Supporting Athletes Facing the Junior to Senior Transition

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### Fig. 1. The holistic athletic career model representing transitions and stages faced by athletes at athletic, psychological, psychosocial, academic/vocational, financial and legal levels of development. Note: A wavered line indicates that the age at which the transition occurs is an approximation.
Pressures from NGBs engage in sponsorships, advertisements etc.

Media recognition

Sport expected to be sole focus

New environment

Different Expectations/Requirements

Coach/Athlete relationship becomes paramount

Sport to Mastery

Development

Independence

Change in relationship with team-mates

Predictions

Parents/Friends less involved in journey

Time for activities outside of significantly reduced

Pressures of needing to perform

Isolation

Coaches become paramount

Number of sig transitions across these areas

Independence

Frequency

Anxiety

Number of sig transitions across these areas

Mastery

Identity

NGBs, Sponsors, Changes in financial demands

Identity

Belonging

Family become less involved

Identity

Belonging

Family become less involved

Belonging

Motivation

Support

NGBs, Sponsors, Changes in financial demands

Confidence

Anxiety

Isolation

Dependence

Performance

Identity

Belonging

Motivation

Support

Number of sig transitions across these areas

Psychological Level

Vocational & Financial Level

Social Level

Sport Level
Differences in the Transition Across Sports

- Team Vs. Individual
- Seasonal Competitions Vs. Long Competition Cycles
- Expected Vs. Un-Expected
- Transitioning Alone Vs. Group Transitioning
- Prepared For Vs. Unprepared For
TRANSITION TIMELINE
A TYPICAL JOURNEY FOR A MALE FOOTBALLER

INTERNATIONAL DUTY (U15+)
From this age players are eligible to be chosen to represent their country; this means they could be called up for camps and tournaments in their home country and abroad.

DEVELOPMENT
More comfortable, development environment – Every 2 years players must fight to be offered a place in the next age group up to continue their playing journey.

ACADEMY (U18–U21)
Performance environment – It is here that players will be offered full-time contracts and will focus solely on their football careers (finishing apprenticeships and education at 18 in order to do this).

POST-ACADEMY (U21–U23)
Mastery/Results environment – this is when players start to get their first professional training contracts. The environment becomes tougher and players continually fight for their place in the squad and their right to play. If players are not thought to be talented enough to go on loan (or in exceptional cases straight to the first team) they are released and must find themselves a new club.

FIRST TEAM
Results environment – if able to prove themselves as worthy of the first team, players will be offered a full-time contract. It often takes many years. And multiple different loan contracts/new clubs before a player gets to this point.

LOAN CONTRACT
Players often are sent out on loan to lower league first teams to experience senior football. This allows them to develop to a standard which would allow them to survive at first team level later in their career.
Developmental Environment

- Self-Awareness
- Developing an Awareness of Identity
- Openness to Learning
- Knowledge of own Goals and Development Pathway

Performance Environment

- Managing Competition Pressures
- Intrinsic Motivation
- Increased Possibility of Burnout
- Wider Identity Knowledge
- Increase in Pressure

Common Factors

- Determination
- Commitment
- Confidence
- Patience
- Coping Strategies

Integration

- Increased Pressure
- Intrinsic Motivation
- Openness to Learning
- Knowledge of own Goals and Development Pathway
- Developing an Awareness of Identity
- Self-Awareness

Wider Identity Knowledge

- Increased Possibility of Burnout

Patience

- Developing an Awareness of Identity
- Self-Awareness
- Openness to Learning
- Knowledge of own Goals and Development Pathway

Increased in Pressure

- Managing Competition Pressures
- Intrinsic Motivation
- Increased Possibility of Burnout
- Wider Identity Knowledge
- Increase in Pressure

Coping Strategies

- Developing an Awareness of Identity
- Self-Awareness
- Openness to Learning
- Knowledge of own Goals and Development Pathway

Confidence

- Developing an Awareness of Identity
- Self-Awareness
- Openness to Learning
- Knowledge of own Goals and Development Pathway

Commitment

- Developing an Awareness of Identity
- Self-Awareness
- Openness to Learning
- Knowledge of own Goals and Development Pathway

Determination

- Developing an Awareness of Identity
- Self-Awareness
- Openness to Learning
- Knowledge of own Goals and Development Pathway
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A Cross-Sectional Analysis of Athletes’ Experiences of the Junior-to-Senior Transition (Successful vs Unsuccessful)

**PURPOSE:**
The purpose of the study was to understand British track-and-field athletes experiences of the junior-to-senior transition. The study looked to explore the perceptions of athletes who experienced a successful junior-to-senior transition as well as those who experienced an unsuccessful transition.

Through interviews, the study looked to understand factors that athletes perceived to aid or hinder their transition outcome (e.g., What made the transition difficult? What helped you to make the transition? What support/resources would you have liked during the transition?).

**RESULTS:**
A total of 22 themes were constructed for those who experienced a successful junior-to-senior transition, compared to 25 for those who experienced an unsuccessful transition.

These themes were grouped into the following four categories:

- Individual Factors
- External Factors
- Cultural & Organisational Factors
- Intervention Strategies

**PARTICIPANTS:**
In total, 10 athletes were interviewed to explore their perceptions and experiences of the junior-to-senior transition.

5 athletes who successfully transitioned
- Female, 2-male
- Aged 26-32
- All athletes competed in an Olympic Games, a World Athletics Championships and a European Athletics Championships.
- Winning medals at the Olympic Games (n=3), World Athletics Championships (n=5), and European Athletics Championships (n=4).

5 athletes who unsuccessfully transitioned
- Female, 4-male
- Aged 26-37
- All athletes competed for Great Britain at either a World Junior Athletics Championships or a European U23 Athletics Championships.
- World Junior Champion (n=1), World Junior European U23 finalists (n=4).

**Purpose of the intervention**
The purpose of the intervention was to:
- provide athletes with appropriate education in order for them to manage sport and non-sport demands whilst negotiating the transition
- educate athletes on the importance of social support whilst providing athletes with opportunity to develop their support network (e.g., mentoring)
- support the holistic development of athletes in both their sporting and non-sporting lives

**Talks:**
- Talk: A Successful Transition by Dame Jessica Ennis-Hill
- Talk: A Challenging Transition by Matthew Lambley
- Personality: Understanding your Personality (Spotlight profile)
- Performance Lifestyle: Financial Advice/Planning
- Performance Lifestyle: Effective Time Management
- Sport Psychology: Coach-Athlete Relationship
- Sport Psychology: Building Confidence for the transition
- Physiotherapy: Looking after your Body during the Transition
- Mentoring: Learn from Experienced Senior Athletes

- Social Support: Supporting your Athlete through the Transition – Strategies for Coaches
- Nutrition: Fuelling your Body during the Junior-to-Senior Transition
- Social Support: Supporting your Athlete through the Transition – Strategies for Parents
- Talk: My Transition into Elite Swimming by Jay Lelliott
- Sport Psychology: Goal Setting for the Transition Period
- Coping Strategies to Manage the Transition
- Sport Psychology: one-on-one support
Considerations when Supporting an Athlete

- When will the athlete know if they’ve been successful in the transition? How does this line up with coach/NGB expectations?
- When will the transition be seen to be complete?
- What can the athlete do to prepare for the transition? How does your role support the athlete’s preparation?
- What is the time-frame of the transition?
- What is the athlete’s experiences of transitions in the past? How did the athlete handle these transitions?
- What is the athlete’s support system like?
- Are any other team-mates/athletes going through the same transition?
- What are the athletes expectations of the transition?
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