focuses on the unique set of circumstances that affect an individual's choices, adjustments, and behaviours (Drahota & Eitzen, 1998).

Schlossberg's model for analysing human adaptation to transition

Some advocates of the notion of sport retirement as a transition adopted Schlossberg's (1981) model for analysing human adaptation to transition and applied it to athlete retirement (Schell, 1995; Swain, 1991). This model was developed as a framework on which various transitional events could be analysed, and it emphasises the importance of the individual's perception of the transition rather than the actual transition itself (Schlossberg, 1981). Three sets of variables are believed to work in combination to influence the adaptation response of each individual. Each variable has the potential to be either an asset or a liability, depending upon the individual's view of the transition situation, their self, and the personal environment.

These variables are:

1. The characteristics of the transition. These include factors such as the timing of the transition, the source and duration of the transition, role changes involved, current stress, and the individuals previous experience with transition.
2. Individual characteristics. These include personal and demographic characteristics, such as socio-economic status, gender, age, stage of life, and health, as well as psychological characteristics such as ego development, personality, outlook, commitment, values, and coping skills.
3. Characteristics of the environment. These include social support networks, and options available for the athletes outside of sport. (Gordon, 1995).

Each individual experiences change in a very personal way, it is their ability to balance resources and deficits in order to satisfy the demands created by a particular

event or non-event that confirms the effect of the transition experience (Schell, 1995; Schlossberg, 1981). Both Swain (1991) and Schell (1995) effectively applied Schlossberg's (1981) model to the retirement experiences of athletes. In keeping with Schlossberg's model, their findings suggested that whether the transition experience is positive or negative will depend upon the athlete's perception of the resources or deficits available to manage the adjustment phase.

The rebirth model

As mentioned earlier, some of the theories and models used to explain athlete retirement infer that retirement from sport is a psychologically traumatic event for the athlete. The rebirth model (Coakley, 1983) challenged this notion, arguing that retirement from sport could be seen as a positive shift for the athlete, and an opportunity for social rebirth, in contrast to the thanatological perspective of social death. The athlete is said to enjoy a reprieve from the physical, psychological, and time constraints of sport, which gives them an opportunity to pursue other valued goals (Schell, 1995). Coakley (1983) argued that to fully understand the impact of sport retirement on an individual, the retirement experience must not be looked at as an isolated event, but rather as a process that is influenced by a range of life variables and circumstances involving the person, time, and reason for retirement.

Allison and Meyer (1988) surveyed twenty former professional tennis players, investigating their career and retirement patterns as well as the problems they experienced during the adaptation process. In line with the predictions of Coakley's (1983) rebirth model, half of the former players indicated feelings of relief on retirement. Many indicated that they valued the release from the competitive pressures

of the circuit, and the opportunity to pursue and/or expand roles they otherwise had to neglect while on tour.

Conceptual models of adaptation to career transition

Based upon previous and current empirical and theoretical research, several conceptual athlete retirement models have been developed to further explain and predict the way in which different variables interact to influence the athlete's adaptation to retirement. These models focus upon the interactions between different variables related to the athlete's retirement from sport and how these interactions effect their ease of adjustment (Gordon, 1995; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994).

Gordon (1995) provided a conceptual model of the career transition process involved in competitive sport. This model illustrated the interactions between four different groups of factors and their relationship with the athlete's adjustment experience. The four factors included:

- Causal factors (age, deselection, injury, free choice)
- Interacting factors (transition characteristics, individual characteristics, environment characteristics)
- Tertiary factors (social support, pre-retirement planning)
- Interventions (counselling, career assistance).

Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) offer a somewhat similar five-stage model that examines the developmental course of athletes' adaptation to sport retirement. A representation of this model is presented in Figure 1 on page 20. This model addresses

athletes' concerns from the initiation of the sport transition process through to the final adjustment. The five stages consist of:

- 1) Causes of career termination. The reasons for discontinuing a sporting career are frequently found to be a function of four factors: age, de-selection, injury, and free choice.
- 2) Specification of the factors related to adaptation to career transition. These factors are intrinsic to the individual athlete and include: self and social identity, previous developmental experiences, and the athlete's perceptions of control, as well as tertiary contributors (e.g. socio-economic status, ethnicity, and financial independence).
- 3) Resources available to aid adaptation to sport retirement. These resources are thought to influence the athlete's ease of adjustment to sport retirement. They include; coping strategies, social support, pre-retirement planning.
- 4) The quality of the career transition. At this point in the model, the quality of the athlete's career transition will depend upon the outcomes of the previous three steps. Here the athlete can either have a "healthy" career transition, or suffer career transition distress.
- 5) Intervention for career transition difficulties. This stage is only experienced by those athletes who suffer career transition distress. It includes different forms of post-retirement intervention that may be effective in helping athletes through career transition difficulties. Such interventions may be cognitive, emotional, behavioural, social, or organisational (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994; 1998).

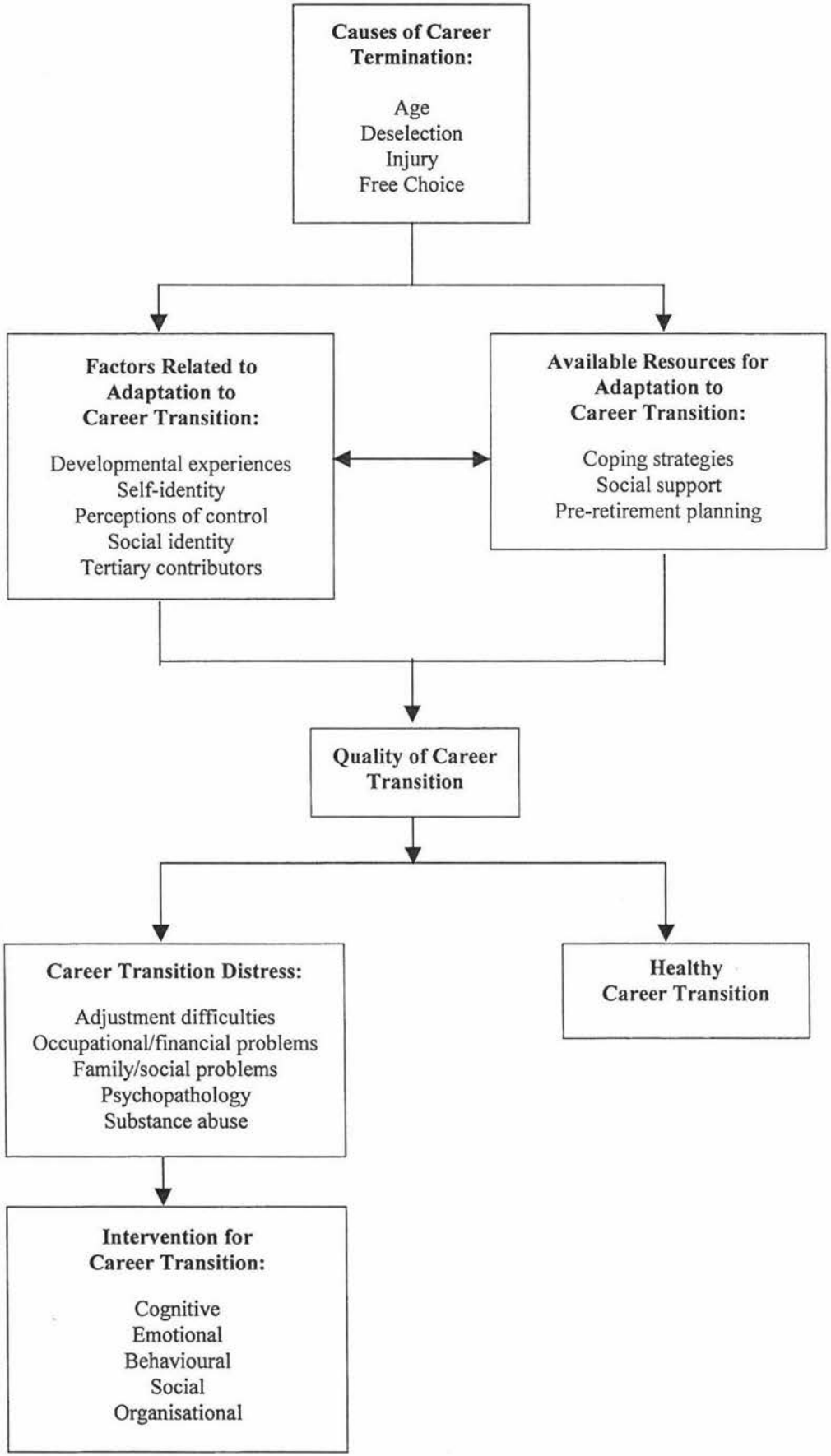


Figure 1. Conceptual model of adaptation to career transition (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994).

Taylor and Ogilvie's (1994) model was used as a framework for the development of the present study, therefore, the next chapter explores and expands upon the five stages of the model listed above.

Summary

This chapter has focused on the question "is sport retirement an issue for athletes?" Various competing perspectives and conflicting research findings indicate that the understanding of the process of athlete retirement is still incomplete (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985). However, from the literature presented, a conclusion could be drawn that in general high school and collegiate athletes adapt more readily to their transition out of sport than their elite amateur/professional counterparts (McPherson, 1984). Another conclusion that may be drawn is that the majority of athletes experience a trouble free adaptation to sport retirement. Nevertheless, the significant minority of athletes who do encounter physical, behavioural, or psychological difficulties adjusting to life after sport is too large to be ignored (Ungerleider, 1997).

A wide range of models and theories have been applied to sport retirement, the majority of which have derived from work in the social sciences. There has yet to be developed a model or theory that is unanimously agreed upon as adequately representing the complex interactions of sport retirement.

CHAPTER TWO

A CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF ADAPTATION

As mentioned previously, it is not the act of ending a sporting career that necessarily causes the athlete distress (Coakely, 1983). Athletes experiencing career transition must often face a wide variety of psychological, social, financial, and occupational changes. It is believed that the extent of the changes, and how athletes choose to perceive them, will influence the quality of the athlete's adaptation to the transition. This chapter explores the five-stages of Taylor and Ogilvie's (1994) conceptual model of adaptation to career transition, examining some of the important variables relating to the healthy or unhealthy adaptation of an athlete to sport retirement.

CAUSES OF CAREER TERMINATION

The means by which an athlete disengages from sport have been categorised as either temporary or permanent (Schell, 1995; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998). Temporary disengagement may occur, for example, when athletes are injured. They may exit the sport for a period of time to recover and return later following rehabilitation, to make a comeback to the same level of competition as before. Permanent disengagement refers to leaving the sport in such a manner that returning to the same level of competition is virtually impossible, for example, following a permanently disabling injury (Cramer-Hammann, 1995).

The temporary and permanent descriptions of disengagement can be further classified as either voluntary or involuntary. Voluntary disengagement refers to when the athlete's decision to leave the sport environment is a matter of free choice, whereas, involuntary disengagement indicates a cause of disengagement that the athlete has little or no control over, such as an un-renewed playing contract, or the physical deficits of ageing (McPherson, 1984). Studies by Strang and Hodge (1996, cited in Hodge, 1997) and Lavalley et al., (1997) both reported that athletes who retired involuntarily, for whatever reason, had a greater percentage of problems with their disengagement, felt less prepared, and found retirement more difficult, than those individuals who retired for voluntary reasons.

One key to understanding athlete retirement is the identification of the causal factors involved in the initiation of the transition. Numerous factors have been described as incidental in the career transition process and four primary factors namely, age, de-selection, injury, and free choice, have been identified (Lavalley et al., 1997; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993).

Involuntary reasons for retirement

Age:

More often than not, retirement from a sport career occurs comparatively earlier in an individual's lifetime than retirement from other careers (Orlick, 1990). Ogilvie and Taylor (1993a) indicated that age is generally considered to be a primary cause of retirement. Early empirical support for this statement can be found in Mihovilovic (1968). In his study 27% of former Yugoslavian professional soccer players retired due to age. More recently a study of retired Australian elite-amateur athletes conducted by

Lavallee et al., (1997) reported that 12.5% of those sampled indicated ageing as the main contributor to their decision to retire.

The physiological, psychological, and social factors that accompany the ageing process can have significant implications for all athletes both young and old (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998). A natural part of the maturation process includes the slow deterioration of certain physical attributes, such as agility, flexibility, muscle mass, co-ordination, and endurance (Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993b; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998). As an athlete ages, he/she may find it increasingly difficult to remain competitive at the same level. The effects of age are particularly evident in sports such as rugby, hockey, soccer, and tennis, where qualities such as size, strength, speed, and precise motor skills are necessary for success (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998).

It is possible for older athletes to delay or compensate for some aspects of this deterioration process through either intensive physical conditioning, or their experience and motivation (Mihovilovic, 1968; Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993a). However, it is the attribute diminishment that often contributes to an older athlete's decision to disengage from sport (Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993b; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998).

Sports such as gymnastics and figure skating demand extremely high levels of performance from young athletes. For individuals in sports such as these, career termination may occur before reaching adulthood due to the physical changes that accompany puberty, including weight and height gain (Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993a; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998). These physical changes can hinder performance and motor development sometimes making previously straightforward skills and manoeuvres near impossible to perform (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998). It is during adolescence that young athletes are most likely to develop eating disorders, or turn to chemical remedies in an

attempt to stop the physical changes and maintain their competitive edge (Thornton, 1990).

The impact of age upon an athlete's decision to disengage from sporting competition also involves psychological components. It has been suggested that a change in personal values or priorities may occur at a later stage in an athlete's career. The athlete's focus may shift away from him or herself to become more family or friends centred (Svoboda, & Vanek, 1982, cited in Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993a), or the athlete may be less motivated to train and compete (Werthner & Orlick, 1986).

The reaction of fans, team-mates, media, and management, towards ageing athletes can also impact on their ability to successfully negotiate a transition away from competitive sport (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998). Those athletes' for whom ageing has corresponded with a decline in competitive performance, may be prone to suffer difficulties with their adjustment to sport retirement, due to issues around loss of status and self-confidence (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998).

Deselection:

The process of deselection has been likened to the Darwinian philosophy "survival of the fittest", a theory that values individuals who thrive in their environments and disregards those no longer successful (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998). The very nature of sport dictates that deselection must occur. If a team is to do its best then it can only contain those players who, for whatever reason, give the team its greatest chance of winning. This form of selection process occurs in children's sports as early as primary school, and continues to dominate throughout high school, university, elite amateur, and professional sport (Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993b).

In an early study investigating the role of deselection among elite athletes, Mihovilovic (1968) reported seven percent of Yugoslavian professional soccer players surveyed indicated that better performing, younger players had forced them out of elite competition. The same sentiments are echoed in a recent study of 48 elite amateur Australian athletes, eight percent indicated that deselection was the main reason for their retirement from sport (Lavalley, et al., 1997).

Theoretical and empirical evidence suggests that career termination difficulties are more likely to occur among those athletes who retire due to deselection (Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Mihovilovic, 1968; Ogilvie & Taylor 1993b; Ungerleider, 1997).

Injury:

Injury, regardless of extent, can have a dramatic effect on an athlete's sporting career. Elite athletes perform at such high levels that even a very slight reduction in physical capabilities may render them no longer competitive at their previous level of sporting competition (Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993a). Not only does the considerable time and effort that must be focused upon the process of injury rehabilitation affect the injured athletes' return to their previous competitive level, but they also miss the normal physical and performance advancements that may have occurred had they not been injured (Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993a).

Although the majority of athletes retire for reasons other than injury, 24% of Czechoslovakian national team members in an early study by Svoboda and Vanek (1982, cited in Werthner & Orlick, 1986) indicated they retired due to injury. Furthermore, 14% of Olympic athletes sampled by Werthner & Orlick (1986), and 15% of female tennis professionals (Allison & Meyer, 1988), were also forced to disengage from sport due to injuries sustained.

It has been suggested that severe injuries, especially those that are career ending, can result in the athlete suffering various forms of psychological distress including anxiety, loss of self esteem, depression, substance abuse (Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993a; Rotella & Heyman, 1993; Werthner & Orlick, 1986).

Injury may not merely end a promising sporting career, it may also have significant ramifications as retired athletes consider new careers. As Taylor & Ogilvie (1998) noted, "it is not uncommon for elite athletes to leave their sport permanently disabled to varying degrees" (p. 433). The physical disabilities not only limit the athletes in their choice of new activities, but also in the careers they invest themselves in, but may also trigger various psychological and emotional problems. How individuals cope with these problems may influence their ability to manage future life transitions (Chartrand & Lent, 1987; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998).

Voluntary reasons for retirement

Free choice:

Many researchers believe the most desirable way for athletes to end their sporting career is to freely choose to retire (McPherson, 1980; Mihovilovic, 1968; Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993b; Werthner & Orlick, 1986). Unlike the three causes of retirement discussed previously, voluntary retirement from sport is an act fully under the athlete's control. The degree of control athletes believe they have over the end of their sport career is important and is thought to directly impact upon the way in which they respond and adjust to the career transition (McPherson, 1980).

It appears that more athletes are now choosing to retire, rather than waiting until they are forced to. When Mihovilovic (1968) executed his study on retired elite soccer

players only four percent reported retiring of their own free will. However, more recently, a study of Canadian athletes found that 42% of the ex-competitors surveyed retired for reasons within their control (Werthner & Orlick, 1986), and Lavallee et al., (1997) reported well over half of their sample (68.8%) of former Australian athletes retired for voluntary reasons.

Careers may be ended voluntarily for a number of personal, social and sporting reasons. These may include: a change in values and motivations, a desire to pursue new goals or interests (Lavallee et al., 1997; Werthner & Orlick, 1986), to spend time with family or friends, or because sport is no longer rewarding (Mihovilovic, 1968; Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993a; Ungerleider, 1997).

Financial difficulties and work/study commitments may also prompt athletes to end their sporting careers voluntarily (Lavallee et al., 1997; Sinclair, & Orlick, 1993; Werthner & Orlick, 1986). Athletes may also choose to disengage from sport because they have become tired or frustrated with sport demands and the competitors' lifestyle, or it may be that they have grievances with coaches, sports organisations, or sporting politics (Allison & Meyer, 1988; Lavallee et al., 1997; Mihovilovic, 1968; Sinclair, & Orlick, 1993; Werthner & Orlick, 1986).

PERSONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL INFLUENCES

Athletes in the transition stage of sport retirement face changes in their psychological, social, physical, financial and occupational lives. The extent of these changes and the athletes' perceptions of them may influence the quality and meaning of the transition experience, as well as having practical implications for post-sport life (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1993a). The following groups of factors are an integral part of these

changes and as such they have the potential to act as stressors, thus, their effects may produce some form of distress in those athletes facing sport retirement (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998).

Developmental experiences

Human development has been recognised by social scientists as a lifelong process in which events, experiences, meanings and roles at one stage in life are influenced by those that occurred at earlier stages in the individual's development (McPherson, 1984). In accordance with Taylor and Ogilvie (1994), developmental experiences include the many different experiences an athlete may have had since the commencement of his/her sporting career. It has been predicted that the nature of such experiences will influence the athlete's self-perception and interpersonal skills, these factors are in turn thought to have some impact upon the quality and ease of the athlete's adaptation to sport retirement (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994).

The personal investment involved in the pursuit of sporting excellence often begins at a young age. It has been suggested that the single-minded pursuit of sport success may lead to restricted personal and social growth and development as well as a decline in academic achievement (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998). Some evidence has been gathered demonstrating the potential negative effect of sport involvement (Curtis & Ennis, 1988; Sherman, Weber, & Tegano, 1986). Curtis and Ennis found 20% of the athletes they studied, believed their progress in school would have been better if they had not played hockey. Similarly, low graduation rates of collegiate basketball and football programmes have also been reported (Sherman, Weber, & Tegano, 1986).

It has been proposed that young, developing, athletes must face issues that are unique and separate from the normal requirements of development, and that an effort must be made to encourage young athletes' development outside the sporting arena (Remer, Tongate, & Watson, 1978; Scanlan, 1985). Significant issues in this area include the development of self and social identities, social roles and behaviours, and social support systems.

The first step in encouraging a more balanced social development of young athletes, is to engender in those parents and coaches involved in youth sport the belief that long term personal and social development is more important than short term sporting success (Scanlan, 1985; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998). Early interventions should ensure young athletes have adequate opportunities for personal and social growth away from the sports environment. However, it should be emphasised that sports participation and personal growth and development need not be mutually exclusive. Youth sports are believed to provide an educational medium for the development of desirable physical and psychosocial characteristics, providing a useful vehicle through which general life skills may be learnt. (Scanlan, Stein & Ravizza, 1989; Smoll, 1993).

Athlete identity

In order to understand the potential impact sport retirement can have on an athlete, one must first attempt to understand the identification that an athlete can have with his or her sport. Much of an athlete's identity can be wrapped up in being just that, an athlete (Orlick, 1990; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998). Successful sporting careers are often achieved at the expense of everything and everyone else. Family, peer support, education, professional training, and a wider range of life skills can be neglected as the

athlete's focus narrows around his/her sporting world (Baillie & Danish, 1992; Orlick, 1990).

Because most athletes begin playing sport at a relatively young age, athlete identity develops through many years of investment of the self in sporting participation. Positive reinforcement for the young athlete from parents, coaches, and friends, coupled with personal success in sports, encourages continued involvement and commitment to sport. Later, specialisation, sport training, and competitions often result in participants not having time for involvement in other extra curricular activities (McPherson, 1980; Ogilvie & Howe, 1986).

The degree to which athletes define their self-worth in terms of their sport participation and achievement is a fundamental interpersonal factor that can influence their ease of adaptation to career transition (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985; Hodge, 1997). In an investigation by Greendorfer and Blinde (1985) of American University athletes 17% of those surveyed reported extreme dissatisfaction with their self-concept upon retirement. Thirty percent of the former professional female tennis players who participated in Allison and Meyer's (1988) research indicated that they experienced feelings of isolation and loss of identity upon retirement. One player, when asked for her first psychological/emotional response to retirement, replied "Lack of identity. Although I was a psychologist, I didn't feel like one – I still felt like a player" (p. 218). Orlick (1990) commented that it might take some athletes years to get over the loss of their former self "the athlete".

Early identification with the label of athlete may lead to social and psychological problems later in life. Some individuals may be unable to detach or separate from their role as an athlete and thus are not able to function effectively in other roles that may be expected of them, such as partner or family member (McPherson, 1980). Those athletes

who believe their retirement from sport is due to deteriorating personal performances are thought to be more susceptible to problems with lack of self-confidence, and feelings of loss of status, than those retiring for different reasons (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993). When an athlete is no longer able to perform to his/her "normal" capabilities and compete with the usual intensity or skill level, there is a tendency to equate the lesser performance with personal failure. The loss of elite status can impact upon athletes' sense of self, and lead to a belief that they are no longer capable of doing anything well (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993).

Social identity

Not only can the athlete's self identity influence his/her adaptation to retirement from sport, the diversity of an athlete's social identity also has the potential to influence adaptation. Social identity refers to that part of the individual's self-concept that derives from membership of certain groups (Vaughan & Hogg, 1995). McPherson (1980) suggested that many athletes define themselves in terms of their popular status, a perception strengthened with the level of public exposure many of today's elite athletes receive. However, such recognition is often short-lived (Stronach, 1993; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998). As a result, the possible loss of status and public esteem following sport retirement can lead athletes to question their personal self-worth and their ability to contribute to society (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998).

Those athletes for whom the socialisation process has occurred primarily within the sport environment may be characterised as role restricted. Having limited themselves to certain social roles, and interactions specific to the sport setting, they may

find it especially hard to assume the different roles necessary outside the sport environment upon their retirement from sport (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985).

A number of studies (e.g., Mihovilovic, 1968; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Ungerleider, 1997; Werthner & Orlick, 1986) have indicated that those athletes who were able to maintain a multifaceted self-identity and a broad-based social identity, including family, friends, educational and occupational components, had a smoother more successful adaptation to their new circumstances following their transition out of sport.

Perceptions of Control

As already mentioned (i.e. on p. 27), the degree of control athletes believe they have over the retirement decision also has the potential to influence the ease with which they adapt to their sport disengagement. Lavalley et al., (1997) in their study of retired Australian athletes, found that former athletes who felt they had almost no personal control over the initial cause of their retirement experienced the greatest adjustment difficulties. It has been suggested that the perceived absence of control may be especially stressful and threatening when related to an event so intrinsically connected to the athlete's self identity (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985). Personal control characteristics have also been reported as varying between individuals who retire for voluntary and involuntary reasons. Those athletes who retire for voluntary reasons have been found to have significantly higher personal control dimensions than those who retire involuntarily (Lavalley et al., 1997).

Goal achievement

Having a sense of past accomplishment or goal achievement in sport is thought to positively influence an athlete's adaptation. In a study by Sinclair and Orlick (1993), 199 retired high performance athletes with international competitive experience completed a 34-item instrument. Findings indicated those athletes who had achieved their sport-related goals tended to be significantly more satisfied about life than those who had not completed their goals or had only achieved some of them. The study indicated that positive adjustment to retirement from high performance sport was related to achieving one's sport-related goals. That is, athletes who accomplished what they set out to do in sport (i.e. achieved a specific performance time or goal), and who retired both with satisfaction, and on their own terms, tended to adjust with ease.

Athletes who achieved their goals are thought to experience a profound sense of accomplishment. This sense of accomplishment, in turn, provides the athlete with a sense of closure, and contributes to a smooth transition out of sport. The encouragement of effective goal setting practices amongst athletes may play an important role in mediating a "smooth" sport retirement transition.

Tertiary contributors

In addition to interpersonal characteristics, athlete characteristics and personal, social, and environmental variables also have the potential to influence an athlete's adaptation to sport retirement. When combined with other primary adaptive factors these tertiary contributors have the potential to improve or aggravate the transition experience. (Coakely, 1983; McPherson, 1984).

Personal variables may include marital status, health, ethnicity, and financial security. The current status of each variable at the time of sport retirement indicates its potential as a stressor when combined with other interacting factors. For example, the spouse/partner has been identified as one of the most important forms of support during the sport retirement transition so marital/relationship status may influence an athlete's adaptation (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993).

For those athletes financially dependent on sports participation, the transition away from sports can seem particularly threatening, especially if they do not possess the necessary skills needed to maintain their standard of living outside the sport environment (Lerch, 1981; McPherson, 1980; Werthner & Orlick, 1986). Similarly, the athlete's health and physical wellbeing at the time of sport retirement are also important. Those athletes in poor health, or who have received chronic disabilities during their sport career may, as a result, have limited choices in their post-athletic activities, careers, and lives (Hill & Lowe, 1974).

Because there may be potentially fewer opportunities for individuals of certain ethnic origins, minority status is thought to effect the individual's preparation for a post-athletic career. The potential of minority status to influence adjustment is thought to be more significant when interacting with socio-economic status and pre-retirement planning (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985). The opportunities perceived to exist outside the sport organisation may also influence the time of an individual's sport retirement as well as whether it is voluntary or involuntary (McPherson, 1984).

Environmental characteristics include the various options available to the athlete on retirement, and the degree of preparation for sport retirement achieved whilst still competing (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998). Orlick (1990) noted that those athletes who had successfully adjusted to their sport retirement and new careers had dealt with potential

transition issues whilst still involved in sport. It has been suggested that part of the reason why many retiring athletes are reluctant to plan for another career is the uncertainty involved in leaving a sport they were both familiar with, and extremely good at, in order to attempt to succeed in areas where their abilities have yet to be proven (Orlick, 1986).

It is important to consider individual transition characteristics such as level of participation and length of time in the sport, when studying sport disengagement, as these characteristics echo each athlete's personal involvement and commitment to his/her sport. Elite level athletes have invested many hours even years of practice to reach that level and the majority maintain year round training schedules in an attempt to retain their elite status (Werthner & Orlick, 1986).

AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES

The career transition away from elite sport involves many changes in the athlete's personal, social, and occupational environments. Successful adaptation to this transition is thought to be related to the manner in which the athletes respond to these changes, and the resources available to help them overcome any difficulties that may arise during this period. The most common resources utilised by athletes include coping skills and techniques, pre-retirement planning, and the social support available to the athlete on retirement (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990; Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993a), the following discussion examines these three resources.

Coping strategies

Coping strategies include techniques and activities that, when performed, appear to aid athletes' adjustment. Some of the effective coping strategies commonly reported by athletes include: having a new challenge or focus to address immediately following retirement, having a sense of past accomplishment, goal setting (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Werthner & Orlick, 1986), and emotional support from family and friends (Hodge, 1995; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Werthner & Orlick, 1986).

In a study of 197 high performance athletes Sinclair & Orlick (1993) found the following potential coping strategies were either not used, or viewed as not helpful during the transition process. These included drugs and alcohol, ignoring problems, and, surprisingly, counselling for personal difficulties.

A further effective strategy is to maintain training and exercise, or continue involvement in the sport in some capacity. For example, a retired rugby player could coach, play in an old boy's team, or compete in masters' tournaments. Curtis & Ennis (1988) reported 71% of retired elite level junior hockey players sampled were, at the time of the study, participating in recreational hockey on a regular basis.

If the retiring athlete is not injured, it is thought to be best if the physical training and exercise requirements of their competitive career are gradually reduced over several months to a lower maintenance level, allowing the athlete to ease into the lifestyle change (Hodge, 1997). Due to the drop in exercise and energy expenditure, the retired athlete may need to seek nutritional and weight control advice. This is because many athletes are used to consuming a large number of calories to meet the demands their chosen sport puts on their bodies. Upon sport retirement they may need to learn new dietary habits to avoid excessive weight changes (Hodge, 1997).

The development of relevant psychological skills and techniques can also aid the athlete in coping with sport retirement. Taylor and Ogilvie (1998) suggest relevant techniques that have been used effectively to manage emotional, psychological, and physiological stressors within other populations may provide the retiring athlete with a more positive focus and attitude towards a new career. Such techniques may include: self instructional training to improve attention, motivation, self-confidence, and problem solving; anger and anxiety management strategies; relaxation training; and health, exercise and nutritional counselling. The application of behaviour modification techniques such as assertiveness training, time management training, and skill assessment and development, may also promote effective coping.

Social support

The amount, type, and quality of social support available to the athlete also impacts upon the quality of the transition experience. As previously discussed, some athletes can become so immersed in the sporting environment that almost all of their friendships, associations, and social activities revolve around the element of sport (Coakely, 1983; Mihovilovic, 1968; Orlick, 1990; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998). The conclusion of their sporting career often signals a separation from previous sport-based emotional and social support (e.g. team-mates, coaches). Therefore, if the athletes do not have other forms of social support available to them they may suffer feelings of isolation, loneliness, and social withdrawal upon their retirement (Mihovilovic, 1968; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Werthner, & Orlick, 1986).

Although social support can come from various sources, family and friends are consistently referred to as the most supportive and effective source (Mihovilovic, 1968;

Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Werthner, & Orlick, 1986). Sinclair and Orlick (1993) asked 199 retired Canadian high performance athletes to rate the various forms of support they received from both personal and institutional sources during their transition. The groups reported as most supportive included the athlete's spouse or partner, family, and friends, with various institutional groups rated as least supportive. Coaches were also reported as providing very little support, if any, to most retiring athletes. In view of the athlete-coach relationship that develops from the amount of time spent together during training and competition, this lack of continuing support may be especially difficult for the athlete (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Stronach, 1993).

Retiring athletes appear reluctant to seek professional assistance and support for transition difficulties, 35% of athletes questioned indicated they would seek assistance from a sports psychologist, and only eight percent would consider another type of psychologist (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993).

There appears to be a discrepancy in the amount and type of support provided by coaches, team-mates, clubs, management, and sporting institutions, and the support desired from these sources by retiring athletes. Many of the athletes in Sinclair and Orlick's (1993) study felt "ignored, used, forgotten, and discarded in retirement" (p. 146). This suggests that such feelings of isolation could be reduced if retiring and retired athletes were given more respect and appreciation for their contribution to the sport, and efforts were made by the sports clubs to maintain some form of continued contact with the retired athlete. This contact could be as simple as keeping the retired athlete on newsletter mailing lists, including these players in tournaments, and using retired players' expertise and experience in training (Mihovilovic, 1968; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993).

The literature presented here leads to the conclusion that current athletes should endeavour to develop social support networks both inside and outside the sport context for help and emotional support during all phases of their sporting career. Retiring athletes need support and understanding from coaches and team-mates during both the retirement decision and the subsequent transition period. Continued support and ongoing contact from the sports clubs or organisations involved will also help counter any feelings the retiring athlete may have of being used and then abandoned (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993).

Pre-retirement planning

It has been suggested that sport retirement interventions are most effective when they begin prior to sport disengagement (Baillie, 1993; Hawkins & Blann, 1996; Werthner & Orlick, 1986). Many athletes and their coaches deliberately avoid broaching the subject of athlete retirement as it is commonly believed that such planning distracts from the athlete's motivation for their current sporting career (Hodge, 1995; Miller, 1997). However, it has been suggested that uncertainty about the future can be a major distraction in itself, and the knowledge that their future is secure allows athletes to be fully dedicated to their current sporting careers (Hodge, 1995).

Generally, pre-retirement interventions focus on issues that relate specifically to the athlete's functional adjustment following sport retirement, whilst post-retirement programmes emphasise affective concerns and the provision of support for the emotional adjustment of the athlete (Baillie, 1993). The pre-retirement intervention often concentrates on the development and cultivation of new career options, as well as fostering an attitude that positively approaches the opportunities of the sport role

transition, and introduces athletes to possible feelings and experiences they may encounter during their adjustment (Baillie, 1993).

Pre-retirement planning has the potential to act upon many factors related to the adaptation process. For example, pre-retirement planning may positively influence tertiary factors such as financial dependency on sport and post-sport occupational potential. It also has the potential to enhance athletes' sense of personal control, and broaden their self-identity. These interventions may help them realise they are not only athletes but also autonomous individuals (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998).

The incorporation of pre-retirement planning is increasingly becoming a part of collegiate, elite amateur, and professional sport (McFadden, 1999; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; The Australian Institute of Sport, 1998). Structured pre-retirement planning programmes that provide reading materials, personal assistance, and "hands on" workshops covering an assortment of activities, are able to provide athletes with a valuable tool to assist them in planning and preparing for a meaningful post-sport career (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998). Such programmes may include social networking, continuing education, the development of mentoring systems, personal and career assessment programmes, and help to develop and initiate job searches (The Australian Institute of Sport, 1998; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998).

Following a comprehensive study of athlete and coach development and transition, Hawkins and Blann (1996) recommend that career education programmes should place increased emphasis on developing and initiating programmes that physically involve athletes in the career planning strategies and activities. For example, developing and initiating a career or education plan, developing career networks through personal contacts during their playing careers, preparing and updating resumes,

practising personal presentation and communication skills, and working in jobs or internships related to desired careers.

There is very little research examining the extent to which pre-retirement planning services are utilised by the elite athlete. Although some results indicate that only a small proportion of athletes (27%) take advantage of these services (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993), little is really known about their actual effectiveness (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998). In Sinclair and Orlick's (1993) study the most frequently cited reason (31% of responses) for not using the Olympic Athlete Career Centre (OACC) for assistance was that the athletes already had their own career plans formulated or in progress, and thus did not need or desire the services. Other reasons given included: a lack of knowledge about OACC (16% of responses), knowledge of the OACC but not the services available (9%), not finding the services helpful (9%), and a belief that the OACC was only useful for instructions on creating a resume or obtaining business cards (7%).

QUALITY OF THE CAREER TRANSITION

Retirement from sport will not necessarily cause a distressful reaction on the part of the athlete (Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998). Rather, according to Taylor and Ogilvie's (1994) conceptual model, the quality of an athlete's adaptation to career transition will be shaped by the presence or absence of, and the quality of, the various variables outlined in stages one, two and three of the model. Thus, the way in which these variables interact for a particular athlete will determine their adaptation to retirement and the quality of the transition (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998).

Career transition distress

Chapter one raised the question of the proportion of athletes who experience distress upon retirement from sport and outlined the different ways in which the distress can manifest itself. To recapitulate, studies have been conducted within various athlete populations examining a variety of variables. It is of note that conflicting findings are frequently reported. However, overall there appears to be a trend for elite athletes to be more vulnerable to different forms of distress than high school, collegiate, or social athletes, although there are some contrary findings for each (Curtis & Ennis, 1988; Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985; Mihovilovic, 1968; Ungerleider, 1997).

For those individuals who do experience difficulty during the transition, the distress can manifest itself in a variety of ways. These may include adjustment difficulties, financial problems, difficulty finding work, family or social problems, emotional difficulties, substance abuse, and criminal activity (Mihovilovic, 1968; Newman, 1991).

POST-RETIREMENT INTERVENTIONS

Despite the best efforts made towards the prevention of career transition distress, difficulties may still reveal themselves when the athlete is presented with the actuality of their sport career end (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998). The experience of a career transition crisis may adversely affect the athletes cognitively, emotionally, behaviourally and socially (Taylor & Ogilvie).

Many post-retirement interventions are designed to aid those athletes who may be experiencing grief reactions, disorientation, loneliness and depression (Baillie, 1993).

Counsellors or sports psychologists can assist athletes to deal with any emotional distress they may be experiencing during their sport-retirement through individual counselling, or within the context of support group sessions with fellow retired athletes. These post-retirement interventions can provide support and aid athletes in the coping process by providing a forum in which they can express and work through their experiences, fears, and frustrations. These interventions may utilise therapy frameworks such as traditional grief therapy or cognitive re-structuring (Baillie, 1993; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998).

The use of support group sessions can also help those athletes experiencing social difficulties. Sessions may include having athletes explore ways of broadening their social identity and role repertoire as well as encouraging them to expand their social support system to include individuals and groups outside the sports arena (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998). The application of post-retirement interventions can also assist the athlete while establishing a new role and self-identity. The sport psychologist or counsellor can aid athletes in identifying beneficial non-sport roles, which enable them to experience feelings of value and self-worth within this new identity, as well as encouraging the effective use of mental skills to overcome the challenges posed by a new career and lifestyle.

There are certain obstacles however, that can hinder the effective treatment of career transition difficulties. Such obstacles include the athletes themselves, and their preconceptions regarding sport-retirement interventions, and the roles played by counsellors and sport psychologists (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998). A survey of former world class amateur athletes indicated that they did not perceive personal counselling as an effective coping strategy during the career transition process (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993).

Other obstacles may be related to the sporting organisations' management of their athletes. For example, sports psychologists employed by organisations are, more often than not, unable to provide adequately for the career transition needs of athletes. This is due to limited contact and little opportunity to develop an extended relationship with team members in which to discuss career transition issues (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998).

Summary

Various factors affecting the athlete's adjustment from high performance competitor to retired athlete have been discussed under the stages proposed in Taylor and Ogilvie's (1994) conceptual model. This model integrates data from prior theorising, previous empirical studies, and experiences with athletes in career transition, in an attempt to provide a model that addresses all appropriate sport retirement concerns, from the initiation of career transition to its final consequences (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998). Thus, the information presented in this chapter provides a fairly concise introduction to the theories and research surrounding the adjustment of athletes to career transition.

The following chapter introduces the rationale for the present research, and explains why the study of athlete retirement is of interest in New Zealand. The aims of the research, and the methodology used to study sport retirement are also documented.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PRESENT STUDY

RATIONALE

Justification

A growing body of research literature concerning athlete retirement has been published in both the United States and European countries. Within this literature, various factors have been identified that are thought to influence or predict the way in which an athlete perceives, and adjusts to, sport retirement. Examples of such factors include: personal resources, coping strategies, social networks, social differentiation factors, life circumstances, personal management skills, and voluntary versus involuntary termination of sport participation (Gordon, 1995; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998). However, further research is needed to more clearly answer the question of why some athletes are unable to successfully negotiate the challenges of change, while others take them in their stride (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985; Denison, 1997; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Werthner & Orlick, 1986).

There is a need for more research in New Zealand on all aspects of athlete retirement. This is because the degree to which findings from overseas sport retirement research can be generalised to New Zealand athlete populations is unknown. It is possible that structural differences within New Zealand (e.g. small population, government, geographical isolation) and New Zealand sport (e.g. very few large sporting bodies, minimal government funding of sport, initiation of professionalism)

may cause the retirement experiences of New Zealand athletes to differ from those of their overseas counterparts. Notwithstanding, there is a need for more international research to provide comparative data to help establish universal principles for effective sport retirement programmes for athletes (Lavalley et al., 1997).

Very few qualitative or quantitative studies investigating retiring or retired New Zealand athletes have been published in refereed journals. In a study of retired New Zealand swimmers ($N = 91$), Strang and Hodge (1996, cited in Hodge, 1997) reported that 64% of the athletes surveyed, regarded their retirement from sport as reasonably 'smooth' and trouble free, while 36% felt their retirement from sport was a difficult experience. Those swimmers who retired involuntarily (e.g. injury or deselection) reported a higher percentage of problems with adjustment and also found retirement more difficult than those who retired voluntarily. The researchers commented that theirs was the only quantitative study of retirement amongst New Zealand athletes at that time.

Denison (1997) was commissioned by the Waikato Institute of Leisure and Sport to examine how New Zealand's elite sports men and women perceived their sport retirement. Information was collected through interviews with 12 athletes who had competed in either an Olympic Games or World Championship. Findings were reported as a series of short stories designed to honestly convey the participant's feelings about the process of retiring from sport. Denison concluded that New Zealand's elite sports men and women felt "stranded, disillusioned, and directionless" when their sport careers ended (p. 11.), their post-sport lives could not match the glory, excitement and sense of achievement experienced during their sport career.

Although little empirical evidence exists with regard to the adjustment experiences of New Zealand sports people, various sports clubs and organisations are

taking initiatives to help athletes manage their careers. For example, in addition to offering career development and employment programmes, the New Zealand Sports Foundation has recently given 34 of New Zealand's leading sports men and women tertiary scholarships to help them pursue life after sport. The scholarships are part of the Foundation's new approach to dealing with the "whole" athlete, supporting New Zealand's leading sports figures by recognising them not only as athletes, but also individuals. Sports Foundation Chief Executive Chris Ineson commented, "We've realised our athletes simply need more than money for competition and sports science. Athletes perform better when they are happy, when they know in the back of their minds that they have something to go on to when they have finished their competitive days." (McFadden, 1999, p. B7).

Aims and Objectives

The present research aims to explore and describe the experiences of New Zealand sports men and women who have ended their high-performance sport career and moved into a new and different stage of life.

It is hoped that, as an exploratory study, this research will provide valuable information within the context of New Zealand sport and provide a reference point for further initiatives into the area of athlete retirement. Conclusions gathered from the study may have the potential to aid coaches, clubs, and national sporting bodies to identify the most effective ways to help retiring athletes through their transition. A questionnaire incorporating quantitative and qualitative components was constructed based upon a conceptual model developed to explain the process of athlete career transition (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). A modified version of Haworth's (1997) life

satisfaction scale was also included in the questionnaire. As well as describing athletes' disengagement experiences, it was hoped that data gathered through the questionnaire would provide an initial understanding of the following research concerns:

1. The relative ease or difficulty with which athletes adjust to sport retirement.
2. Potential interactions between smooth transition experiences, the determinants of sport retirement, and the achievement of prior sporting goals.
3. The exploration of possible differences in the responses of male and female athletes.
4. Athletes' perceptions of, and preference for, pre- and post-retirement programmes and programme delivery methods.
5. The life satisfaction of retired athletes, in particular:
 - In relation to time since sport retirement,
 - In relation to reason for sport retirement.

The present study is retrospective in nature because access to a sufficient number of athletes currently undergoing a career transition away from sport was not feasible. One unavoidable disadvantage of reliance on retrospective information is that responses to the questionnaire may be affected by the need to recall prior experiences of sport disengagement. With the use of recall data, it is difficult to assess the extent to which perceptions of causal factors, and or adjustment processes, might have changed over time (Allison & Meyer, 1988; Cramer-Hammann, 1995; Curtis & Ennis, 1988). It is desirable to control the time factor or reduce its influence where possible. In the present study, information was gathered on the age of the participants and the length of time since sport retirement to provide some indication of the extent of recall involved.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Participant recruitment

Retired athletes were contacted for this study in three different ways. A total of 2500 leaflets were distributed to participants in the North Harbour Masters Games held between the 13th and 21st of March 1999. The leaflet briefly detailed the study and invited those athletes who had retired from top level sporting competition and met the study's criteria of having competed at a regional level or above, to complete and return a tear off expression-of-interest slip. The completed interest slip contained name, and postal address details. Those who returned the slip were sent a questionnaire pack.

The Administrator of the Silver Fern Club agreed to send a questionnaire pack to those members who were thought to have had retired from top level sport. This club consists of athletes from various sports who have represented New Zealand.

Snowball sampling was also utilised to contact athletes and distribute further questionnaire packs.

Through the above three methods, 194 retired athletes received a questionnaire pack either by mail or hand distribution. Each pack contained a letter of introduction explaining the purpose of the study, an information sheet, the anonymous questionnaire, and a pre-addressed, free post envelope. The time needed to complete the full questionnaire was not expected to exceed twenty minutes and each participant was asked to return the completed questionnaire within three weeks of receiving it.

The researcher's telephone number was provided to enable the athletes to raise any queries they might have regarding the questionnaire and the study.

A follow-up reminder letter was not sent to those who had returned expressions of interest slips because, due to the various ways in which the questionnaire packs had been distributed, the names and addresses of most respondents were unknown. A total of seventy-four useable questionnaires were returned, yielding a return rate of 38% from those distributed.

The study sample

Seventy-four retired sports people participated in the study, 50 male athletes, and 24 female athletes. The athletes ranged in age from 18 to 79 years ($M = 48.7$, $SD = 16.6$), the estimated mean age of participants at time of career transition was 30 years ($SD = 8.3$).

Participants were recruited from the greater Auckland area, and all had either regional, national, or international competitive sporting experience. Levels of representation in the final sample included Olympic Games ($n = 14$), Commonwealth Games ($n = 2$), World Championships ($n = 1$), New Zealand representative ($n = 44$), National representative² ($n = 6$), and Regional representative ($n = 7$). The athletes participated in a total of 34 different sports (See appendix A), and on average, they maintained their highest level of sports participation for between 5 and 10 years. General demographic details are summarised in Table 1.

² National representative included those athletes who competed at a national level but never represented New Zealand out of New Zealand in international competition.

Table 1.
Gender and Age of participants at time of retirement and time of questionnaire completion.

| <i>Age</i> | <i>Gender</i> | | <i>Total</i> |
|--|---------------|--------|--------------|
| (Years) | Male | Female | Athletes |
| <i>Age at time of retirement from sport</i> | | | |
| <=20 | 3 | 6 | 9 |
| 20 – 30 | 16 | 11 | 27 |
| 31 – 40 | 25 | 3 | 28 |
| 41 – 50 | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| 51 + | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Total | 45 | 24 | 69 |
| <i>Age at time of questionnaire completion</i> | | | |
| <=20 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 20 – 30 | 4 | 4 | 8 |
| 31 – 40 | 10 | 4 | 14 |
| 41 – 50 | 7 | 3 | 10 |
| 51 – 60 | 10 | 7 | 17 |
| 61 + | 13 | 5 | 18 |
| Total | 45 | 24 | 69 |

Note. The deviations in sample size from the total who participated (*N*=74) are a result of missing demographic details.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for the study was gained by departmental review. As a result of the departmental review process, it was deemed necessary that a counselling contact be provided to participants. In the event of issues or emotions being raised for them through their participation in the research, the inclusion of contact details for a counsellor provided an option for assistance. A suitable counsellor was approached and, with her agreement, her name and contact details were provided on the information sheet received by each participant. The information sheet is provided in Appendix B1.

MEASURES

Questionnaire Development

Athlete Career Transition Inventory:

The Athlete Career Transition Inventory is a 47-item instrument developed for this research in order to explore the transitional experiences of competitive sports people who have disengaged from top-level sports.

The intention of this study was to examine the career transition experiences of New Zealand sports people, utilising the conceptual model of the career transition framework developed by Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) (Refer to Figure 1). Within the time frame of the study only limited piloting of the survey instrument was possible, therefore, previously developed and tested items from athlete career awareness and career transition studies were incorporated into the questionnaire. The sources from which they were taken are discussed below.

From a search encompassing both New Zealand and overseas athlete retirement literature and questionnaires, two questionnaires were selected, namely the Career Awareness Assessment for athletes (Hawkins & Blann, 1996), and the Women's Intercollegiate Athletic Retirement Survey (Schell, 1995). The Career Awareness Assessment was examined by an international panel of experts in athlete career transition and questionnaire design at the request of Hawkins and Blann. These experts found the Career Awareness Assessment for athletes to be face and content valid, successfully identifying the needs of Australian athletes in the areas of career transition and career awareness (Hawkins & Blann, 1996). Hawkins and Blann considered the questionnaire to be appropriate for use in future sport retirement research. However, they did not include details of the reliability of the instrument. Little reliability and

validity information was reported for the Women's Intercollegiate Athletic Retirement Survey, except for comments that the pilot study and questionnaire revisions assured the reliability and the validity of the measures.

The Athlete Career Transition Inventory was developed by a process of adaptation, addition, and format modification of relevant questions from the selected surveys. Selected questions were then fitted into a questionnaire framework based upon Taylor and Ogilvie's (1994) conceptual model of adaptation to career transition. Fifteen new questions were included, developed by the researcher on the basis of a literature search. Nine of those were included in the main body of the questionnaire, and six in the demographic section.

The first draft of the questionnaire was examined by peer assessment. As a result of the peer assessment, modifications were made to avoid content ambiguity and misinterpretation. These modifications included simplification and re-wording of several questions, reducing answering formats to three main methods, the inclusion of open-ended questions, and the exclusion of several questions thought to be redundant.

A small pilot study was carried out on the second draft to further evaluate individual questionnaire items and assess questionnaire effectiveness in the intended context. Six retired sports people (age range 20-32 years) were asked to complete the pilot questionnaire. The six athletes participated in five different sports. They were instructed to complete the questionnaire in their own time, and were each given a separate page on which to make any comments or suggestions.

As a result of comments made by athletes completing the pilot study, improvements were made to the wording and layout of the Likert scale and ranking format questions. A third questionnaire draft was again examined through peer

assessment from which no significant changes were made. The final version was then constructed for the study.

Instrument description

The Athlete Career Transition Inventory:

The Athlete Career Transition Inventory consisted of two sections. Section one comprised of 12 demographic questions on age, gender, education, and sport participation. Section two was comprised of 35 questions grouped under the following four sub headings:

- Current sport involvement,
- Previous sport involvement,
- Post-sport adjustment,
- Career planning and support.

A final open-ended question provided participants with the opportunity to mention any information that they felt was relevant or not covered within the main body of the questionnaire and to comment on the questionnaire's structure and content.

Section one was designed to gather personal and sporting demographic information regarding athletes' gender, education, sport representation, length and level of sport involvement, time of sport retirement, reason for sport retirement, and athlete identity.

In Section two, the first sub-section, current sport involvement, sought information on athletes' motivations for their present level of sport involvement. The second sub-section entitled previous sport involvement, gathered information as to

athletes initial motivation for sport participation, and how sport participation affected their personal and social growth and development. Athletes were also asked if they had achieved their sporting goals, and whether they enjoyed their current level of physical activity more than they did their previous competitive sporting career. A section on post-sport adjustment investigated athletes’ job experiences, sense of control, and self-confidence, both during and after their sport career, as well as the athletes’ ease of adjustment. Information was also gathered concerning the athletes’ level of pre-retirement planning, the support available prior to and during the transition, and the preferred sport retirement interventions and delivery methods.

A variety of methods were used to record responses. These included Likert scales, ranking of alternatives, check boxes, and an open-ended question. Clear instructions for each method were presented prior to their use. The majority of the questionnaire was scored using a six-variable Likert scale (Questions 13-25 and 30-41), the available responses and their definitions were included in the questionnaire as follows:

| <i>Level of agreement</i> | <i>Numerical response</i> | <i>Meaning</i> |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Strongly disagree | 1 | Opposite to my views or me |
| Mostly disagree | 2 | Generally opposite to my views or me |
| Mildly disagree | 3 | Somewhat opposite to my views or me |
| Mildly agree | 4 | Somewhat like my views or me |
| Mostly agree | 5 | Generally like my views or me |
| Strongly agree | 6 | Like my views or me |

Six alternatives were used instead of five or seven to try to overcome the “sitting on the fence” phenomenon sometimes found in odd numbered scales. This occurs when

respondents opt for a neutral category, thus providing little information (Hawkins & Blann, 1996). This particular format was used successfully by Hawkins & Blann in their "Career Awareness Instrument" for athletes.

The ranking format used in the career planning and support section (Questions 42-45) was also modelled on a format used by Hawkins & Blann (1996). Here information was sought on the perceived usefulness of a range of career management and transition programmes, as well as on the social support available. Participants were asked to rank either one to three (1 = most preferred, 3 = least preferred), one to four (1 = most responsible, 4 = least responsible), or one to six (1 = most preferred, 6 = least preferred, and 1 = most helpful, 6 = least helpful) depending on the question. Check-the-box questions were used chiefly to obtain demographic data.

The complete Athlete Career Transition Inventory is included in Appendix B2.

Modified Life Satisfaction Questionnaire:

Present life satisfaction was measured using a modified version of Haworth's 12 item "Life Satisfaction Scale" (Haworth, 1997). The modifications were employed to make the questionnaire relevant to retired athletes and involved omitting four of the original twelve items. Those items omitted were: "how satisfied do you feel about the house or flat in which you live", "the local district in which you live", "your standard of living", "and the present government". It was felt, at the time of questionnaire development, that the inclusion of these items might have discouraged some respondents from completing this section of the questionnaire if they were viewed as not directly relevant to the issue on which they agreed to be surveyed.

Each item in this section was scored on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 "extremely dissatisfied", to 7 "extremely satisfied". A total life satisfaction measure is

obtained by summing the scores to the first seven questions. On each question, one point is scored for an “extremely dissatisfied” answer, with the number of points increasing by one for each successive response on the scale, up to a maximum of seven points for an “extremely satisfied” answer.

Question eight requires respondents to rate their life as a whole at the present moment. This is scored in the same fashion as the first seven questions and the score for this item provides a measure of an individual’s overall life satisfaction (Haworth, 1997, Warr, Cook & Wall, 1979). The Modified Life Satisfaction Questionnaire is included in Appendix B3.

Haworth (1997) based his Modified Life Satisfaction Scale upon the Life Satisfaction Scale developed by Warr, Cook, and Wall (1979). The Life Satisfaction scale was developed to measure the life satisfaction of a British sample of blue-collar workers. It was reported as face valid and shown to have good internal reliability, although Cronbach alpha co-efficients were not reported (Warr, Cook, and Wall, 1979).

Summary

This chapter has outlined the rationale and design of the present study. Information was also provided on the content and development of the instruments used for data collection. The study was designed to explore and describe the retirement experiences of New Zealand athletes, and highlight potential areas where more detailed investigations are warranted. However, it was also intended to provide a picture of athletes’ experiences against which changes produced by the increasing movement towards professionalism can be tracked.

Chapter four describes the data collected from the questionnaire and the strategies used to analyse the information gathered.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS SECTION

ANALYTIC STRATEGIES

Data for analysis were comprised of responses to the Athlete Career Transition Inventory. Descriptive statistics (percentages, means, and standard deviations) are reported for all variables.

Formal inferential statistical analyses were conducted using Statistical Analysis System (SAS) software (SAS, 1989). Given the ordinal nature of the Likert scale responses, chi-square tests of independence were employed to explore gender differences in the allocation of responses. After inspection of the data, the six Likert scale categories were collapsed into a three-response scale prior to chi-square analyses. This was done in order to reduce the occasions on which cells contained too few cases (< 5) for meaningful analysis. Categories were collapsed as follows: response categories one and two (Strongly and Mostly disagree) were combined, categories three and four (Mildly disagree and Mildly agree) were combined, and categories five and six (Strongly and Mostly agree) were also combined. Thus, responses were re-categorised as disagree, neutral and agree.

In view of the number of chi-square tests conducted, only significant results are reported. Details of the remaining tests are included in Appendix C.

The Wilcoxon Rank Sums two-sample test with continuity correction of 0.5 (equivalent to the Mann-Whitney U test) was used for comparisons involving two independent groups. Specifically this test was used to compare the responses of male

and female participants on the Modified Life Satisfaction Questionnaire. The Kruskal–Wallis test was used for comparisons involving more than two independent groups. An alpha level of $p < .05$ was adopted for all comparisons. The internal reliability of the modified life satisfaction scale was determined using Cronbach coefficient alpha statistic. Post-hoc power estimates, using Cohen's (1988) conventions were conducted using G-power software (Buchner, Erdfelder & Faul, 1997). Open-ended questions were examined for interpretative purposes, and supplement the statistical results.

The results are presented under six sub headings. These correspond to the major divisions of the Athlete Career Transition Inventory:

- Demographics,
- Current sporting participation
- Previous sport involvement
- Post-Sport Adjustment,
- Planning for life after sport
- Life Satisfaction.

DATA ANALYSIS

Demographic Information

Of the 74 participants in this study, 68% were male ($n = 50$) and 32% were female ($n = 24$). The mean age of participants at the time of the survey was 48.7 years ($SD = 16.6$), with a mean age at time of retirement from sport of 29.9 years ($SD = 8.3$). The length of time the athletes had been retired from their highest level of sporting competition ranged from 1 to 48 years, with an average of 18.6 years ($SD = 14.3$).

Most of the athletes (91%) still maintained some form of sport participation, and the majority of individuals (61%) continued to identify themselves as athletes. Responses of those individuals who still identified with the title “athlete” suggested they competed in Masters tournaments, maintained a certain level of physical fitness, or were now coaching. Some individuals believed they could compete again if they choose to because they retained the necessary knowledge and expertise. Several athletes commented “once an athlete, always an athlete”.

Tables within this chapter will be broken down by male and female responses in cases where analysis revealed significant differences, otherwise figures will be given for the total number of individuals who correctly answered the question.

Education

Table 2 lists the level of education and type of qualifications achieved by participants. As shown in Table 2, the majority (73%) achieved School Certificate level or beyond before exiting the educational system (this percentage excludes those in the

“Other” category as their level of school education was unknown). Just under a third of the participants (30%) received some form of tertiary education.

Table 2

Education received by participants before leaving the educational system.

| Characteristic | N | % |
|---|----|----|
| Highest Qualifications (<i>N</i> = 72) | | |
| Doctorate | 1 | 1 |
| Masters Degree | 5 | 7 |
| Bachelors Degree | 12 | 17 |
| Diploma | 4 | 5 |
| Form Seven | 13 | 18 |
| Form Six | 4 | 5 |
| School Certificate | 14 | 20 |
| Form Five | 5 | 7 |
| Forth form or below | 7 | 10 |
| Other | 7 | 10 |

Qualifications contained in the “Other” category of Table 2 include: apprenticeships, trade certificates, and instructors certificates.

Sport participation

The athletes represented 34 different sports (See Appendix A). Several participants successfully competed in more than one sport during their sporting career. Those sports participated in by more than five percent of the sample included: athletics, badminton, cricket, field hockey, rowing, rugby, and swimming.

Details of participants’ sporting representation, length of sport participation, and time commitments during sport career are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Sport Demographics

| Characteristics | N | % |
|---|----|----|
| <i>Sporting representation achieved (N = 74)</i> | | |
| Regional | 8 | 11 |
| National | 7 | 9 |
| New Zealand | 43 | 58 |
| Commonwealth Games | 2 | 3 |
| Olympic Games | 14 | 19 |
| <i>Years spent at regional level or above (N = 73)</i> | | |
| < 1yr | 2 | 3 |
| 1 – 2 | 4 | 5 |
| 3 – 5 | 12 | 16 |
| 6 – 10 | 18 | 25 |
| 11 – 14 | 15 | 21 |
| 15 + | 22 | 30 |
| <i>Weekly hours spent participating in sport (N = 74)</i> | | |
| 9 hrs or less | 8 | 11 |
| 10 – 14 | 17 | 23 |
| 15 – 19 | 15 | 20 |
| 20 – 24 | 16 | 22 |
| 25 – 29 | 11 | 15 |
| 30 – 34 | 1 | 1 |
| 35 – 39 | 3 | 4 |
| 40 + | 3 | 4 |

As shown in Table 3, the vast majority of participants (80%) had represented New Zealand in their chosen sport, and 22% of those had competed in either the Olympic or Commonwealth Games. While competing at their highest level the athletes in this study spent an average of 15 – 19 hours a week either training for, or competing in, their chosen sport. Half the athletes (51%) remained competitive at a regional level or beyond for at least ten years.

Almost half (49%) of the participants retired from sport for voluntary reasons. Both voluntary and involuntary reasons were given by 13% of respondents who selected the “Other” category. These included:

- Lack of financial support available for elite athletes. The need for full-time work to support oneself and/or one's family.
- Starting a family.
- Lack of coaches and facilities for further advancement in the sport.

The remaining participants (38%) reported that the key factor in their decision to retire was not under their control. The 38% who retired involuntarily included individuals who reported age as the major reason for their retirement (18%), injury (10%), deselection 10%.

Current sporting participation

Table 4 presents responses to questions focusing on the participant's motivation to maintain their present level of physical activity.

Table 4

Current sport involvement

| Question. | Percentage of participants | | | | | |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| | Response Category | | | | | |
| | Strongly disagree % | Mostly disagree % | Mildly disagree % | Mildly agree % | Mostly agree % | Strongly agree % |
| <i>I maintain my current level of physical activity for:</i> | | | | | | |
| <i>Health benefits</i> (Q. 13, N = 73) | 2 | 4 | 1 | 12 | 29 | 52 |
| <i>To socialise</i> (Q. 14, N = 72) | 7 | 8 | 13 | 21 | 22 | 29 |
| <i>To remain competitive</i> (Q. 15, N = 72) | 10 | 22 | 14 | 14 | 21 | 19 |
| <i>To gain prestige</i> (Q. 16, N = 72) | 49 | 18 | 14 | 8 | 8 | 3 |

The health benefits gained from physical activity appeared to be the strongest motivation for those individuals who continue sport participation, 93% of participants expressed some form of agreement with this statement. Seventy two percent of participants also indicated some form of agreement that the social aspect of sport participation was a motivator. Just over half the participants (54%) agreed that the desire to remain competitive motivated their current sport participation, although, very few respondents (19%) agreed to some extent that they maintained their current level of physical activity for prestige and recognition.

Previous sport involvement

Motivation for participation

Table 5 presents responses to questions regarding participants' previous sport involvement. The relevant questions explore the original motivation for sport participation and compare the participants' previous sport experiences with their enjoyment of their current level of physical activity.

As can be seen in Table 5, the large majority of participants (95%) agreed to some extent that they originally participated in sports for the love of the particular sport itself. Similarly, the majority (80%) also agreed that they originally participated in sports to compare skills or compete with others. In contrast to participants motivation for current sport involvement (Table 4), only a third of participants agreed they originally participated in sport for the social contact involved. The majority of participants expressed some form of disagreement with the suggestion that reasons other than the sport itself, such as gaining recognition, awards, or prizes, may have been the original motivating factor for their sport participation.

Table 5

Original motivation for sport participation.

| Question. | Percentage of participants | | | | | |
|---|----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|----------------|------------------|
| | Response Category | | | | | |
| | Strongly disagree % | Mostly disagree % | Mildly disagree % | Mildly agree % | Mostly agree % | Strongly agree % |
| (Q. 17, N = 70) <i>Compared to my previous sport experience I enjoy my current physical activity more.</i> | 16 | 23 | 17 | 21 | 19 | 4 |
| <i>I originally participated in sports:</i> | | | | | | |
| (Q. 18, N = 72) <i>To be with people in a social situation.</i> | 21 | 26 | 19 | 16 | 11 | 7 |
| (Q. 19, N = 73) <i>For the love of the sport itself.</i> | 3 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 32 | 58 |
| (Q. 20, N = 73) <i>To compare skills or compete with others.</i> | 7 | 8 | 5 | 11 | 33 | 36 |
| (Q. 21, N = 72) <i>For reasons other than the sport itself.</i> | 42 | 24 | 8 | 12 | 11 | 3 |

Table 6 includes responses to questions concerning athletes' goal achievement during their sport career and the degree to which sport participation enhanced or hindered their social development and personal growth.

As shown in Table 6, the majority of participants (68%) agreed to some extent that they had accomplished all of their sporting goals during their competitive years. The majority of participants also agreed that sport participation enhanced their social development (93%) and personal growth and development (99%). Participants also agreed to some extent that their main socialisation was done within the sport environment.

Table 6

Previous sport involvement.

| Question. | Percentage of participants | | | | | |
|---|----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|----------------|------------------|
| | Response Category | | | | | |
| | Strongly disagree % | Mostly disagree % | Mildly disagree % | Mildly agree % | Mostly agree % | Strongly agree % |
| (Q. 22, N = 70) <i>I accomplished all my sporting goals during my competitive years.</i> | 12 | 10 | 10 | 8 | 45 | 15 |
| (Q. 23, N = 73) <i>I feel sport participation enhanced my social development.</i> | 0 | 3 | 4 | 20 | 33 | 40 |
| (Q. 24, N = 72) <i>I feel sport participation enhanced my personal growth and development.</i> | 0 | 1 | 0 | 18 | 21 | 60 |
| (Q. 25, N = 74) <i>I mainly socialised with people I met through sport participation.</i> | 7 | 8 | 5 | 11 | 33 | 36 |

Post-sport adjustment

Education and work involvement

Following retirement from sport 54% of the female participants and 27% of the male participants gained further educational qualifications. Overall, 36% of the entire sample under took further education.

During the peak of their sporting career 93% of the athletes engaged in paid employment outside their sports participation. Five participants (7%) indicated they did not work during the peak of their sport careers. The demographic information collected from these participants indicates they may have been attending high school or tertiary institutions during this time.

Of those athletes in paid employment during their sport careers, 65% were working on a full time basis, 17% worked on a part-time basis and 15% had jobs in which they were able to manage their working hours (self-managed). A further two participants (3%), were members of the armed forces during the peak of their sport careers.

Just below a quarter of participants (23%) reported their current paying occupation was related to sport, while a smaller percentage of participants (14%) were taking part in unpaid sport-related work at the time of questionnaire completion.

Adjustment

Table 7 presents information regarding the relative ease or difficulty of participants' adjustment to sport disengagement, the possibility of skill recycling, and emotional and physical sport-related changes.

As shown in Table 7, only 41% of participants agreed to some extent that their second career was more emotionally rewarding than their sport career.

With regard to the ease or difficulty of adjustment to sport retirement, the majority of participants (69%) expressed some form of agreement with the following statement, *'I adjusted to my new circumstances following my sport career quickly and without difficulty'*. Similarly, 70% of participants agreed to some extent with the statement, *'My overall adjustment to retirement from sports was very easy'*.

The majority of respondents (71%) were able to fully adjust to their retirement from sport in less than a year. However, 19% of participants reported their adjustment took three or more years.

Table 7Post-sport adjustment

| Question. | Percentage of participants | | | | | |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| | Response Category | | | | | |
| | Strongly disagree % | Mostly disagree % | Mildly disagree % | Mildly agree % | Mostly agree % | Strongly agree % |
| (Q. 30, $N = 69$) <i>My second career was more emotionally rewarding than my sport career.</i> | 22 | 15 | 22 | 22 | 9 | 10 |
| Q. 31, $N = 72$) <i>The skills I acquired during my sport career could be used in other careers.</i> | 3 | 12 | 8 | 18 | 31 | 28 |
| (Q. 32, $N = 72$) <i>I adjusted to my new circumstances quickly and without difficulty.</i> | 7 | 10 | 14 | 16 | 30 | 23 |
| (Q. 33, $N = 73$) <i>My overall adjustment to retirement from sports was very easy.</i> | 7 | 9 | 14 | 16 | 31 | 23 |
| (Q. 34, $N = 73$) <i>Immediately following sport retirement my physical activity level reduced by at least half</i> | 10 | 15 | 8 | 15 | 23 | 29 |

An overall score for adjustment was achieved by summing each participant's responses to questions 32 and 33. These two questions were highly correlated (.78) and both measured the athlete's adjustment to sport retirement. This combined score was used in all calculations concerning adjustment to retirement.

Separate Kruskal-Wallis tests were performed to assess:

1. Whether there were differences in the reported ease of adjustment to sport retirement between groups of athletes who retired for different reasons,
2. Whether there were differences in reported ease of adjustment between the three agreement categories with regard to sport goal achievement,

3. The possibility of differences in reported ease of adjustment between groups of athletes who retired from sport at different ages.

No significant differences in adjustment to sport retirement were found amongst those who retired due to age, injury, deselection, free choice, or “other” reasons $\chi^2 (4, n = 70) = 4.80, p = 0.31$. The six Likert scale agreement levels of sport goal achievement were collapsed into a three-response scale (as detailed on p. 60.). No significant differences in adjustment to sport retirement were found among participants’ responses for these three goal achievement categories. $\chi^2 (2, n = 71) = 0.22, p = 0.88$. When participants were categorised according to the following sport-retirement age groupings 15-24 yrs, 25-30 yrs, 31-35 yrs, and 36-50 yrs, there were no significant differences among the groups with respect to ease of adjustment $\chi^2 (3, n = 68) = 3.80, p = 0.28$. A second analysis, conducted using only two retirement age categories (less than 30 years and over 30 years of age) also found no significant differences in adjustment for the two age groups $\chi^2 (1, n = 68) = 3.37, p = 0.07$.

Self confidence and personal control

Table 8 presents information regarding participants’ self-confidence and personal control levels. Due to apparent trends in the data, subsequently confirmed by the statistical analyses reported below, male and female responses are reported separately.

The majority of male and female participants (86% and 92% respectively) agreed to some extent that they had a strong sense of control over their life during their sport career. However, there was a reduction in personal control levels reported by male participants (76%) and female participants (69%) following sport retirement.

Table 8
Levels of personal control and self-confidence.

| Question. | Percentage of Male and Female athletes | | | | | |
|--|--|----------------------|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| | Response Category | | | | | |
| | Strongly disagree % | Mostly disagree % | Mildly disagree % | Mildly agree % | Mostly agree % | Strongly agree % |
| <i>I had a strong sense of control over my life:</i> | | | | | | |
| <i>During my sporting years</i> (Q. 35) | | | | | | |
| M (n = 50) | 0 | 4 | 10 | 24 | 34 | 28 |
| F (n = 24) | 0 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 54 | 34 |
| <i>Immediately following sport retirement</i> (Q. 36) | | | | | | |
| M (n = 49) | 0 | 8 | 16 | 25 | 33 | 18 |
| F (n = 23) | 9 | 13 | 9 | 4 | 57 | 8 |
| <i>I had a high level of self-confidence</i> <i>immediately following my retirement</i> (Q 37) | | | | | | |
| M (n = 49) | 8 | 2 | 12 | 12 | 37 | 29 |
| F (n = 24) | 8 | 21 | 4 | 21 | 38 | 8 |

Notes. M = Male participants, F = Female participants. The slight deviations in sample size are the result of missing values.

A chi-square analyses on responses by males and females to questions regarding their perception of control over their life both during and following sport participation, and self-confidence levels immediately following retirement, uncovered a significant difference only with respect to perception of control immediately following sport retirement. Female participants reported feeling more personal control post-sport than male participants $\chi^2 (2, n = 72) = 6.66, p = .036$, Cramér's V = 0.304.

Planning for life after sport

Pre-retirement planning

Table 9 presents participants responses to questions regarding career planning and social support, as well as other aspects of the athlete's preparation for sport retirement.

Table 9

Career planning and social support available.

| Question. | Percentage of participants | | | | | |
|---|----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|----------------|------------------|
| | Response Category | | | | | |
| | Strongly disagree % | Mostly disagree % | Mildly disagree % | Mildly agree % | Mostly agree % | Strongly agree % |
| (Q. 38, N = 72) <i>I prepared for my retirement from sport whilst still competing.</i> | 25 | 18 | 6 | 7 | 25 | 19 |
| (Q. 39, N = 67) <i>I managed my finances to support myself and my family during my sport transition.</i> | 12 | 9 | 12 | 12 | 35 | 20 |
| (Q. 40, N = 69) <i>Opportunities were available to help prepare me for sport retirement.</i> | 64 | 12 | 10 | 7 | 6 | 1 |
| (Q. 41, N = 69) <i>My spouse/significant other and/or family helped me during my sport transition..</i> | 23 | 16 | 10 | 20 | 19 | 12 |

Responses to a question regarding pre-retirement planning during the athlete's competitive years were polarised, 44% of respondents either mostly or strongly agreed that they had prepared, and 43% of respondents either mostly or strongly disagreed, indicating that they did not prepare for their sport retirement. Only 13% of participants reported having access to some form of pre-retirement planning during their sport

career. Just over half the athletes (52%) either mostly or strongly agreed that they managed their finances during their sport career in order to support themselves and their families during their transition out of sporting competition. No significant differences were found between males and females in their responses to questions related to career planning and social support.

Pre-retirement programmes: content and delivery

Instructions for the ranking formats used to answer questions regarding preferred type of pre-retirement programme, programme delivery, time of programme application, and responsibility for programme utilisation, were misinterpreted by some of the participants. Rather than applying one set of rankings to the questions as intended, some participants used a separate ranking scale for each individual item within the question. Only correct responses have been included in the data analysis. Therefore, the number of responses reported in this section is reduced for these three questions.

The majority of athletes in this study (79%) felt that career planning programmes and services should be available to athletes both during and after their sport career.

Based on their own experience with sport retirement, participants were requested to rank the usefulness of a variety of different pre-retirement planning strategies from one to five, one being the most effective and five the least effective. The results are shown in Table 10.

Personal and career assessment was considered the most useful option gaining 36% of the respondents' top rankings. Education and career counselling was the next most popular with 19% of first rankings and 26% of second rankings. Help to develop and initiate a job search received the maximum number of fifth rankings with 41% ranking this method as the least helpful.

Table 10
Percentage of respondents giving a particular ranking to options listed for career planning interventions.

| Effectiveness Ranking | Delivery Method | | | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| | Personal/Career Assessment | Jobs or Internships | Education & Career Counselling | Initiate a job Search | Mentoring System |
| 1 (Most Helpful) | 36 | 10 | 19 | 5 | 19 |
| 2 | 18 | 20 | 26 | 15 | 5 |
| 3 | 20 | 28 | 23 | 13 | 32 |
| 4 | 11 | 20 | 16 | 26 | 22 |
| 5 (Least Helpful) | 15 | 22 | 16 | 41 | 22 |

Retirement strategies listed as helpful by those who responded in the “Other” open-ended category included: getting financial education and advice, and the availability of emotional support and counselling.

Participants were also asked to rank six different modes of pre-retirement programme delivery in order of effectiveness, one being the most effective and six being the least effective. This information is presented in Table 11.

As shown in Table 11, individual counselling received the most first rankings with 44% of participants preferring this mode of programme delivery. Mentoring system was the next most preferred option with 27% of first rankings and 22% of second rankings. Conferences were thought to be the least effective with 39% of respondents scoring them sixth.

Table 11
Percentage of respondents giving a particular ranking to options listed for the various modes of retirement programme delivery.

| Effectiveness Ranking | Delivery Method | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------|---------|------------------------|-------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| | Conference | Seminar | Individual Counselling | Small Group Counselling | Reading Material | Mentoring System |
| 1 (Most Effective) | 4 | 8 | 44 | 19 | 10 | 27 |
| 2 | 6 | 14 | 14 | 30 | 12 | 22 |
| 3 | 15 | 18 | 14 | 20 | 25 | 9 |
| 4 | 12 | 28 | 15 | 11 | 12 | 16 |
| 5 | 24 | 26 | 8 | 13 | 16 | 7 |
| 6 (Least Effective) | 39 | 6 | 5 | 7 | 25 | 19 |

Small differences were observed in the responses of male and female participants, in particular for individual and small group counselling. However, due to the small number of participants that correctly answered this question it was not possible to explore these differences further. Nevertheless, a record is kept of this information in Appendix D.

When asked to rank the level of responsibility held by athletes, coaches, and sport administrations for ensuring the utilisation of career planning and retirement programmes, both male (71%) and female (52%) respondents indicated the athlete was primarily responsible. Overall, coaches were seen as least responsible for ensuring the utilisation of career planning strategies (52%).

Social support

Information was gathered on the various forms of social support available to the athlete whilst actively competing in sport. Table 12 shows which of the listed social support systems were available to participants during their sport careers. Those participants who responded to the open-ended segment of this question included, spouse's family, facility managers, and mentors, as available forms of social support.

Table 12

The support systems available to participants while they were actively competing in sport.

| Support system | Group | | | | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|----|-------------------------|----|------------------------------|----|
| | Male (<i>n</i> = 48) | | Female (<i>n</i> = 24) | | Full sample (<i>N</i> = 72) | |
| | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Coach | 28 | 58 | 21 | 87 | 49 | 68 |
| Spouse | 30 | 63 | 6 | 25 | 36 | 50 |
| Brother/Sister | 12 | 25 | 8 | 33 | 20 | 28 |
| Parent/s | 34 | 71 | 16 | 67 | 50 | 69 |
| Sporting Institution | 10 | 21 | 10 | 42 | 20 | 28 |
| Friends | 29 | 60 | 15 | 63 | 44 | 61 |
| Team members | 25 | 52 | 19 | 79 | 44 | 61 |

Parents and coaches appear to be the main sources of support available to athletes during their sport careers (69% and 68% respectively). Those groups that appear to offer the least support to competitive athletes are sporting institutions and siblings. Some differences can be seen in support available when the data is separated by gender. Parent/s and spouses are the main sources of support for male athletes (71% and 63% respectively), and coaches and team-mates are the main sources of support for female athletes (87% and 79% respectively).

Open-ended questions

The open-ended questions were included to provide participants with an opportunity to further express opinions regarding sport retirement as well as comment on the questionnaire's structure and content. Responses to these questions were examined to identify common themes. The questions are as follows:

Comment on any matters related to retirement from sport that you consider important and were not covered in the questionnaire (Q.47a).

Thirty-eight participants completed this question, providing a wide range of responses. A number of themes were identified in participants' responses. Two judges allocated responses to categories representing these themes. The Kappa score for this question was, $k = .89$. The most common themes are provided below as well as an example statement for each. The lowest number of responses allocated to that theme is included in brackets.

The need for financial support and funding of sport (e.g. sponsorship, government support) was one of the most common themes derived from this question, (> 7 responses)

I believe that businesses haven't caught up with Europe and the United States in the benefits of sports sponsorship – an area that could help athletes during and after the career.

The need for education/skills training and sporting excellence to work together, (> 6 responses)

A lot of athletes at a high level while still at school do seem to put their sport first, I think there needs to be more of a focus on education and "life after sport".

The importance of maintaining some form of sport involvement or physical activity once retired from competition,

(> 5 responses)

Retirement from top level sport should not mean eliminating all sport. It should provide the opportunity to pursue other sports, develop wider interests and contacts, and continue with one's main sport at a lower level.

The relevance of the term "retirement" when referring to those athletes who shift into other areas of their sport (i.e. coaching, Masters tournaments),

(> 6 responses)

I do not consider I ever actually retired. I merely withdrew from attempting to compete at top level!

The need for New Zealand sports bodies to better understand and manage their retiring athletes was also commonly indicated in participant's responses,

(> 7 responses)

I was told by a former team-mate at the start of my career "once it's over, they (the sports establishment) don't really care, or want to know about you".

Make any comments about the questionnaire itself that you would like to direct to the researcher (Q 47b).

Twenty-two participants made comments regarding the questionnaire. The kappa score for this question was $k = .81$. Respondents mentioned several key question areas that they felt were important to athlete retirement but not covered in the Athlete Transition Inventory. These included:

(> 5 responses)

- *Movement into coaching roles, how this may have been fulfilling, extending sport involvement.*
- *The freedom gained following sport retirement to pursue other careers, goals and interests.*

- *The degree to which retired athletes are interested in becoming sports consultants or mentors.*
- *Questions relating success in work career to sport attitude.*

Comments were also made that the questionnaire applies more to those athletes recently retired,

(> 3 responses)

At first I didn't think this was relevant to me. I competed at a stage when sport was very different to today.

and those athletes who are professional.

(> 4 responses)

Young people see sport as a possible career – we never did.

Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction information was gathered using a further modification of Haworth's (1997) Life Satisfaction Scale. The resulting scores were then summed in accordance with Haworth (1997) to produce total life satisfaction, and overall life satisfaction scores.

The sample was divided into five groups of approximately equal size on the basis of years since sport retirement. This produced the following groups. Those who had been retired for 1 – 3 yrs ($n = 14$), 4 – 12 yrs ($n = 14$), 13 – 20 yrs ($n = 14$), 21 – 30 yrs ($n = 14$), and 31 – 51 yrs ($n = 13$).

Table 13 presents the mean life satisfaction scores of participants, as well as mean scores for five groups partitioned by years since retirement.

As shown in Table 13, Mean total and overall life satisfaction scores were above the scale mid point, and closer to the scale maximum than the mid-point. The mean for

total life satisfaction was $M = 38.1$ ($SD = 6.2$), and overall life satisfaction, $M = 5.8$ ($SD = 1.1$). Participants reported being most satisfied with their family life and the least satisfied with their present state of health.

The lowest total and overall life satisfaction scores were recorded for the sample group that had been retired from sport for less than three years, $M = 35.7$ ($SD = 5.9$) and $M = 5.4$ ($SD = 1.2$) respectively. The highest total and overall life satisfaction scores were recorded for the sample group who had been retired from sport between 13 – 20 years, $M = 40.7$ ($SD = 5.7$) and $M = 6.2$ ($SD = 0.7$) respectively.

Table 13

Average life satisfaction scores for participants, and scores sorted by years since sport retirement.

| Group | Life Satisfaction Questions | | | | | | | Total L.S. | Overall L.S. |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|---------------|-----------------|
| | Q 1. | Q 2. | Q 3. | Q 4. | Q 5. | Q 6. | Q 7. | | |
| <i>Full sample</i> | | | | | | | | | |
| (<i>N</i> = 73) | | | | | | | | | |
| M | 5.5 | 5.0 | 5.1 | 5.6 | 5.5 | 5.5 | 5.9 | 38.1 | 5.8 |
| SD | 1.1 | 1.4 | 1.4 | 2.0 | 1.4 | 1.2 | 1.2 | 6.2 | 1.1 |
| <i>Years retired</i> | | | | | | | | | |
| ≤ 3 (<i>n</i> = 14) | | | | | | | | | |
| M | 4.7 | 4.6 | 4.9 | 5.1 | 5.5 | 4.9 | 6.0 | 35.7 | 5.4 |
| SD | 1.3 | 1.5 | 1.3 | 1.0 | 1.2 | 1.5 | 0.7 | 5.9 | 1.2 |
| 4 – 12 (<i>n</i> = 14) | | | | | | | | | |
| M | 5.4 | 4.6 | 5.6 | 5.9 | 6.0 | 6.0 | 6.1 | 39.0 | 6.1 |
| SD | 1.3 | 1.8 | 1.5 | 1.3 | 1.3 | 0.9 | 1.1 | 6.1 | 1.0 |
| 13 – 20 (<i>n</i> = 14) | | | | | | | | | |
| M | 5.8 | 5.5 | 5.5 | 6.1 | 6.0 | 5.6 | 6.1 | 40.7 | 6.2 |
| SD | 0.8 | 1.0 | 1.7 | 0.8 | 1.0 | 1.2 | 1.4 | 5.7 | 0.7 |
| 21 – 30 (<i>n</i> = 14) | | | | | | | | | |
| M | 5.7 | 5.1 | 4.8 | 5.4 | 5.0 | 5.4 | 5.9 | 37.2 | 5.8 |
| SD | 0.7 | 1.5 | 1.4 | 1.4 | 1.9 | 1.4 | 1.4 | 7.8 | 1.3 |
| 31 – 51 (<i>n</i> = 13) | | | | | | | | | |
| M | 5.9 | 5.3 | 4.8 | 5.5 | 4.9 | 5.9 | 6.2 | 38.5 | 5.8 |
| SD | 1.1 | 1.4 | 1.1 | 1.4 | 1.4 | 1.0 | 0.7 | 5.5 | 1.2 |

Cronbach alphas for the life satisfaction scale ranged from .78 to .82, with an overall alpha score of .78, indicating good internal reliability.

A Wilcoxon Rank Sum test was performed to assess whether there was a difference in life satisfaction levels between males and females. No significant differences were found between genders for either total life satisfaction, $\chi^2(1, n = 73) = 1.37, p = 0.24$, or overall life satisfaction scores, $\chi^2(1, n = 73) = 0.82, p = 0.36$.

A Kruskal-Wallis test did not uncover any differences in life satisfaction attributable to differences in the reasons for retirement from sport. This was the case for both total life satisfaction, $\chi^2(4, n = 71) = 0.70, p = 0.95$, and overall life satisfaction, $\chi^2(4, n = 71) = 0.91, p = 0.92$.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the implications of sport retirement in New Zealand. As well as describing athletes' disengagement experiences, the information gathered was used to address the following research concerns: athletes adjustment to career transition, the life satisfaction of retired athletes, the desirable content and delivery mode of pre- and post-retirement interventions, and gender differences in retirement experiences. The following discussion attempts to provide an initial understanding of these focus areas, based on the information gathered in the current study.

OBJECTIVES

The adjustment experience

It is evident that the majority of athletes surveyed had a relatively easy transition away from high performance sport, fully adjusting to their new situation within a year of sport retirement (Table 7). These findings are in keeping with previous New Zealand sport retirement research. Strang and Hodge (1996, cited in Hodge, 1997) reported 68% ($n = 58$) of the retired swimmers in their study had a reasonably smooth and problem free transition into sport retirement.

In the present study 93% of the athletes surveyed maintained some form of work participation throughout their high performance sport career, despite training and

competition schedules. It is possible that the continued work involvement helped the athletes cope with, and adjust to, their sport retirement. Many researchers (e.g. Haerle, 1975; Mihovilovic, 1968; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Ungerleider, 1997; Werthner & Orlick, 1986) have indicated that maintaining regular involvement in activities outside of sport enables the athletes to sustain a multifaceted self-identity and a broad social identity, two factors that have been implicated in successful adaptation to sport retirement. Work may also provide the athletes with a focus or challenge to continue with immediately following their retirement from sport. Such a focus is recommended as a highly effective strategy for coping with sport retirement (Haerle, 1975; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Werthner & Orlick, 1986). Reiterating this notion one participant commented,

The freedom provided by no longer having a sporting career allowed my other career to become more of a focus and therefore more successful and rewarding.

If continued involvement in activities outside of the sport arena is a necessary factor in the facilitation of a smooth sport retirement, then the further advancement of New Zealand sport towards professionalism, and high profile sporting competitions, may have negative influence upon future athletes' ease of adjustment. Professionalism enables more and more athletes to earn a very good living from sport alone, thus they no longer need to work outside their sport involvement (McConnell, 1996). The extensive time and resource demands placed on professional athletes, coupled with the pressure to remain successful, and possibly to engage in promotional and media appearances, may increase the likelihood that they will develop a uni-dimensional sports-only identity, limiting their professional, social, and emotional encounters to the sport environment.

Although in the current study only a minority of athletes reported suffering adjustment difficulties as they retired from sport, those individuals involved in sport (athletes, coaches managers, sports administration, sporting bodies) cannot afford to ignore the issue. There are still individuals who do have difficulties adjusting to their career transition, and as the fanfare, media attention, salaries, and ticket prices escalate, so too does the impact on the athletes themselves. Stepping off such mighty pedestals and adjusting to “normal” life may prove much more difficult for future professional athletes than it has in the past (Drahota & Eitzen, 1998).

Adjustment predictors

Despite contrary findings in the literature (e.g. Lavalley et al., 1997; Strang & Hodge, 1996, cited in Hodge, 1997), this study failed to find evidence of a link between causal factors in retirement and the athlete’s subsequent positive or negative adjustment. Whether sport retirement was initiated by age, deselection, injury, or free choice, did not appear to influence the relative ease or difficulty of adjustment in the athletes surveyed. This outcome is inconsistent with the hypotheses advanced in conceptual models of retirement from sport (Gordon, 1995; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994), and previous research (Lavalley et al., 1997; Strang & Hodge, 1996, cited in Hodge, 1997).

Both Strang and Hodge (1996, cited in Hodge, 1997) and Lavalley et al., (1997) reported that athletes who retired involuntarily found retirement more difficult, and experienced a greater degree of social and emotional adjustment than those athletes who retired voluntarily. In the current study, the various voluntary and involuntary causal factors were looked at individually to ascertain the possibility of a link with ease of adjustment. Due to the small number of individuals contained in each of the three

involuntary groups (age, $n = 13$, deselection, $n = 7$, injury $n = 7$) there is an increased probability of a Type 2 error. Thus, there may be an effect not uncovered in this study. Further research into the reasons for retirement as predictors of adjustment, using a larger sample, would be useful.

Similarly, no link was found between athletes' sport goal achievement and their adjustment to sport retirement. This finding is contrary to that of Sinclair and Orlick (1993) who reported that positive adjustment to retirement from high performance sport was related to either achieving, or having achieved one's goals in sport.

In the current study, however, the transformation of "agree" "disagree" Likert scale responses to obtain data on the extent of goal achievement may not have provided sufficiently clear data to provide evidence of a link between degrees of goal achievement and ease of retirement.

The inability of this study to find a specific factor that directly influenced adjustment to sport retirement accords with the notion of sport retirement as a transitional event, as discussed in chapter one. Each athlete brings to the sport retirement experience his/her own personal resources, perceptions of stress, coping strategies, support networks and social experiences (Schlossberg, 1981). It is the interaction between the individual, the resources available to and used by the individual, and the type of transition encountered, that mediates adaptive success or failure, rather than one or two dominant factors (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993).

Life satisfaction

An examination of athletes' life satisfaction by years since sport retirement indicated a tendency towards lower life satisfaction scores for those athletes retired for

three years or less (Table 13). Although this may indicate that athletes experience lower levels of life satisfaction immediately following sport retirement, definite conclusions cannot be drawn from the current data as there were no more than 14 participants in each of the five years-since-retirement groups. It would be desirable to gather data regarding the athlete's life satisfaction during their competitive career, as well as following its conclusion. Such research should compare the life satisfaction of those athletes retired for as little as six months, with the satisfaction level of those retired for two, three, four, or five years.

A drop in life satisfaction following sport retirement was reported by Werthner and Orlick, (1986). In their study, athletes were asked to rate their life satisfaction over three time periods: during their sport career, immediately following their sport career, and at the time of the interview. A significant majority of the athletes (89%) rated their life satisfaction immediately following the end of their sport career lower on the scale, than during their life as an athlete and at the time of the survey. Werthner and Orlick (1986) concluded that the drop in life satisfaction was indicative of a period of adjustment and decision making during which the athlete attempts to find a new life style and career.

All individuals must undergo a number of transitions, or life events, within their lifetimes (Miller, 1997). "A life event can be any 'happening' or phase in the life of an individual which requires the individual to change the pattern of life" (Malim & Birch, 1998, p. 548). Some life events, such as marriage, or starting a new job, are experienced by most adults. Others, such as sport retirement or redundancy, may only be experienced by some people. Life-event theory suggests that all life events can induce a degree of stress, regardless of whether the events are perceived as good or bad,

and, therefore, all involve some degree of adjustment on the part of the individual (Malim & Birch, 1998).

In future, former athletes' life satisfaction scores should be compared with the scores of counterparts from the general population who are also passing through some form of career transition. The shifts in life satisfaction for athletes may be a normal part of adult development.

Programme preference and delivery

Currently, sporting bodies within New Zealand are beginning to acknowledge the need for education to prepare athletes for life after sport (McFadden, 1999). Thus it is necessary to identify athletes' needs and preferences for the content and delivery of such programmes. Most of the participants in the present study did not receive any form of pre- or post-retirement career education either during their sport career or when they retired from sport. The majority of the athletes also believed career education and pre-retirement planning interventions would be most effective if they were available to athletes not only during their sport careers, but when they were in the process of adjusting to their retirement as well (Tables 10 & 11).

Personal and career assessment programmes were identified as the most desirable type of intervention by both the male and female participants. Such programmes are likely to help athletes identify personal qualities, and match them to the careers they are best suited to. Help to identify and initiate further education or training necessary in order to obtain their career goals (education and career counselling) was ranked second in preference. Many participants also indicated a desire for financial education and management training during their sport career. These results reflect

findings in an Australian study conducted by Hawkins and Blann (1996), where preferred career planning programmes were those that helped athletes obtain actual work experiences related to their career choices or to identify careers best suited to them.

Athletes tended to steer away from large-scale mass delivery methods such as conferences and seminars, instead they registered preferences for more personalised approaches, such as individual or small group counselling, for the delivery of pre- and post-retirement planning interventions. Participants also indicated that the use of a mentoring system could be an effective method of delivering pre- and post-retirement interventions.

The athletes studied saw themselves as primarily responsible for the utilisation of programmes offered, indicating a degree of self-government. Coaches were deemed least responsible for ensuring programme use, emphasising the conception of a coach's role as improving the individual or team's performance, and helping athletes reach their sporting goals. Athletes do not consider it the place of the coach to instruct and monitor the athlete on his/her pre-retirement planning and education.

Personal control

Very little of the research regarding sport retirement specifically investigates the possibility of gender differences in the adjustment experiences of men and women (Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985; Hawkins & Blann, 1996; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993). Within the current study, significant gender differences were observed only with respect to personal control (Table 8). Female athletes reported feeling significantly less control

over their lives immediately following their retirement from sport than their male counterparts.

In general, those athletes surveyed agreed with the statement that they had a strong sense of personal control during their sport careers, however, they appeared to experience a decrease in their sense of personal control immediately following sport retirement. This finding is in contrast to the finding of Werthner and Orlick (1986). Most of the athletes they interviewed reported that their personal control rose immediately following the end of their sports career and continued to rise for several years thereafter. This initial rise in personal control was largely attributed to the perceived lack of personal control the athletes felt they had over their lives during their competitive careers. One athlete remarked:

" The coaches had total control over my life while competing, they [told me] when to train, when to eat, I have much more control over my life now"
(Orlick, 1986, p. 174).

Werthner and Orlick (1986) suggested that athletes experienced an increase in personal control because they were able to start making their own decisions concerning their livelihood.

An explanation as to why athletes in the present study reported a higher sense of personal control during their sport careers may lie in the less institutionalised nature of New Zealand sport. Unlike many athletes in the United States, for example, the majority of New Zealand sports people are not carried through to their elite sports careers on the backs of high school and college sport programmes. Most continue to work, thus their lives still involve a degree of autonomy away from sport, where they are involved in life-shaping decision making processes. However, with the introduction of professionalism in New Zealand sport, this may change. As sport becomes a viable

career option (at least in the short-term) sports bodies may become more institutionalised and coaches and management teams will play a much greater role in the athlete's life. The professional athlete becomes an employee of the sporting body, and it is the job of coaches and management to get the most out of the investment.

Social support

In light of their close relationship with the athlete, it is not surprising that parents and coaches were reported by participants as most supportive during their sporting career (Table 12). Those groups rated least supportive included sporting institutions and siblings. A gender separation of responses revealed some differences in the support roles provided by various groups during the athlete's sport career. While parents and spouses were identified as the two most supportive groups by male athletes, female athletes rated their coach and team members as most supportive during their sport career. Those groups reported as least supportive included the sporting institution and siblings for male athletes, and spouse and siblings for female athletes.

It is possible that more male athletes than female athletes were married during their sport careers, leading to the low spouse support score for females. However, this cannot be confirmed, as information regarding marital status during the sport career was not gathered from participants. Another possible explanation for the above gender difference may lie in the role assignment of males and females. Hays and Oxley (1986) found that women provided more informational and emotional social support to their friends than men. It has also been suggested that women have been socialised to express their emotional feelings more than men (Wheeler, Reis & Neslek, 1983), it may be more natural, given the more nurturing role of women, for them to readily provide

support for their spouse, the male athlete. Men, on the other hand, may find it more difficult to provide the necessary emotional support to female athletes.

The high availability of support from team members reported by female athletes may also be indicative of general differences in the social and emotional interactions between men and women. Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1988) have noted that when people are in a stressful situation they look for someone to help them cope with the experience: either a competent intelligent person who will help them to assess the situation clearly, or somebody warm and supportive.

The majority of athletes in the Hawkins and Blann (1996) study believed that their spouses/significant others and/or families should be involved in helping them make the transition out of sport and into a new career or activity. However, only 32% of those athletes in the current study agreed that their spouse, significant other and/or family was actually involved in helping them during their transition. A further 39% either strongly or mostly disagreed that this group provided help during the transition process (Table 9). This is surprising, given that close family have a vested interest in the outcomes of transition.

Although coaches play an important supportive role for athletes during their sport career, their role in the athlete's retirement is somewhat unclear. As noted previously, the current athlete sample did not consider it the place of coaches to monitor athletes' preparation for sport retirement. However, it may be desirable for coaches to maintain a supportive involvement with athletes during both the preparation for sport retirement, and the actual transition.

At what stage in the athlete's career should the coach cease his or her involvement? Strang and Hodge (1996, cited in Hodge, 1997) found the former swimmers studied, regarded coaches as necessary for both social and emotional support

through the transition to retirement – but few swimmers actually received such support at that stage. Similarly, Sinclair and Orlick (1993) found that coaches, along with institutional sporting groups provided very little if any support to most retiring athletes.

If it is the case that coaches do not remain involved with athletes in some form during their career transition then, on retirement, athletes lose an important component of their social support network. Such a loss may potentially contribute to adjustment difficulties when combined with other individual and situational factors involved in sport retirement (Mihovilovic, 1968; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Werthner & Orlick, 1986). If the coach's focus is restricted to the competitive athlete, athlete retirement may be a time in which mentor relationships developed with former athletes could be particularly important (Table 11). Ungerleider (1997) reported that many athletes spoke of their mentors, and how friendships developed that followed them from sport into the work environment. Many of the Olympians studied still spoke regularly with, and sought counsel from, their mentors, even thirty years after sport retirement. More focused research is needed in the areas of coach and mentor involvement with the retiring athlete.

Regardless of whether coaches or mentors provide the athlete with social and emotional support during their competitive sport career and subsequent retirement transition, they would be unlikely to be the most appropriate sources of practical assistance with the career and financial planning aspects of pre-retirement planning and post-retirement counselling intervention. Thus, relevant sporting bodies have an additional role to fulfil within their management of sport, and of the athletes that make it happen.

As discussed in Chapter two, many researchers (e.g. Coakely, 1983; Mihovilovic, 1968; Orlick, 1990; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1993) have suggested that, due to

athletes' total psychological and social immersion in the sports world, their social activities revolve primarily around their sporting life. Thus, the majority of their friends, acquaintances, and other associates, are often found within the sports environment. This was true of the athletes in the present study as well. The majority of athletes (80%) agreed on some level that during their sporting career they mainly socialised with those individuals they met through their sport involvement (Refer Table 6).

However, contrary to the depictions of limited social roles and restricted personal and social development often associated with athletes (Orlick, 1990; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998), an overwhelming majority in the present study (99%) agreed on some level that they felt sport participation enhanced their personal growth and development. Similarly, 93% agreed that sport participation enhanced their social development.

Within the present study, the social aspect of sport did not play an important part in participants' original motivations for sport participation (Table 5). It is interesting to observe however, that by contrast, it does appear to have a role in athletes' motivation to continue some form of sport participation once retired from sport (Table 4). When asked why they maintain their present level of physical activity, 72% of participants in this study indicated that it was for the social aspects of such participation.

Due to the strong sport based social network developed by athletes while competing, it is understandable that an athlete retired from high performance sport continues to seek social interactions within the sports arena. Social contact and interactions occur within an environment with which the athlete is familiar. Such activity in organised groups, such as sports clubs, is considered to be conducive to the establishment of stronger mutual ties between individuals, and ties of friendship (Mihovilovic, 1968). Coakely (1984) suggests that individuals who were physically

active earlier in life are generally more physically active later in life, so there would also be a greater chance that athletes would meet individuals who share similar lifestyles, memories, and interest in sport. It has been argued that shared interests are a source of satisfaction across a variety of interpersonal relationships and provide a better predictor of interpersonal attraction than similar attitudes (Wenner, 1989).

A salient feature of this study is that there were very few patterns in the survey responses. This might well reflect the self-motivated and self-reliant aspects of these athletes' characters. They were not pawns in the sporting world used in the achievement of some common good, but rather unique individuals striving to achieve their own personal goals.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COACHES AND SPORTING BODIES

This study sought to address the paucity of research on sport retirement in New Zealand. New areas were explored, and suggestions were made about directions for future research. The data gathered may serve as a benchmark for comparison with future athlete retirement research in New Zealand's developing sporting climate. The responses of the high performance athletes support the notion that the majority have a relatively easy retirement, although a small percentage appear to have serious difficulties as was reflected in extreme Likert scale responses.

This study provides valuable information regarding the career planning and education needs and preferences of athletes. The following recommendations arise from the athletes' reported pre- and post-retirement career education needs.

1. That career education and planning programmes should focus on programme content that will assist athletes to identify their personal qualities, and match them to

careers best suited to them. These programmes should also help athletes identify and initiate any further education or training they may need to attain their non-sport career goals.

2. That career education programmes:
 - be designed and delivered in either an individual or small group counselling setting;
 - be available both during and after the athlete's sport career;
 - be in a manner that may involve mentors or coaches (where possible).
3. That coaches consider more carefully how they will manage their relationships with those athletes who are retiring from sport. This research highlights the important role coaches play in athletes' lives, providing expertise, social and emotional support during the athletes' sport career, and raises the question of whether they should extend this role into the transition period.
4. That consideration be given to the involvement of mentors in the competitive athlete's life. Mentors may help to bridge the gap into sport retirement providing continuity of support through both the athlete's sport career and subsequent retirement.

As mentioned in chapter two, some coaches believe that even to broach the topic of retirement from sport during the athlete's active career is likely to distract from competitive performance. They would argue that discussion of retirement issues during the sport career would be doing the athletes a disservice, planting seeds of doubt in their minds that may affect their current focus and concentration. The contrary argument

suggests that addressing athletes' uncertainty regarding their future, and providing initiatives that help prepare them for life post-sport, allows athletes to totally dedicate themselves to their current sporting career with the peace of mind that their future is secure. Regardless of the level of involvement a coach may have with his or her retiring athletes, they should at least make the effort to ensure athletes are aware of the services available elsewhere to help them prepare for, and cope with, their sport retirement.

From comments made by participants throughout the current study it is clear that the great wealth of knowledge and expertise possessed by those athletes now retired, has yet to be used to its potential by all currently involved with sport. The following remarks express what appear to be typical feelings:

Things in this country are slowly starting to change but I can't emphasise enough of using former athletes (mentor role) to help out as a 'strength' for the athlete to get more mentally tough. Helps create confidence in a person and helps the athlete to grow and think for themselves both on and off the field.

My considerable knowledge and experience gained from twelve years of international competition as a New Zealand representative was not sought or evaluated from athletic administration. I feel I had something to offer to the benefit of my chosen sport.

The increased use of mentoring relationships within sport would benefit both mentors and mentees alike. It would help the former utilise their experience, and allow continued interest in the sport, it could also boost their self-esteem and help to counter feelings of being used and abused by the "system" often reported by retired athletes (Stronach, 1993). Mentees would benefit from additional advice and support from someone who understands the many challenges that athlete faces.

One may argue the potential for some mentors to give the athlete bad advice, either because of their reluctance to move with the times, or from a distaste for the

'new' more professional atmosphere of modern sport. However, in light of the type of social and emotional relationship that would be expected to develop between a mentor and mentee those individuals who differ greatly in opinion would be unlikely to develop a strong or effective mentoring relationship in any case.

The question remains as to who should provide and deliver appropriate programmes, and where the funds should come from to establish appropriate facilities. These questions are largely beyond the scope of the present research. It has been suggested that preparing the athlete for sport retirement is a task that should not be left just to a few people at a particular level of competitive sport, rather, it should be the responsibility of individuals involved at all levels and in all areas of sport including parents, educators, coaches, administrators, physicians, & psychologists (Hodge, 1997; Werthner & Orlick, 1986). However, the information and recommendations provided above are aimed in particular at coaches, sports psychologists, and sporting bodies, because, at present, these groups have the ability to change attitudes towards retiring athletes by better addressing and understanding their sport retirement needs.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

There are a number of limitations that must be taken into account when considering the implications of this study. First, the athletes assessed in this study had been retired from sport for an average of almost 19 years at the time of data collection. Therefore, information regarding the athlete's sport career and sport retirement relies heavily on recall data. It is difficult to know the extent to which the athlete's perceptions of adjustment processes or emotions experienced might have changed over time. It would be desirable to control the time since retirement of participants, possibly

by studying athletes in cohort blocks, using comparable groups with respect to the type of sporting activity studied.

Secondly, there is a need for the use of longitudinal studies that follow athletes through their sport career and subsequent sport retirement and adjustment. The information provided might help the development of generalised profiles for those athletes who experience difficulties with their adjustment to retirement, and those who do not.

Thirdly, to provide a clearer indication of the possibility of gender differences in retirement experiences, a larger sample size containing equivalent numbers of male and female athletes would be desirable. A larger sample size would also help reduce the effect of missing data, and allow generalisations to be made and used more confidently within the sport arena.

Increased sample size would also improve the power of such a study. To investigate the power of the current study post-hoc power estimates for chi-square comparisons were conducted using Cohen's (1988) conventions. Two sample sizes were used, corresponding to the overall number of participants ($N = 74$), and the smallest number of responses recorded for a question involved in the chi-square analysis ($n = 49$). In light of previous research, power for these two sample sizes was calculated assuming small and medium effect sizes, and both one and two degrees of freedom. For a medium effect size, power for the full sample was 0.73 ($df = 1$) and 0.63 ($df = 2$). With the sample size of $n = 49$, the power for a medium effect size was 0.56 ($df = 1$) and 0.45 ($df = 2$). Power for a small effect size was below 0.14 for both sample sizes ($N = 74, n = 49$).

Finally, with regard to the questionnaire content, the inclusion of questions regarding the financial implications of high-level sport participation would have

provided more information on an issue that appears to currently be central to sport participation and sport retirement.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Future research in the area of sport retirement should focus on several issues. Investigations into sport retirement must develop and utilise strategies that will allow the researcher to gain an insider's view of the inner workings of the sports world. This may be possible through the use of focus groups, informants, or the development of scientist/participant research teams. For example, the insight of athlete focus groups may be a useful tool in the development of questions and surveys for particular athlete populations such as team sports versus individual sports.

Coaches are pivotal figures in athletes' lives, thus their attitudes towards and involvement in sport retirement need to be examined. The role coaches play in the sport retirement experience and the involvement expectations of both athletes and coaches, should be the focus of further research. It would be desirable to investigate the perceptions, expectations of responsibility, and attitudes of both coaches and sport management towards retiring and retired athletes.

The present study highlighted the possibility of changes in the degree of control athletes perceive they have over their life circumstances. Further investigation using a more longitudinal approach would help clarify whether there is indeed a drop in the personal control dimension immediately following sport retirement. Comparison studies with individuals who have been made redundant or are retiring from the work force would also extend this area further. If a temporary drop in personal control is eventually

confirmed immediately following retirement, then athletes can be advised to expect it, given tips on how to deal with it, and encouraged with the knowledge that it will pass.

“Career recycling” and its possible application to sport retirement would also provide an important area for future research. Many retired athletes enter a new career following their departure from sport, often applying the skills they have learnt from their sport involvement, such as time management, goal setting, concentration skills, and team development methods. It is postulated that the term “retirement” may not be suitable for all athletes and instead the use of “career recycling” from Super’s Theory (1990, cited in Sharf, 1997) may more realistically describe the career transition made by athletes. In the current study, the majority of participants (61%) reported that they still identified themselves with the title “athlete” although they were no longer competitive at their highest level. Many were not comfortable with labels like “retired” or “former” athlete.

Recycling describes those who re-assess their career plans at various points during their life time, re-entering the exploration stage, reassessing their values, interests and capacities. It could be argued that athletes re-enter this exploration stage following the end of their sport career. It is necessary for them to assess the options (job/career) available to them, in the process analysing the skills they have developed during their sporting career, and identifying those that may be recycled and used effectively in a new career.

Research from this perspective would build upon the theoretical notion of role acquisition or accumulation, and short-term careers proposed by Curtis and Ennis (1988). This perspective suggests that following retirement from high performance sport, activity in the sport role persists with less intensity and commitment, and another role, a different work role, is subsequently acquired.

CONCLUSION

Hodge (1995) believes that athletes (especially elite athletes) are owed “ the courtesy of help in balancing the demands of sport, career, and lifestyle, so that they are not cast aside as yesterday’s heroes, while attention is moved to a new crop of elite athletes” (p. 98). This research was designed to provide an exploratory and descriptive account of the sport retirement experiences of athletes who had already retired. The main findings and conclusions drawn from this study are summarised below:

- The majority of athletes studied made a relatively smooth and trouble free transition out of high-performance sport. This finding is in keeping with those findings of Greendorfer and Blinde (1985), Strang and Hodge (1996, cited in Hodge, 1997), and Ungerleider (1997).
- The various reasons for retirement and achievement, or lack of achievement, of sporting goals did not significantly predict the ease of adjustment to sport retirement. This leads to the conclusion that it is a combination of several factors, and the interaction between them, that influences adjustment rather than one specific factor.
- Significant differences were found between the responses of male and female participants with respect to degree of personal control they felt they had immediately following sport retirement. This may be a reflection of differences in the social situation between males and females.
- Neither the reason for retirement from sport nor the length of time since retirement significantly predicted the life satisfaction scores of participants.

- Athletes ranked themselves as most responsible for the utilisation of career transition programmes. Personal and career assessment was participants preferred programme content. Both males and females indicated a preference for personalised programme delivery methods such as individual or small group counselling.
- Coaches and parents were reported as the most readily available source of support for athletes during their sport careers, however, only a third of participants agreed that their spouse, significant other and/or family had helped them during their transition out of sport.

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APPENDIX A

Sports represented in sample

| Sport | N |
|-----------------------------------|----------|
| <i>Team sports (N = 54)</i> | |
| Basketball | 4 |
| Cricket | 13 |
| Hockey | 8 |
| Netball | 3 |
| Rowing | 6 |
| Rugby | 11 |
| Rugby League | 3 |
| Soccer | 1 |
| Softball | 1 |
| Surf Lifesaving | 2 |
| Water Polo | 2 |
| <i>Individual sports (N = 44)</i> | |
| Athletics | 7 |
| Badminton | 5 |
| Billiards | 1 |
| Canoeing | 1 |
| Cross country skiing | 1 |
| Cycling | 1 |
| Fencing | 1 |
| Golf | 1 |
| Gymnastics | 2 |
| Ice skating | 1 |
| Judo | 1 |
| Karate | 1 |
| Kayaking | 1 |
| Long Distance Running | 3 |
| Power Lifting | 1 |
| Roller skating | 1 |
| Squash | 3 |
| Swimming | 5 |
| Table Tennis | 2 |
| Tennis | 2 |
| Wrestling | 1 |
| Yachting | 2 |

Note. Some of the participants successfully competed in several different sports during their sporting careers, therefore, a total of 98 sports are represented here.

APPENDIX B1



MASSEY
UNIVERSITY

A L B A N Y

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

INFORMATION SHEET

Athlete retirement/Career transition experiences of New Zealand athletes

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This study is being conducted as part of the requirements for the completion of a Master of Science degree through Massey University in Albany.

The study is designed to investigate the ease with which New Zealand athletes make the transition from competitive sporting competition to a second career, and the assistance they had or would like to have available to aid this transition.

You have been invited to participate in this study as a result of either your completion of the interest leaflet or your membership of a particular club. You are NOT required to participate in the study: involvement is on a purely voluntary basis.

This survey pack contains the questionnaire, the information sheet, and a free post envelope in which to return the completed questionnaire. It is anticipated completion of the questionnaire will take approximately twenty minutes. The questionnaire is required to be completed by the participant and returned if possible within a month of receiving it. It is assumed that filling in the questionnaire implies consent. You have the right to decline to answer any particular question or questions.

The completed questionnaires are anonymous. The information collected will only be used for the purpose of this study and no individuals will be identifiable in any publications arising from the research. A summary of the findings will be made available to all participants who received a survey form by mail, and through Sporting Clubs who have made survey material available.

In the unlikely event that completion of the questionnaire raises issues that are distressing for you, Jill Duncalfe, MEd(Counselling), MNZAC, is willing to give advice with respect to suitable Counselling resources. Jill works part time at Student Health, Massey University Albany, and is in private practice. She can be contacted by telephoning 524-7414. General practitioners are another useful point of reference, since most hold a list of various counselling and support services.

APPENDIX B2

ATHLETE CAREER TRANSITION INVENTORY

SECTION ONE

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

Please tick the box/es that apply to you, and complete the details where requested.

1.

Gender:

Male

☐

Female

☐
2.

Which educational qualifications did you obtain before leaving the educational system?
3.

Highest level of sporting representation achieved.

Regional

National

New Zealand representative

Olympic

Other

☐

☐

☐

☐

☐

If you ticked 'other' please specify:

4.

Main sport/s that you were representative in:

5. When you were competing at the level ticked in question three, what was the approximate amount of time you spent participating in your sport each week, on average? (Training and competitions included.)

9 hrs or less

10-14 hrs

15-19 hrs

20-24hrs

25-29 hrs

30-34 hrs

35-39 hrs

40+ hrs

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6. How long were you competitive at either a regional level or beyond during your competitive sporting career?

Less than 1 year

1 - 2 years

3 - 5 years

6 - 10 years

11 - 14 years

15 + years

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7. What year did you retire from top level competitive sporting competition? 19 __

8. Age at the time of retirement from top level sport.

9. What was the main cause of your retirement from active sporting competition?

Age

Free choice

Injury

De- selection

Other

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If you ticked 'other' please specify:

10. Are you currently participating in any form of physical activity or sport participation?

Yes

☐

No

☐

11. Which of the following were available to you during your retirement from top level sports participation?

Personal and career assessment programmes ☐

Career counseling to help you identify and initiate further education/training needed. ☐

Training and advice in the preparation of a resume/curriculum vitae and identifying and applying to prospective employers. ☐

A mentoring system using already retired athletes. ☐

Other (Please specify below). ☐

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12. Do you still consider yourself an athlete?
Please explain your answer:

Yes ☐ No ☐

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SECTION TWO

The following is a list of statements about thoughts, feelings and behaviors that may or may not apply to you.
Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement by **circling** the number that best corresponds with your answer.

| <i>Level of agreement</i> | <i>Numerical response</i> | <i>Meaning</i> |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Strongly disagree | 1 | Opposite to my views or me |
| Mostly disagree | 2 | Generally opposite to my views or me |
| Mildly disagree | 3 | Somewhat opposite to my views or me |
| Mildly agree | 4 | Somewhat like my views or me |
| Mostly agree | 5 | Generally like my views or me |
| Strongly agree | 6 | Like my views or me |

CURRENT SPORT INVOLVEMENT

| | Strongly disagree | Mostly disagree | Mildly disagree | Mildly agree | Mostly agree | Strongly agree |
|---|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|
| 13. I maintain my current level of physical activity for the health benefits of physical fitness. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 14. I maintain my current level of physical activity so I can socialize with others interested in sport and have fun. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 15. I maintain my current level of physical activity to remain fairly competitive. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 16. I maintain my current level of physical activity to gain prestige and recognition. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

PREVIOUS SPORT INVOLVEMENT

| | Strongly disagree | Mostly disagree | Mildly disagree | Mildly agree | Mostly agree | Strongly agree |
|---|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|
| 17. Compared to my competitive sport experiences, I enjoy my current level of physical activity more. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 18. I originally participated in sports to be with people in a social situation. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 19. I originally participated in sports for the love of the particular sport itself. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 20. I originally participated in sports to compare skills or compete with others. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 21. I originally competed in sports for reasons other than the sport itself (i.e. gaining recognition, awards, prizes etc.) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 22. I accomplished all my sporting goals during my competitive years in sport. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 23. I feel sport participation enhanced my social development. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 24. I feel sport participation enhanced my personal growth and development. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 25. I mainly socialised with people I met through my sport participation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

POST-SPORT ADJUSTMENT

26. Did you gain any further educational qualifications following your retirement from competitive sports competition? Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, please list:

.....

.....

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27.

Did you work during your peak sporting career?

Yes☐

No☐

If so, was your work:

Part time☐

Full time☐

Self managed☐

Other☐

If you ticked 'other' please specify:

28.

If you have paid work, is your current occupation related to sports?

Yes☐

No☐

No paid work☐

29.

How long following retirement did it take for you to feel fully adjusted to your new circumstances?

Less than six months☐

A year☐

Two years☐

Three or more years☐

* For the questions on the following pages the meaning of the labels associated with the numerical responses is the same as on page three of this questionnaire.

| | Strongly disagree | Mostly disagree | Mildly disagree | Mildly agree | Mostly agree | Strongly agree |
|--|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|
| 30. My second career was more emotionally rewarding than my sporting career. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 31. The skills I acquired during my sporting career could be used in a variety of other careers. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 32. I adjusted to my next career following my sporting career quickly and without difficulty. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 33. My overall adjustment to retirement from sports was very easy. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

| | | Strongly disagree | Mostly disagree | Mildly disagree | Mildly agree | Mostly agree | Strongly agree |
|-----|---|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|
| 34. | Immediately following retirement from top level sport, my physical activity level reduced by at least half. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 35. | I had a strong sense of control over my life during my sporting years. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 36. | I had a strong sense of control over my life immediately following my retirement from sporting competition. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 37. | I had a high level of self-confidence immediately following my retirement. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

CAREER PLANNING AND SUPPORT AVAILABLE

| | | | | | | | |
|-----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 38. | I prepared for my retirement from sport whilst I was still competing. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 39. | During my sporting career I managed my finances to support myself and my family while I made the transition into a new career. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 40. | There were opportunities made available to help prepare me for the career transition out of sport whilst I was still competing. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 41. | My spouse/significant other and/or family were involved in helping me make the transition out of a sporting career into another career. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

42. At which stage do you feel career planning programmes and services should be provided?

Please rank in order 1-3.

(1= **most** preferred, 3= **least** preferred.)

- a) During the sport career
- b) After the sport career
- c) Both during and after the sport career

☐
☐
☐

43. Which of the following would have helped you most when you retired from sporting competition?

Please rank in order 1- 6.

(1= **most** helpful, 6= **least** helpful.)

- a) Personal and career assessment programs to help you identify your personal qualities and match them to careers best suited to you.
- b) Jobs or internships to help you obtain actual work experience related to your career choice.
- c) Education and career counseling to help you identify and initiate further education or training needed to attain your new career goals.
- d) Help to develop and initiate a job search, for example, training in the preparation of a resume/curriculum vitae, and advice about identifying and applying to prospective employers.
- e) A mentoring system where by you could discuss issues you faced with other retired athletes who have been in the same situation.
- f) Other
(If you have something definite in mind, please specify):

☐
☐
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44. Which method of programme delivery would you prefer?

Please rank in order 1-6.

(1= most preferred, 6= least preferred.)

- a) Conferences
- b) Seminars
- c) Individual counseling
- d) Small group counseling
- e) Reading material
- f) Mentoring system

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45. If career transition programmes are provided who do you believe is primarily responsible to ensure that the programmes are utilised?

Please rank in order 1-4

1= most responsible, 4= least responsible

- a) The athlete
- b) The coach
- c) The administrators of your sport
- d) The coach and the administrators of your sport working together

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46. The following support systems were available to me whilst I was actively competing in sport. (Please tick each item that applies to you.)

- Coach
- Spouse
- Brother/sister
- Parents
- Sporting Institution
- Friends
- Team members
- Other

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If you ticked 'other' please specify:

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47. In the spaces below please:

- a) Comment on any matters related to retirement from sport which you consider important and were not covered in the questionnaire.

- b) Make any comments about the questionnaire itself that you would like to direct to the researcher.

APPENDIX B3

MODIFIED LIFE SATISFACTION QUESTIONNAIRE

Instructions: Please consider the following aspects of your life as they seem to you at the moment. Please indicate for each aspect how satisfied you feel about it by placing a tick in the appropriate box.

| | Extremely dissatisfied | Very dissatisfied | Moderately dissatisfied | Not sure | Moderately satisfied | Very satisfied | Extremely satisfied |
|---|---------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| How satisfied do you feel about: | | | | | | | |
| 1. The way you spend your leisure time. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Your present state of health. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. The education you have received. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. What you are accomplishing in life. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. What the future seems to hold for you. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. Your social life. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. Your family life. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. Taking everything together, your life as a whole these days. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Thank you. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

APPENDIX C.

Table C1.

Results of Chi-square analyses of Likert scale responses by gender.

(2 degrees of freedom in each case)

| Question Number | χ^2 | Probability | Cramér's V |
|--------------------|----------|-------------|------------|
| 13 | 0.911 | .634 | 0.112 |
| 14 | 1.133 | .567 | 0.125 |
| 15 | 2.467 | .291 | 0.185 |
| 16 | 0.375 | .829 | 0.072 |
| 17 | 0.424 | .809 | 0.078 |
| 18 | 0.089 | .956 | 0.035 |
| 19 | 0.404 | .817 | 0.074 |
| 20 | 0.079 | .961 | 0.033 |
| 21 | 2.231 | .328 | 0.176 |
| 22 | 0.718 | .698 | 0.099 |
| 23 | 2.350 | .309 | 0.179 |
| 24 | 2.294 | .476 | 0.177 |
| 25 | 1.485 | .529 | 0.142 |
| 30 | 1.274 | .718 | 0.137 |
| 31 | 0.662 | .985 | 0.096 |
| 32 | 0.029 | .692 | 0.020 |
| 33 | 0.737 | .230 | 0.100 |
| 34 | 2.938 | .059 | 0.201 |
| 35 | 5.662 | .036 | 0.277 |
| 36 | 6.655 | .058 | 0.304 |
| 37 | 5.708 | .842 | 0.282 |
| 38 | 0.344 | .612 | 0.069 |
| 39 | 0.984 | .596 | 0.123 |
| 40 | 1.034 | .939 | 0.122 |
| 41 | 0.126 | .608 | 0.043 |

APPENDIX D

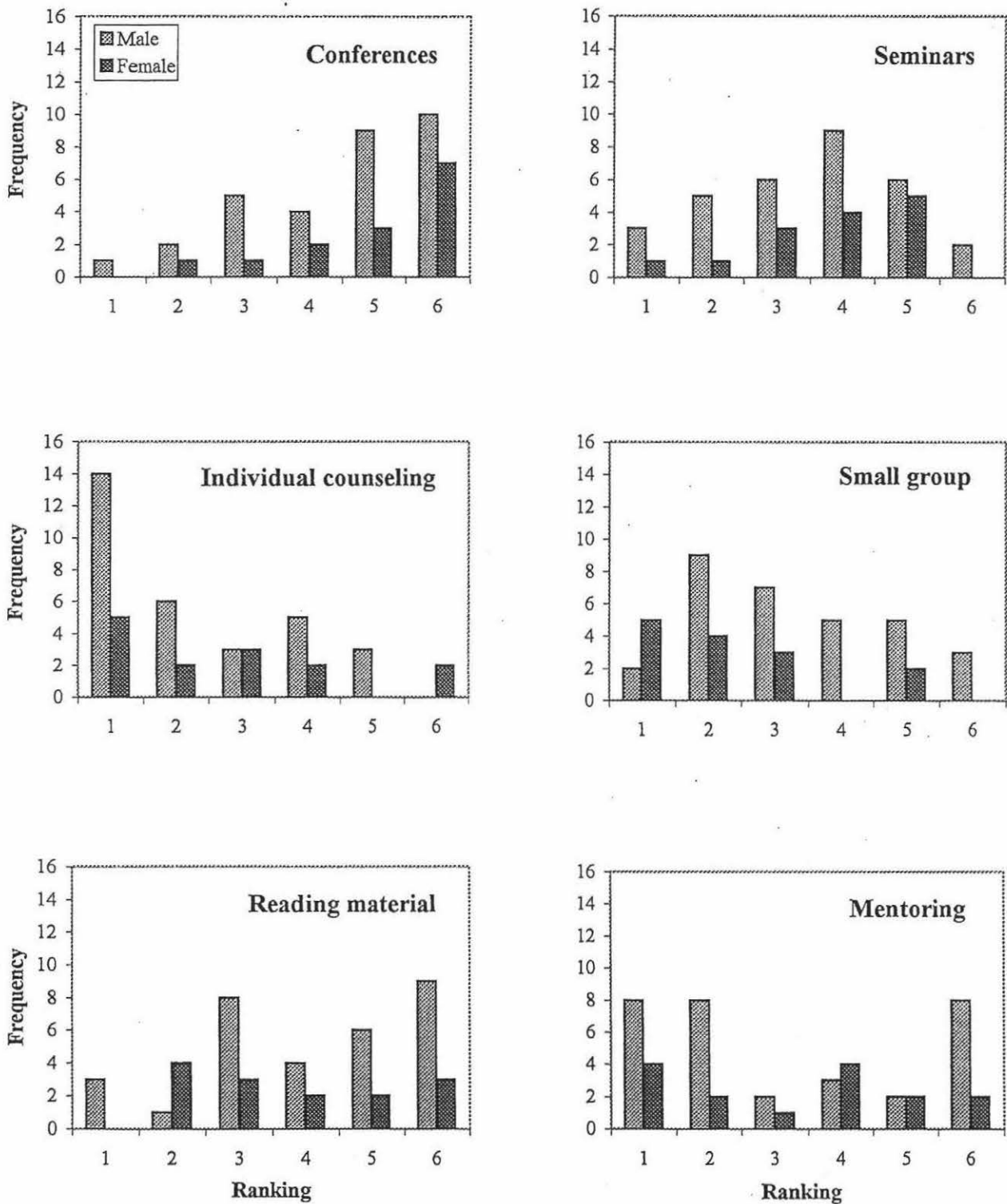


Figure 3. Graphs showing the frequency of respondents giving a particular ranking to the various modes of pre-retirement programme delivery.

Note. A ranking of 1 = most preferred mode of delivery, a ranking of 6 = least preferred mode.