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A British University Case Study of the Transitional Experiences of Student-Athletes

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1        Abstract

2    *Objectives:* Within Great Britain, increasing numbers of elite sport performers are attending

3    higher education institutions. The current study presents an exploration of the transitional

4    experiences of these individuals at a specific British university. Wylleman and Lavallee's

5    (2004) developmental model on transitions faced by athletes and Stambulova's (1997, 2003)

6    athletic career transition model were used to provide the theoretical foundation of inquiry.

7    *Design and method:* An instrumental case study design was adopted to provide an in-depth

8    analysis of student-athletes' experiences at a university. The case university was selected

9    based on its provision of elite sport support services. To acquire a holistic understanding,

10   interviews were conducted with current and recently graduated student-athletes from the

11   university, and focus groups were run with university staff (viz. administrators, coaches, and

12   support staff). Qualitative data were analyzed using a thematic framework approach.

13   *Results:* Elite student-athletes at the British university were found to experience simultaneous

14   athletic, academic, psychological, and psychosocial transitions. To overcome the transitional

15   demands, student-athletes were found to draw on a variety of internal (e.g., self-awareness)

16   and external (e.g., academic flexibility) resources and to implement coping strategies (e.g.,

17   seeking social support). Potential barriers to successful transitions were also identified (e.g.,

18   parental overprotection).

19   *Conclusions:* These findings advance the limited existing literature on British university

20   student-athletes' transitional experiences and suggestions are provided for how other

21   universities can enhance provision for their elite student-athletes.

22        *Keywords:* career transition, collegiate, dual role, performance, sport, talent

1    A British University Case Study of the Transitional Experiences of Student-Athletes

2    Within Great Britain, university student-athletes represent a population of growing

3    interest and importance to sport researchers and policy makers. This elevated attention is

4    due, in part, to the significant number of talented and elite sport performers attending further

5    and higher education institutions (Haley & Saghafi, 2012; Podium, Universities UK, &

6    British Universities & Colleges Sport, 2012) and to the increased awareness of the demands

7    faced by athletes during these years (Stambulova, Alfermann, Statler, & Côté, 2009;

8    Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). To elaborate, universities are increasingly becoming 'hubs'

9    for athletes as they can provide the support and flexibility that best enable performers to

10   continue their sporting career (Aquilina, 2013). For example, Aquilina (2013) noted that

11   universities may afford greater access to, and provision of, established support networks,

12   facilities, and flexible academic programs. Furthermore, during the years of 18 and 21

13   athletes from most sports[1] experience a normative transition from youth to senior aged

14   competitor (Stambulova, 1994) and attempt to become a mastery level performer (Wylleman

15   & Lavallee, 2004); a facilitative university environment can aid this development. Indeed,

16   between the 1992 Barcelona and 2012 London Olympic Games, 65% of British gold

17   medalists had been to university (British Universities & Colleges Sport, 2012).

18   The simultaneous transitions in academic (i.e., high school to university/college) and

19   athletic development are likely to be stressful for student-athletes as they experience strain

20   from numerous and competing demands (Knowles & Lorimer, 2014; Miller & Kerr, 2002;

21   Petitpas, Brewer, & Van Raalte, 2009). The athletic transition from development to mastery

22   performer, for example, may result in an athlete struggling to meet on-field (e.g., training)

23   and off-field (e.g., parent) expectations (Bruner, Munroe-Chandler, & Spink, 2008; Finn &

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[1] It is acknowledged that the transition may occur earlier in athletes participating in sports where peak performance is achieved before biological maturity (e.g., figure skating, women's gymnastics).

1    McKenna, 2010; Stambulova, Franck, & Weibull, 2012). Furthermore, the academic

2    transition to higher education may lead to changes in place of residence, increased distance

3    from friends and family, and new personal and academic responsibilities (Lowe & Cook,

4    2003; MacNamara & Collins, 2010). Academic and athletic transitions are not the only

5    developmental changes to occur at this time, however, as athletes also experience potentially

6    stressful and impactful changes in their psychosocial and psychological development

7    (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). For example, psychosocial transitions occur in the nature of

8    relationships held with parents. More specifically, parents have been shown to provide vital

9    emotional support for athletes traversing difficult transitions during their career (Mills, Butt,

10   Maynard, & Harwood, 2012; Pummell, Harwood, & Lavallee, 2008); however, when moving

11   to university, an athlete's access to this support may be reduced and parental influence may

12   be replaced by support from other sources (Falls & Wilson, 2013). Late adolescence is also a

13   significant period for psychological development with individuals challenged by various

14   developmental tasks (e.g., accepting one's physique) that shape their self-identity (Rice,

15   1998). For many student-athletes, sport is likely to play a significant role in this process as

16   their sport involvement intensifies during these years (Coakley, 1993) and their perceptions

17   of the importance of sport has been shown to peak at this time (Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985).

18        A student-athlete's ability to manage and overcome the demands they experience

19   during these concurrent transitions is likely to determine whether they are successful as a

20   senior performer (Bennie & O'Connor, 2006; Hollings, Mallett, & Hume, 2014; Pearson &

21   Petitpas, 1990). Bennie and O'Connor (2006), for example, found that elite track and field

22   athletes who were able to overcome athletic challenges, such as a lack of initial senior level

23   success, were more likely to remain in sport compared to those who were not. If not coped

24   with effectively, the multifaceted demands faced by student-athletes can also have

25   implications for academic performance, mental health, and psychosocial development

1    (Ferrante & Etzel, 2009). In relation to the issue of psychosocial development, the time

2    commitments associated with athletic pursuits can leave little time for student-athletes to

3    foster and nurture relationships outside of their sporting milieu (Kimball & Freysinger, 2003).

4    Without these broader social networks, student-athletes are more likely to feel and be

5    perceived by others as detached from the rest of the student cohort (Shurts & Shoffner, 2004).

6    This separation, in addition to the elevated social position (e.g., celebrity status) often held by

7    student-athletes, may lead to unstable and shallow relationships and, ultimately, social

8    isolation (Ahlgren-Bedics & Monda, 2009; Blinde & Greendorfer, 1992).

9            In light of the multifaceted transitions experienced by student-athletes at this age, and

10   the impact of these changes on their success and psychosocial well-being, it is perhaps

11   unsurprising that there have been growing calls to support these, and other, individuals who

12   opt to continue their sport alongside study or employment (see, e.g., Desprez et al., 2008;

13   Preece et al., 2004). In response to these calls, researchers have increasingly followed

14   Wylleman and Lavallee's (2004) holistic approach and examined athletes' transitions in

15   nonsport areas, alongside athletic changes (see, e.g., Debois, Ledon, & Wylleman, in press;

16   Ryba, Stambulova, Ronkainen, Bundgaard, & Selänne, in press). Furthermore, a growing

17   number of researchers (see, e.g., Morris, Tod, & Oliver, 2014; Stambulova, Engström,

18   Franck, Linnér, & Lindahl, in press) are utilizing career transition explanatory models to

19   explain the factors that influence coping and the subsequent success of a transition. One such

20   model is the athletic career transition model (Stambulova, 1997, 2003). Within the model, a

21   transition is depicted as a process comprising of an individual's effort to cope with a set of

22   demands through the mobilization of internal (e.g., an athlete's knowledge) and external (e.g.,

23   social support) resources. Hindering a successful transition are barriers (e.g., an athlete's

24   lack of skills, interpersonal conflict). If an individual effectively overcomes the demands,

25   then they are proposed to experience a successfully transition. Conversely, ineffective coping

1  will lead to a crisis-transition and will require an intervention.

2  Despite the increase in transition literature and the development of potentially

3  relevant conceptual models, Park, Lavallee, and Tod (2013) observed that relatively few

4  studies conducted on athletes' transitions in the United Kingdom (UK) have employed a

5  theoretical framework. Notable exceptions sampling university student-athletes are Aquilina

6  (2013) and MacNamara & Collins (2010). MacNamara and Collins (2010) used Wylleman

7  and Lavallee's (2004) developmental model to inform their interviews with elite British track

8  athletes before and after their transition to university. Similarly, in her multinational study

9  into the opportunities and constraints for dual role athletes, Aquilina (2013) used Wylleman

10  and Lavallee's (2004) model to inform the researcher's approach to the interview process.

11  Within both studies, the challenges faced by dual role athletes (e.g., balancing academic,

12  athletic, and social commitments) and the potential resources for managing these demands

13  (e.g., motivation to fulfill potential) were identified. Sampling and reporting issues, however,

14  limit the generalizability of both studies. To illustrate, MacNamara and Collins (2010)

15  interviewed six athletes and triangulated their responses against those provided by significant

16  others and a talent development manager. The study therefore provides a useful insight into

17  the transitional experiences of British track athletes, but it does not encapsulate the

18  experience of student-athletes from other sports at the various universities. Furthermore,

19  although Aquilina (2013) achieved cross-cultural validity through triangulating British

20  student-athletes' responses with individuals from France and Finland, the study is restricted

21  since no information is provided about where the student-athletes were based or whether the

22  opportunities afforded to them were typical across British universities.

23  The critique made of Aquilina's (2013) study is particularly salient to the

24  understanding of British university student-athletes' experiences because individuals'

25  experiences vary markedly depending on which university they attend. Although high

1   academic standards are expected of students across all British universities, the assistance

2   student-athletes receive to maintain excellence in both academic and athletic domains will

3   vary based on the institution. To elaborate, in 2001, nine multi-sport high-performance

4   centers (HPCs) were established in the UK to support athletes' holistic development and a

5   number of these centers are located on university campuses (English Institute of Sport, 2015).

6   Elite student-athletes who enroll at these institutions are therefore more likely to have access

7   to support and provision (e.g., sport lifestyle advisors) than student-athletes are at other sites

8   (Aquilina & Henry, 2010). Indeed, McKenna and Dunstan-Lewis (2004) identified a lack of

9   support and understanding as one of the three areas of concern for elite student-athletes at a

10  'traditional' British university (i.e., where courses include classics, law, medicine, and

11  science). However, to date, McKenna and Dunstan-Lewis' study represents the only

12  investigation into the experiences of elite student-athletes at a specific British university and

13  a lack of understanding therefore exists about student-athletes at other institutions. This lack

14  of knowledge is compounded by the low validity of drawing from literature on student-

15  athletes in other nations. For example, despite a vast amount of literature existing on the

16  experiences of student-athletes in the United States of America (USA), elite student-athletes

17  in the USA more closely resemble professional sportspeople than students, and thus their

18  experiences cannot be readily applied to their British counterparts who are required to

19  demonstrate both academic and athletic excellence (Cross, 2004).

20          Accordingly, the purpose of the present study was to examine the transitional

21  experiences of student-athletes based at British university housing a national HPC and

22  offering elite sport support services. More specifically, the aim was to conduct a holistic

23  exploration of the demands faced by student-athletes, the resources they had available for

24  coping with these demands, the coping strategies implemented, and any barriers that inhibited

25  their successful transition. Furthermore, it was hoped that the results from the study would

1    inform future support and provision for elite student-athletes at the university.

2                                                                **Method**

3    **Design**

4         To investigate the multifaceted transitional challenges faced by university student-

5    athletes, a single instrumental case study design was used with the university representing the

6    unit of analysis (Stake, 1995). This approach involved selecting a specific case (i.e., the

7    university) and using multiple perspectives rooted within that context to explore and illustrate

8    the problem of interest (Creswell, 2013; Lewis & McNaughton Nicholls, 2014). To obtain

9    these multiple perspectives, a combination of interviews and focus groups were conducted.

10   Interviews were used with current and recently graduated student-athletes to allow their

11   personal experiences of the transitions to be fully explored and their journey through

12   university to be understood (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). To provide further detail and create

13   a holistic representation (cf. Lambert & Loiselle, 2008), focus groups were then conducted

14   with administrators, coaches, and support staff to enable their collective observations of the

15   experiences of student-athletes to be captured. To direct the data interpretation, Wylleman

16   and Lavallee's (2004) developmental model of transitions faced by athletes and Stambulova's

17   (2003) athletic career transition model were used.

18   **The Case**

19        A British university was purposively selected for this study based on the number of

20   elite student-athletes at the institution, its record of sporting success, and its provision of elite

21   athlete support. To elaborate, student-athletes at the university perform on a national or

22   international level in 13 performance and development sports (i.e., sports receiving accessing

23   to elite support services). In addition, the university acts as the base for athletes from four

24   National Governing Bodies. In terms of sporting success, over 90 athletes with relations to

25   the university competed in the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, and 35 current

1     and ex student-athletes won medals at the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow (LLoyd,

2     2014). The university has also won the British Universities and Colleges Sport

3     Championships for 34 consecutive years (British Universities & Colleges Sport, 2014). Elite

4     athletes studying at the university have access to sports science and medicine (e.g., fitness

5     testing, physiotherapy) services (Sport Development Centre, 2015). Furthermore, student-

6     athletes receive academic support from an education and development manager, lifestyle

7     support from performance sport mentors, and the most talented performers also receive

8     financial support.

9     **Participants**

10     Participants were recruited based on their current or previous experience of student-

11     athletes' transitions at the case university.  In total, 26 individuals (6 current student-athletes,

12     3 recently graduated student-athletes, 9 coaches, 3 support staff, and 5 administrators) were

13     included in the sample.  Descriptive information for the current and recently graduated

14     student-athletes is provided in Table 1. Recently graduated student-athletes had completed

15     their university studies one year prior to the interview and were currently still participating in

16     elite sport. Nine of the current coaches at the university chose to participate in the focus

17     groups and represented a range of sports including cricket, field hockey, rugby union,

18     swimming, and track and field.  Coaching experience at the case university ranged from one

19     year to 18 years.  The support staff were one physiotherapist and two strength and

20     conditioning coaches, and their experience working with university sports ranged from four

21     years to 10 years.  Administrative staff held a variety of roles (e.g., performance sport

22     strategic manager, sports scholarship scheme manager) and their experience working in

23     university sport ranged between two and 12 years.

24     **Interview Guide and Questioning Route**

25     An interview guide and a questioning route were developed for the interviews and

1    focus groups, respectively.  The interview guide was divided into five sections.  The first

2    section informed participants about the nature of the study, its purpose, participant right of

3    voluntary withdrawal, the treatment of data, and the precautions taken to ensure

4    confidentiality and participant anonymity.  The second section provided a consent form that

5    allowed participants to indicate that they had fully understood the details of the project and to

6    ask any remaining questions.  The interview began in earnest at the beginning of the third

7    section of the interview guide where participants were asked to provide relevant contextual

8    information (e.g., their age, their time participating in sport).  Following the completion of

9    this part of the interview, student-athletes were asked to draw a timeline of their journey

10   through university sport mapping particular challenges and successes they had experienced.

11   Once completed, the diagram acted as a prompt for participant recall and it provided specific

12   events for the interview to explore.  Section four comprised the main part of the interview

13   and asked questions about the challenges faced by student-athletes during university, the

14   necessary skills, attitudes, and values individuals needed to develop to cope with them, and

15   the barriers they encountered.  An example question is "what skills, attitudes, and values do

16   student-athletes need to develop whilst they are at university?"  The fifth section concluded

17   the interview by encouraging participants to share any thoughts about their interview

18   experience. Although the interview guide was semi-structured and the order of the sections

19   remained constant across interviews, the order of the questions asked within each section

20   varied in accordance with the flow of the conversation.

21        A questioning route was developed to guide the focus groups conducted with the

22   administrators, coaches, and support staff; it comprised the same five main sections as the

23   interview guide.  The first and second sections provided detailed information about the study

24   and the opportunity for the participants to provide informed consent.  The third section

25   invited participants to introduce themselves to the other members of the focus group by

1    providing their name and detailing their involvement in university sport, and to discuss an

2    opening topic (viz. the benefits and consequences for student-athletes participating in

3    university sport). The fourth section comprised questions that were designed to elicit

4    discussion about the challenges they had observed student-athletes encountering, the

5    resources they felt student-athletes should develop, and any strategies they had implemented

6    in an attempt to support the student-athletes. The fifth section concluded the focus group by

7    encouraging the participants to share any thoughts about their focus group experience.

8    **Procedure**

9         Following institutional ethical approval, enquiries were made via email to the elite

10   sport squads at the university, and to all of the university's administrators, coaches, and

11   support staff. Recently graduated student-athletes were contacted via email using the contact

12   details they had voluntarily provided in a database before they left the institution. For those

13   who were willing to take part, a mutually convenient time and location was arranged. In

14   total, ten semi-structured interviews[2] and five focus groups took place. Interviews were

15   conducted either face-to-face or over Skype$^{TM}$. To ensure that participants' responses were

16   accurately represented in the final data set, all interviews were digitally recorded. The

17   interviews lasted between 48 and 74 min and, following transcription, yielded 152 pages of

18   single-line spaced text. All of the participants were given pseudonyms to protect their

19   identity and ensure their anonymity.

20        Focus groups were clustered according to participants' roles (i.e., there were three

21   focus groups with coaches, one with support staff, and one with administrators). The first

22   author acted as the facilitator for the focus groups and each group contained between three or

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[2]In addition to the interviews conducted with student-athletes, an interview was took place with one administrator. This decision was made to alleviate any hierarchical issues that may have resulted from his senior role and potentially restricted participant disclosure (cf. Hollander, 2004); head and assistant coaches from the same sport were also separated in the focus groups for this reason.

1  four participants to allow adequate speaking time for each participant and to encourage

2  effective interaction and exchange of views (Krueger & Casey, 2009; Stewart, Shamdasani,

3  & Rook, 2007). The five focus groups ranged in duration from 49 to 84 min and the audio

4  recordings were transcribed verbatim yielding 96 pages of single-line spaced text.

5  **Data Analysis**

6  The transcripts from the one-to-one interviews and focus groups were analyzed

7  together to enhance data completeness on the topic of student-athletes' transitional

8  experiences at the case university (cf. Lambert & Loiselle, 2008). Focus groups were thus

9  analyzed using whole group analysis so that each group became a comparable unit of analysis

10  to each of the individual interviews (Wilkinson, 2011). The first author analyzed the

11  transcripts using the guidelines from framework analysis presented in Spencer, Ritchie,

12  Ormston, O'Connor, and Barnard (2014; see also, Pope, Ziebland, & Mays, 2000). First,

13  transcript were read several times to ensure familiarization and then pertinent themes

14  emerging from the data were generated. Second, demand themes were structured according

15  to Wylleman and Lavallee's (2004) model and resource, barrier, and coping themes

16  associated with each demand where then structured according to Stambulova's (2003) model.

17  Third, data contained within each theme was reviewed to ensure that they had been collated

18  coherently and that no themes were missing from the framework. To further support this

19  stage of the analysis, two validation procedures were implemented. The first procedure

20  involved the second author independently reviewing the accuracy of the thematic framework

21  to the data. For the second procedure, an independent researcher (external to the research

22  team) reviewed a sample of raw data quotes (33%) and attempted to match them to the

23  themes generated. Although the clustering of the quotes to themes reached a satisfactory

24  level of agreement (97.3%), some of the themes were relabeled to better encapsulate the raw

25  data (e.g., high performance level was changed to continued increase in performance level;

1    increasing communication was changed to communicating with staff). The resultant thematic

2    framework is presented in Table 2. Finally, member validation was employed to ensure that

3    the interpretation of the data by the researchers represented the meaning initially intended by

4    the participants (Lewis, Ritchie, Ormston, & Morrell, 2014).

5                                                          **Results**

6            Constructed from the experiences of current student-athletes and supported by the

7    experiences of recently graduated student-athletes and university staff, the results from this

8    qualitative investigation depict the transitions encountered by dual role athletes at the case

9    university. The thematic framework resulting from the analysis, and the relationships

10   between demands, resources, barriers, and coping, are shown in Table 2. In total, 14

11   transitional demand themes were identified across the four levels (i.e., athletic,

12   academic/vocational, psychological, psychosocial) from 99 raw data quotes. Fourteen

13   personal (100 raw quotes) and 13 external (153 raw quotes) resource themes were identified;

14   ten external barrier themes (35 raw quotes) were also found[3]. Furthermore, participants

15   described nine coping strategy themes (91 raw quotes). Below, a selection of extracts are

16   presented as illustrative examples of the demands faced by student-athletes at the case

17   university, the internal and external resources they have to deal with these demands, the

18   external barriers they may encounter, and the coping strategies they may implement.

19   **Athletic Level Transitions**

20           When arriving at the case university, student-athletes experienced two athletic

21   transitional demands: competition for selection and training and lifestyle expectations. In

22   relation to the latter, one student-athlete spoke of struggling to meet the elevated training

23   requirements of university sport: "At the start of the year, I found it really hard to adapt to

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[3] Within the data, all of the described personal barrier themes were experienced in relation to, or following, an external barrier theme (e.g., misperceptions of ability following experience of a national talent program). Therefore, external factors were the origins of these barriers and are presented instead of personal variables.

1    everything, because I was used to training only 3, 4 times a week, and now I train 10 times a

2    week". Evidence for this athletic level demand was also provided by the experiences of a

3    recently graduated student-athlete and various university staff. Within the administrator

4    focus group, for example, one individual stated:

5        I do think there are some people who are still not prepared for what we need them to

6        do when they come here. So some of them who've got by on talent and a couple of

7        training sessions a week . . . come here, and they're expected to train at least once,

8        sometimes twice a day, you can't go out drinking, you can't do this, you can't do that,

9        and it's a big step up.

10        To cope with these transitional demands, participants spoke of the impact that existing

11    student-athletes at the university had. For example, one of the current student-athlete

12    described how he tried to support new student-athletes meet their sports expectations:

13        I just try and be a good example and help the Freshers out . . . you've got to help

14        people to not make the same mistakes that you did, and just be a good role model as

15        the old guy.

16        Furthermore, support staff noted the importance of elite role model peers within the

17    university environment for setting the standard expected and for inspiring new student-

18    athletes to reach this level:

19        Role models will determine the culture of an environment and putting young, easily

20        influenced people into a setting where they have a carrot dangled in front of them,

21        will lead them to interpret what has been set as the standards and culture of that club.

22        This process of observational learning described by the staff was evident in both the

23    current and recently graduated student-athletes' responses. For example, one recently

24    graduated student-athlete described how she learnt from the international athletes training at

25    the case university:

1   Once I realized that [being an international swimmer] was what I really wanted, I

2   started looking at the way that the other people at the ITC [Intensive Training Centre]

3   conducted themselves and there was no excuses. There's a reason that they're the

4   best, and I needed to behave like them if I wanted to be the best.

5   However, staff at the case university also discussed how student-athletes' attempts to

6 overcome the demands they encounter as part of their initial transition into university sport,

7 and throughout their time at university (e.g., continued increase in performance level, injury

8 and fitness issues, performance setbacks), were hindered by various external barriers. More

9 specifically, staff noted that the societal celebrity culture combined with experience on talent

10 identification (ID) programs, resulted in some student-athletes holding misperceptions about

11 their ability and lacking the necessary work ethic to overcome these sporting demands. The

12 administrator quote below elucidates the impact of talent ID programs:

13   The proliferation of world class performance programs and the fact that these kids

14   have practiced in a national under-14 program, under-16 program, under-18 program;

15   they are probably privileged beyond their talent too early. And therefore they

16   sometimes get minor delusions of grandeur before they have actually earned the

17   privilege of getting the support that we can offer them. And I do have a real concern

18   that too many kids who are highly talented, but just don't have the work ethic. And

19   they still arrive to us at age 18 with an expectation that we're just going to keep

20   supporting them whatever.

21 **Academic/Vocational Level Transitions**

22   During their time at the case university, the student-athletes experienced academic

23 transitional demands when meeting the requirements of their university degree and when

24 preparing for a post-university career. In relation to the transitional demands of embarking

25 on a degree, one student-athlete spoke of her teammate's struggle to meet the extensive

1    commitments of her Masters degree in Sport Science:

2        She's so busy and she's struggling to come to training, it seems like such a nightmare

3        . . . she just lived in the library and was always in labs . . . I don't know if I could have

4        looked forward to playing hockey at the end of the day if I had 9-5 like she did.

5        Recently graduated student-athletes and staff also acknowledged the difficulties

6    experienced by student-athletes when attempting to meet the demands of a degree program,

7    as the following quote from a recently graduated student-athlete illustrates:

8        My dissertation supervisor wanted me to start collecting data right at the end of

9        October, the start of the Masters year . . . so it meant that as soon as the hockey season

10       started, I had to start my dissertation as well so it was a lot harder to manage it.

11       To support student-athletes overcome these academic demands, the case university

12   provides a variety of academic processes (e.g., academic flexibility, progress reports),

13   perceived by the participants to make it unique from any other British universities. For

14   example, one current student-athlete described how the case university was, to his

15   knowledge, "the only university that lets you do a stretch degree", which enabled him to split

16   his final year of study over two years. Furthermore, one student-athlete described how

17   academic flexibility enabled him to attend international competitions without missing class:

18       If we have an international competition we'll fly out on the Thursday so generally I'll

19       miss from midday Thursday or sometimes all day and Friday, but the department have

20       been quite flexible. If I've needed to change a lab group or anything like that, I've

21       been able to.

22       Within his interview, the administrator also espoused the uniqueness of provision at

23   the case university, as the following extract illustrates:

24       We have, I think, support systems that are way ahead of almost any other university in

25       the UK. To actually have formal university policy that's been through Senate which

1    outlines how academic flexibility will work with elite student-athletes, how stretch

2    degrees work . . . I would guarantee there is no other university in this county that has

3    got that level of policy written into the university structure.

4        Some of the systems put in place at the case university, however, were not perceived

5    as positively. To elaborate, the case university has an affiliation with a local further

6    education college. The college provides elite student-athletes, who fail to achieve the

7    necessary grades to attend the university, an alternative setting to continue their study whilst

8    benefiting from the support provision at the university. Although this partnership has

9    increased the number of athletes available for selection, the coaches noted that it has also

10   created discontinuity in the course expectations and challenges faced by the student-athletes:

11       With the college on board, we have more athletes that go to the college and the

12       majority of athletes that are struggling are at the college . . . I think the problem is that

13       the college kids see what the uni kids do and they think they can do exactly the same.

14       To cope with the academic demands they encounter and to utilize the flexibility in

15   place, participants described how student-athletes were, or needed to be, proactive and plan

16   ahead. One student-athlete spoke about meeting with their academic personal tutor to

17   organize their potentially stressful exam period:

18       I went to see him [personal tutor] to sort it [missing an exam] out and find out what I

19       could do about it. Obviously this may happen again in the summer and it's a big time

20       for me, that's when there's potentially international races and there could be an issue

21       in managing to do the exam and all my other things as well.

22   **Psychological Level Transitions**

23       Psychological transitional demands for student-athletes encapsulated the movement

24   from adolescence to adulthood including developing identity, establishing personal

25   motivation, learning to look after oneself, and taking personal responsibility for one's

1    development.  For example, one student-athlete spoke about how he had become more

2    willing to take responsibility for his training since being at university:

3         I think that now I've come to university I feel more independent. I think it relates to

4         the sport as well. So now I'm prepared to take training into my own hands and try and

5         make it better myself rather than just taking orders from a coach.

6         Within the coaches' focus groups, it was evident that this transition towards personal

7    responsibility occurred gradually during a student-athlete's experience at university:

8         I just see them accepting far more responsibility over their actions, and their

9         directions, and their lives really . . . And it's just a gradual process of seeing them

10        start to take ownership of their lives a little bit more.

11        Coaches were perceived to have an active role in student-athletes' development of

12   personal responsibility.  Coaching staff described, for example, how they "try and throw them

13   [the players] a lot of responsibility, so they will lead match-day debriefs and stuff like that".

14   However, coaches were also mindful and hesitant of always providing proactive support to

15   student-athletes without them initially seeking help, as the following quote illustrates:

16        I was wondering what [coach's name] said [about making student-athletes aware of

17        the processes]. If we put interventions in place, well preventions I guess, how much

18        do they [the student-athletes] then just think that is the normal standard, and that is

19        what they should expect every time they've given up. Does that actually solve them

20        being proactive and doing it for themselves?

21        Parents, on the other hand, were perceived to make this transition in personal

22   responsibility more difficult for student-athletes by having taken responsibility for large

23   amounts of the student-athletes' lives prior to university.  For example, a recently graduated

24   student-athlete stated that living at home prior to university meant that parents "did

25   everything for you". This assertion was reinforced by members of the administrator focus

1  group who described how support from parents and schools, prior to university, left many

2  student-athletes  without the ability to look after themselves or take responsibility:

3          People regularly tell me we get athletes in here now who've been molly-cuddled, up

4              until the point of 18, and they come here and they can't even make a sandwich or

5              wash their clothes, because their parents or their schools have done it all for them.

6          One of the methods that participants believed student-athletes could use to cope with

7  the demands associated with taking personal responsibility was to display openness for

8  learning and challenge. The desire for learning was also perceived to be important for

9  student-athletes reaching a higher athletic standard, as the following extract illustrates:

10         I think the ones who perform best are the ones who are open-minded, inquisitive,

11             curious, who want to know and understand what is happening to them. The ones who

12             are more 'coach tell me if I need to go left or right', will get to certain point, but will

13             probably not make it to the next step. So there is a degree of desire to learn that has to

14             be there in the individual.

15  **Psychosocial Level Transitions**

16         On a psychosocial level, student-athletes were described as experiencing a change in

17  coach, a decrease in parental support, and the need to establish new friendships when starting

18  at university. In addition, these psychosocial demands continued throughout student-athletes'

19  time at university as they were required to balance and manage their relationships. Student-

20  athletes' experiences of changing their coach varied among participants. For example, some

21  established an immediate rapport with their new coach and were complimentary of them: "he

22  [the coach] is like my mentor as well as my coach" and "he [the coach] was the most

23  knowledgeable person that I have had by miles". However, others experienced difficulty

24  initially bonding with their new coach: "I think the coach thought I had a bit of an attitude, or

25  thought I was a bit of a pisshead, or didn't think I was focused regarding my hockey".

1    Furthermore, the coach-athlete relationship was perceived to fluctuate through university.

2    One current-student athlete, for example, described how the relationship changed after their

3    first year at the university: "after the first year, I knew the coach quite well and I got on with

4    him so, there's a bit more of a bond, we know each other quite well and I'm quite happy to

5    discuss things".  A recently graduated student-athlete described how his challenging coach-

6    athlete relationship, ultimately had a positive impact on his hockey:

7           I thought he [the coach] was one of the best coaches I've had in that he showed me it

8           is not easy to succeed, you have to push yourself and I'm not going to lie, if I hadn't

9           gone to [the case university], if I hadn't been coached by him, I wouldn't be the

10          player I am today. That's not to say there weren't times you hated him, but that's the

11          same with every coach, you hate them at times, but you actually think they're class.

12          One of the strategies that was described by the participants to help them understand

13   the requirements of their new coach was to increase communication with the staff member.

14   In this instance, a recently graduated student-athlete outlined how he felt greater

15   communication with a coach or experienced student-athlete teammates could help alleviate

16   this transitional demand:

17          There needed to be more communication. Be that sitting down [with the coach], or

18          even some of the older members of squad sitting down all of the freshers [first year

19          students] and explaining 'each and every one of us has had different experiences

20          regarding our first year, but this is what is expected of you in your first few weeks,

21          then next few weeks, then next few weeks'.

22          In addition, coaches described how a student-athlete's ability to effectively

23   communicate and act with integrity were important for establishing a coach-athlete

24   relationship.  For example, within one of the coaches' focus groups, participants described

25   how athletes needed to be "comfortable in picking a phone up, or letting people know where

1    they are, what's going on in their family" if they required support. Integrity and emotional

2    intelligence were highlighted in another coach focus group, as the following quote illustrates:

3        To have that little bit of emotional intelligence to realize what their values are and

4        show good integrity towards those . . . they [individuals who do this] ultimately last

5        really well and make the most of everything in the program. They connect really well

6        with their peers and staff and everyone around them.

7        One of the barriers faced when establishing a relationship with a new coach for team-

8    sport athletes at the case university, was the lack of flexibility in who their coach would be.

9    This meant that student-athletes in team-sports were required to try and build these

10   relationships, whereas individual-sport athletes were able to change. The following extract

11   from the support staff focus group illustrates this dynamic:

12       The other thing slightly different is that in the [individual-sport] disciplines, if you

13       don't have synergy with the coach you can go and get a different coach. Whereas if

14       you don't have synergy with the [team-sport] coach and you're a [team-sport] player

15       then there is no other option there. So with regard to role models and personal

16       development, and the mentoring and pastoral support coaches and support staff are

17       giving, in some scenarios there is slightly more flexibility.

18                                    **Discussion**

19       The current study explored the transitional experiences of student-athletes based at a

20   British university housing a national HPC and offering elite sport support services. An in-

21   depth understanding of these transitions was developed through analysis of qualitative data

22   collected with student-athletes studying at the university, athletes who have recently

23   graduated from the institution, and the university staff (e.g., coaches) who aim to support

24   athletes during these years. The results from the study demonstrate that student-athletes

25   experienced simultaneous transitions in athletic (e.g., training and lifestyle expectations),

1    academic (e.g., course requirements), psychological (e.g., taking personal responsibility), and

2    psychosocial (e.g., change in coach) development. Furthermore, participants reported a

3    variety of personal (e.g., dedication and strong work ethic, self-discipline) and external (e.g.,

4    academic flexibility, elite role model peers) resources that help student-athletes cope with the

5    transitional demands. Coping strategies implemented by student-athletes included

6    communicating with staff, observational learning of through their peers, and setting goals. A

7    range of external barriers (e.g., parental overprotection, society and celebrity culture)

8    hindering student-athletes' transitions were also described.

9         The identification of multifaceted transitional experiences by the participants in the

10   current study supports extant research into the simultaneous development proposed to occur

11   in athletes between the ages of 18 and 21 years (see, e.g., Knowles & Lorimer, 2014; Miller

12   & Kerr, 2002). For example, current student-athletes, recently graduated student-athletes,

13   and staff reported a psychological development in student-athletes level of personal

14   responsibility and this shift was likely to be related to the concurrent psychosocial transition

15   of decreasing parental support. The transitions experienced by student-athletes at the case

16   university in the current study also support those previously identified in British track athletes

17   commencing university (see, MacNamara & Collins, 2010). Both studies identified higher

18   standards of training and a change in coach as significant transitions, for example. However,

19   the current study also advances the previous work of MacNamara and Collins (2010) because

20   it investigated student-athletes' transitions throughout their university study (e.g., post-

21   university career), rather than solely focusing on the immediate experiences at the start of

22   university. The transitions described in the current study are also comparable to those found

23   in non-student British athletes at this age (see, e.g., Finn & McKenna, 2010) and university

24   student-athletes from other nations (see, e.g., Falls & Wilson, 2013).

25        The current study drew on Stambulova's (1997, 2003) athlete career transition model

1    to explore the factors which affected the success of student-athletes' transitions at the case

2    university.  When reflecting on the support provided to student-athletes at the institution,

3    participants acknowledged the uniqueness of provision compared to other British universities.

4    For example, the case university has formal legislation detailing how elite athletes can

5    receive special dispensation if academic and athletic commitments clash and if they want to

6    extend their studies for an additional year.  Furthermore, the existence of a national HPC on-

7    site meant that elite student-athletes had access to an array of medical and sport science

8    support.  This provision is in stark contrast to that described previously by McKenna and

9    Dunstan-Lewis (2004) at a 'traditional' British university.  Indeed, the challenges (e.g.,

10   relationships with academia, lack of support and understanding) described in McKenna and

11   Dunstan-Lewis' study were not evident in the current study, with academic staff and a high

12   quality academic course, instead, perceived as resources for overcoming transitional

13   demands.  This latter observation on the benefit of study alongside sport is in accordance with

14   that previously found in British, Finnish, and French university student-athletes by Aquilina

15   (2013); it does, however, contrast with findings previously reported on the perceptions of

16   Australian student-athletes (see, Cosh & Tully, 2014) and Swedish adolescent student-

17   athletes (see, Stambulova et al., in press). One explanation for the difference found between

18   student-athletes' perceptions in the current study and those in Cosh and Tully's (2014) study,

19   for example, may be that the increased support for academic studies provided at the case

20   university transforms the course from a chore to a welcome distraction.  However,

21   irrespectively of the support on offer, participants in the current study also emphasized how

22   student-athletes still needed to possess and display a desire for learning, which, as described

23   below, was not the case for all individuals at the case university.

24          Participants perceived student-athletes encountered a range of external barriers that

25   subsequently resulted in personal deficiencies.  To illustrate, prior experience of junior

1    performance programs, professional academies, or National Lottery funding was thought to

2    result in a lack of work ethic and a climate of expectancy. Staff, for example, suggested that

3    some elite student-athletes arrived at the university with "minor delusions of grandeur".

4    Furthermore, coaching staff debated the merits of providing proactive support as opposed to

5    allowing the student-athletes to learn from their own mistakes. Within the UK, such a debate

6    would be uncommon at the majority of universities because academic and athletic

7    departments operate independently and student-athletes are given personal agency over

8    ensuring they meet the expectations placed on them. These discussions therefore represent a

9    novel finding in the literature on university student-athletes' transitions; however they do

10   concur with the emerging talent development literature which opposes overtly supportive

11   programs, in favor of those which involve challenge and coping (see, e.g., Collins &

12   MacNamara, 2012; Howells & Fletcher, 2015; Sarkar, Fletcher, & Brown, in press). This

13   finding therefore has potentially significant implications for practitioners and policy makers

14   as it questions whether existing support practices are actually having the desired long-term

15   effects on athletes' development.

16          The participants in the current study described a range of coping strategies that

17   student-athletes implemented to overcome the transitional demands they experienced. Whilst

18   MacNamara and Collins (2010) have previously highlighted the use of goal setting, the

19   remainder of the coping strategies identified represent new findings in British university

20   student-athletes. For example, student-athlete participants described how they overcame the

21   psychosocial transition of changing coach by approaching them prior attending university and

22   ensuring that they maintained communication with them. Furthermore, social agents were

23   found to be an important source of support, encouragement, and escape, and peers were a

24   source of observational learning and social comparison to help student-athletes achieve

25   excellence in both their sport, and their studies. The impact of social agents observed in the

1    current study supports a recent exploration of the transitional experiences of Australian

2    university student-athletes (see, Cosh & Tully, in press) and elite dual career athletes (see,

3    Debois et al., in press), within which participants reported seeking social support from either

4    their coach or parent to overcome demands.

5         The findings of the current study have a range of practical implications for how

6    universities can facilitate student-athletes' coping with the transitions they experience. First,

7    participants suggested that student-athletes would benefit from arriving at university with an

8    awareness of the requirements to be placed on them. To support this, greater communication

9    between coach and incoming student-athlete should be implemented. Additionally, student-

10   athletes suggested that they would have benefitted from having more experienced student-

11   athletes sharing their first-year experiences. Second, the case university has successfully

12   implemented a system of academic flexibility and communication between academic and

13   athletic departments that is unique in the UK; other universities should explore how they can

14   enhance dialogue within their institutions to provide greater support to their elite student-

15   athletes. Third, whilst student-athletes were described as needing to be proactive in seeking

16   support and in learning how to take personal responsibility over their development, coaches

17   can also play a significant role in creating opportunities for student-athletes to overcome

18   these psychological demands. For example, coaches could give student-athletes

19   responsibility for establishing team ethos and for determining squad discipline, as this would

20   teach them that they are accountable for their own actions. The suggestions listed here,

21   however, give rise to an important debate regarding whether university level student-athletes

22   benefit most from proactive support or experiential learning. To elaborate, some of the

23   participants encouraged the use of support strategies (e.g., academic flexibility) to help

24   student-athletes cope with their holistic transitions. However, this contradicted the view held

25   by others who were critical of the increasing support athletes received prior to university

1    (e.g., talent programs).  To resolve this debate, it is likely that institutions will need to

2    establish a balance between support and independence, perhaps in part graded by the student-

3    athletes' year of study as they grow and increase their level of personal responsibility.

4         The current paper advances previous work on the development of student-athletes at

5    British universities which has been limited to the experience of a specific transition by British

6    track athletes (see, MacNamara & Collins, 2010), student-athlete experiences at a traditional

7    British university (see, McKenna & Dunstan-Lewis, 2004), and a general account of student-

8    athlete experiences (see, Aquilina, 2013). Furthermore, a notable strength of this study is the

9    recruitment of participants from a range of roles associated with student-athletes (e.g.,

10   administrators, coaches), in addition to the student-athletes themselves, as this provides

11   multiple perspectives that hopefully engender a holistic and comprehensive examination of

12   the student-athlete experience (cf. Johnston, Harwood, & Minniti, 2013; Jones, Dunn, Holt,

13   Sullivan, & Bloom, 2011). A limitation of the current study was the lack of representation

14   from academic staff.  The decision not to recruit academic staff was made because it was

15   anticipated that any one staff member would have had only sporadic experience of transitions

16   in student-athletes.  However, notwithstanding this justification, the results from this study

17   suggest that academic staff play an active role in shaping the development of student-athletes

18   and future research would benefit from obtaining their perspectives and an understanding of

19   how academic and athletic departments can work in collaboration for the benefit of the

20   students.  A further limitation of the current study is the use of a case study methodology

21   since this precludes comparison between the experiences of student-athletes at the case

22   university and those in other settings.  Future research should compare the experiences of

23   student-athletes across a variety of British universities, in addition to conducting a cross-

24   cultural exploration of university student-athletes' experiences in North America, Europe,

25   and the rest of the world.

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1    Table 1

2    *Current and Recently Graduated Student-Athletes' Descriptive Information*

| Participant | Gender | Age | Year of study | Sport | Current sport level |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SA1 | F | 18 | 1st | Track and field | Junior national champion |
| SA2 | M | 20 | 1st | Rugby union | University 1st XV |
| SA3 | M | 19 | 1st | Triathlon | National series |
| SA4 | M | 20 | 2nd | Badminton | International |
| SA5 | M | 22 | 5th (Final) | Triathlon | World champion |
| SA6 | F | 21 | 3rd (Final) | Field hockey | University 1st XI |
| AL1 | M | 22 | | Field hockey | International |
| AL2 | F | 23 | | Swimming | International |
| AL3 | F | 26 | | Field hockey | National league |

3    *Note.* SA = student-athlete; AL = recently graduated student-athlete; F = female; M = male

1    Table 2

2    *The Demands and Related Resources, Barriers, and Coping Strategies Observed in Student-Athletes' Transitions at the Case University*

| Transitional demand | Resources utilized | Barriers encountered | Coping strategies implemented |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Athletic level** | | | |
| Competition for selection (10) | *Internal*<br>Dedication and strong work ethic (1)<br>Desire for and openness to learning and challenge (1)<br>Resilience (3)<br>Self-awareness (3) | | Being proactive and planning ahead (1)<br>Observational learning and social comparison (1)<br>Quitting (2)<br>Seeking social support (1) |
| | | *External*<br>Overly competitive and intimidating teammates (2) | |
| Injury setbacks and fitness issues (14) | *Internal*<br>Injury-awareness (3)<br>Opportunistic, optimistic, and positive personality (4)<br>Patience (1)<br>Resilience (3)<br><br>*External*<br>Coach support (2)<br>National Lottery funding and professional academies (1)<br>Nurturing environment and access to facilities (1)<br>Parental and partner support (1)<br>Scholarship (1) | | Being proactive and planning ahead (3)<br>Changing personal priorities (1)<br>Communicating with staff (1)<br>Quitting (2)<br>Seeking social support (2) |

| Transitional demand | Resources utilized | Barriers encountered | Coping strategies implemented |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Support staff (4) | | |
| Performance setbacks (9) | *Internal* Career-awareness (1) Dedication and strong work ethic (2) Desire for and openness to learning and challenge (2) Resilience (8) Self-awareness (1) | | Being proactive and planning ahead (2) Communicating with staff (1) Displaying openness to learning and challenge (2) Goal setting (1) Quitting (1) Seeking social support (2) |
| | *External* Coach support (2) High quality academic course (1) Non-sport housemates (2) Nurturing environment and access to facilities (1) | *External* Breakdown in coach-athlete relationship (1) National Lottery funding, academies, and talent identification programs fostering misperceptions of status (3) Parental overprotection (1) Society and celebrity culture (1) | |
| Training and lifestyle expectations (11) | *Internal* Appreciation of others (2) Dedication and strong work ethic (3) Desire for and openness to learning and challenge (1) Honesty, humility, and integrity (1) Interpersonal skills (1) Opportunistic, optimistic, and positive personality (1) Organization and time-management (3) Patience (1) Personal decision making ability (1) | | Being proactive and planning ahead (4) Changing personal priorities (2) Communicating with staff (3) Displaying openness to learning and challenge (3) Observational learning and social comparison (8) Overcommitting (1) Quitting (1) Seeking social support (4) |

| Transitional demand | Resources utilized | Barriers encountered | Coping strategies implemented |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Self-awareness (2)<br>Self-discipline (5)<br><br>*External*<br>Coach support (8)<br>Elite role model peers (8)<br>National Lottery funding and professional academies (2)<br>Nurturing environment and access to facilities(3)<br>Presence of training group and teammates (7)<br>Support staff (3) | *External*<br>Lack of understanding from non-sport housemates (5)<br>Non-student performance squads' facility access (1)<br>Overly competitive and intimidating teammates (3)<br>Society and celebrity culture (1) | |
| Continued increase of performance level (3) | *Internal*<br>Dedication and strong work ethic (7)<br>Desire for and openness to learning and challenge (2)<br>Opportunistic, optimistic, and positive personality (2)<br>Organization and time-management (3)<br>Patience (1)<br>Personal decision making ability (4)<br>Self-awareness (2)<br><br>*External*<br>Academic flexibility (3)<br>Academic staff (1)<br>Coach support (8)<br>Elite role model peers (6) | *External*<br>Breakdown in coach-athlete relationship (2)<br>Lack of understanding from non-sport housemates (1) | Being proactive and planning ahead (8)<br>Changing personal priorities (4)<br>Communicating with staff (2)<br>Displaying openness to learning and challenge (2)<br>Observational learning and social comparison (7)<br>Seeking social support (9) |

| Transitional demand | Resources utilized | Barriers encountered | Coping strategies implemented |
|---|---|---|---|
| | High quality academic course (5) National Lottery funding and professional academies (3) Non-sport housemates (2) Nurturing environment and access to facilities (13) Parental and partner support (3) Presence of training group and teammates (8) Scholarships (1) Support programs (1) Support staff (5) | Overly competitive and intimidating teammates (5) Parental overprotection (2) Pressure from university reputation (1) Society and celebrity culture (1) | |
| **Academic/vocational level** | | | |
| Course requirements (9) | *Internal* Career-awareness (1) Dedication and strong work ethic (3) Desire for and openness to learning and challenge (2) Interpersonal skills (2) Opportunistic, optimistic, and positive personality (4) Organization and time-management (7) Personal decision making ability (4) Self-discipline (3) *External* Academic flexibility (8) Academic staff (1) Coach support (15) | *External* Affiliation with local college creating discontinuity in academic expectation (2) | Being proactive and planning ahead (14) Changing personal priorities (2) Communicating with staff (8) Displaying openness to learning and challenge (5) Observational learning and social comparison (2) Seeking social support (1) |

| Transitional demand | Resources utilized | Barriers encountered | Coping strategies implemented |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Elite role model peers (1) | Societal emphasis on higher education (1) | |
| | High quality academic course (1) | | |
| | Nurturing environment and access to facilities (1) | | |
| | Parental and partner support (1) | | |
| | Support staff (8) | | |
| Post-university career (8) | *Internal* | | Being proactive and planning ahead (5) |
| | Appreciation of others (2) | | |
| | Career-awareness (7) | | Changing personal priorities (3) |
| | Interpersonal skills (3) | | Communicating with staff (9) |
| | Opportunistic, optimistic, and positive personality (1) | | Displaying openness to learning and challenge (2) |
| | Personal decision making ability (2) | | |
| | | | |
| | *External* | | |
| | Academic staff (2) | | |
| | Coach support (6) | | |
| | High quality academic course (1) | | |
| | Support programs (2) | | |
| | Support staff (1) | | |
| Psychological level | | | |
|   Developing identity (1) | *Internal* | | Being proactive and planning ahead (2) |
| | Self-awareness (2) | | |
| | | | Changing personal priorities (1) |
| | *External* | *External* | Communicating with staff (1) |
| | Coach support (1) | National Lottery funding, academies, and talent identification programs fostering misperceptions of status (3) | Observational learning and social comparison (1) |
| | Elite role model peers (1) | | |
| | High quality academic course (1) | | |
| | Non-sport housemates (1) | | |
| | Support programs (1) | | |

| Transitional demand | Resources utilized | Barriers encountered | Coping strategies implemented |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Support staff (2) | | |
| Establishing personal motivation (4) | *Internal*<br>Career-awareness (4)<br>Dedication and strong work ethic (2)<br>Honesty, humility, and integrity (1)<br>Opportunistic, optimistic, and positive personality (1)<br>Personal decision making ability (1)<br>Self-awareness (4) | | Being proactive and planning ahead (5)<br>Changing personal priorities (5)<br>Communicating with staff (1)<br>Displaying openness to learning and challenge (2)<br>Goal setting (1)<br>Observational learning and social comparison (1) |
| | *External*<br>Coach support (3)<br>Elite role model peers (4)<br>High quality academic course (2)<br>Parental and partner support (2)<br>Presence of training group and teammates (3)<br>Support staff (1) | *External*<br>National Lottery funding, academies, and talent identification programs fostering misperceptions of status (2)<br>Overly competitive and intimidating teammates (1)<br>Society and celebrity culture (1) | Seeking social support (3) |
| Looking after oneself (2) | *Internal*<br>Organization and time-management (1)<br>Self-discipline (1) | | Being proactive and planning ahead (2)<br>Changing personal priorities (1)<br>Communicating with staff (3)<br>Displaying openness to learning and challenge (1)<br>Observational learning and social comparison (2) |
| | *External*<br>Coach support (6)<br>Elite role model peers (1)<br>High quality academic course (3)<br>Presence of training group and teammates (1)<br>Support staff (1) | *External*<br>Breakdown in coach-athlete relationship (1)<br>National Lottery funding, academies, and talent identification programs fostering misperceptions of status (1)<br>Parental overprotection (3) | Seeking social support (2) |

| Transitional demand | Resources utilized | Barriers encountered | Coping strategies implemented |
|---|---|---|---|
| Taking personal responsibility (13) | *Internal*<br>Career-awareness (6)<br>Dedication and strong work ethic (5)<br>Desire for and openness to learning and challenge (2)<br>Honesty, humility, and integrity (1)<br>Interpersonal skills (3)<br>Organization and time-management (2)<br>Personal decision making ability (10)<br>Self-awareness (4)<br>Self-discipline (1)<br><br>*External*<br>Coach support (12)<br>Elite role model peers (4)<br>High quality academic course (1)<br>Nurturing environment and access to facilities (1)<br>Presence of training group and teammates (4)<br>Support programs (1)<br>Support staff (2) | *External*<br>Breakdown in coach-athlete relationship (1)<br>National Lottery funding, academies, and talent identification programs fostering misperceptions of status (3)<br>Overly competitive and intimidating teammates (3)<br>Parental overprotection (3)<br>Society and celebrity culture (1) | Being proactive and planning ahead (14)<br>Changing personal priorities (4)<br>Communicating with staff (9)<br>Displaying openness to learning and challenge (6)<br>Goal setting (1)<br>Observational learning and social comparison (4)<br>Seeking social support (4) |
| Psychosocial level<br>  Change in coach and maintaining coach-athlete relationship (5) | *Internal*<br>Appreciation of others (1)<br>Desire for and openness to learning and challenge (1)<br>Honesty, humility, and integrity (2)<br>Interpersonal skills (3) | | Being proactive and planning ahead (2)<br>Communicating with staff (4) |

| Transitional demand | Resources utilized | Barriers encountered | Coping strategies implemented |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Self-awareness (1) | | |
| | | *External*<br>Breakdown in coach-athlete relationship (3)<br>National Lottery funding, academies, and talent identification programs fostering misperceptions of status (1) | |
| Loss of parental support (3)<br>Making new friends and managing relationships (7) | *Internal*<br>Self-discipline (1)<br>*Internal*<br>Appreciation of others (1)<br>Dedication and strong work ethic (1)<br>Desire for and openness to learning and challenge (1)<br>Interpersonal skills (2)<br>Opportunistic, optimistic, and positive personality (1)<br>Self-awareness (1) | | Being proactive and planning ahead (1)<br>Being proactive and planning ahead (3)<br>Changing personal priorities (1)<br>Displaying openness to learning and challenge (1)<br>Seeking social support (4) |
| | *External*<br>Coach support (2)<br>Non-sport housemates (1)<br>Nurturing environment and access to facilities (1)<br>Presence of training group and teammates (4)<br>Support programs (2) | *External*<br>Lack of understanding from non-sport housemates (2)<br>National Lottery funding, academies, and talent identification programs fostering misperceptions of status (1)<br>Overly competitive and intimidating teammates (1) | |

1    *Note.* Number in parentheses indicates the number of raw data quotes relevant to each theme.