Chapter 3

Transitions on the athlete journey: a holistic perspective

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As athletes progress through their sporting career they experience several careers transitions, both expected and unexpected, which can impact on their mental wellbeing and athletic development. Such transitions may include, for example, the junior-to-senior transition, transitions to another club or training group, and retirement from sport. This chapter will explore varied transitions faced by athletes and the potential psychological challenges of these. It will discuss theoretical models and empirical research on within-career transitions, with a case study used to contextualise the potential challenges athletes may face and the potential ways to manage the process.

The case of Dan

To conceptualise the complexity of within career transitions and illustrate the various factors which may influence the process, below the case of Dan is outlined: a rugby player who is going through the transition to senior sport, one of the many transitions athletes may face during their career (see Box 3.1). Dan is also having to manage other facets of his life, meaning that his focus is not purely on his sport transition, creating further challenges.

Box 3.1 Case study: Dan (rugby)

Dan is an 18-year old rugby player who has just signed his first professional contract for his team who compete in the Premiership. The team which he plays for is very supportive of young players moving up from the youth to first team. Dan has played for several rugby teams in the past and has, in recent times, dedicated approximately 30 hours of every week to training to support his development, knowing that if he performs well, the team he is now with will give him an opportunity to stake a claim for a regular first team place.

He has recently moved away from home for the first time, in preparation for training full-time with his team. He has a fear of being away from his parents and siblings who have supported him throughout his youth career. He is also moving away from his friends, many of whom he has grown up with and spent time with doing various hobbies, including for instance, watching rugby, going cycling and playing in the park. Dan has also had a number of injuries recently and, although he believes he has a very good chance of being a successful player and having a lengthy career, he wants to explore the possibility of carrying on his education at University and exploring potential career options he may have post-retirement.

The case of Dan is common - athletes can often experience several concurrent and competing transitions, which combine to create a difficult process for those experiencing them. Research has started to conceptualise the types of transition that Dan is experiencing. This literature has identified that there are several transitions in the context of athletes' careers which may influence their

development. These transitions may have unique characteristics which need to be considered when implementing support to assist athletes as they go through these processes.

Models of transition

Transitions can be classified as normative transitions, which are those which are predictable and anticipated (e.g., the junior-to-senior transition; Sharf, 1997) and non-normative transitions, which are those which are unexpected (e.g., a career-ending injury; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). As non-normative transitions are difficult to predict they are not easily depictable in any transition frameworks or models (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). There have, however, been several normative career transition models, for example initial models (e.g., Bloom, 1985; Côté, 1999) have suggested that there are a series of stages that athletes will go through in their athletic careers including the initiation, development, mastery, and retirement phases.

The Holistic Athlete Career model

Wylleman and colleagues (2004, 2013) expanded upon previous work outlining normative transitions at the athletic level by also considering non-athletic domains. They suggest that athletes may experience different stages of development in five domains: athletic, psychological, psychosocial, academic/vocational, and financial (Wylleman, Reints, & De Knop, 2013). An adapted version of their model is shown in Figure 3.1, which highlights the stages of transition and, with a red rectangle, the anticipated transitions which may occur throughout athletes' careers. The age ranges represented are guidelines that may not apply to all sports (e.g., gymnasts may enter the mastery stage and retire from sport earlier).

Athletic level

The athletic level outlined by Wylleman and colleagues (2004, 2013) suggests that there are four normative transitions athletes go through. The first, the transition into competitive sports (the initiation stage), occurs at the age of approximately 5 or 6. This is where the athlete will be introduced to formal versions of the sport and potentially start to compete in a more organised training and competition environment. Following this transition into the initiation phase, athletes may participate in competitive sport for between 5-7 years. Typically it is only when they reach the age of 12 or 13 that athletes may transition to the development stage; this stage is where athletes engage in an intensive level of training and competition with a specific focus on development for performance gains (e.g., to develop skills to win competitions). At approximately the age of 18 or 19, athletes may undergo the junior-to-senior transition. This is where athletes progress into the mastery stage of performance. In this stage, athletes compete at the elite level of sport and dedicate most of their athletic time to training and competition; it is also during this stage where athletes may experience several other transitions, including changes of coach, relocation, injury, change of weight category, deselection, and change of sport discipline/playing position. The final transition which occurs is the transition from the mastery stage to the discontinuation stage. The discontinuation stage is where athletes terminate training and competing in their sport (discussed in Chapter 4).

[FIGURE 3.1 SHOULD BE PLACED HERE]

Psychological level

Drawing on Rice (1998), the psychological level outlined by Wylleman and colleagues (2004, 2013) outlines three stages of psychological development athletes will go through with concurrent transitions between these stages (childhood, adolescence, young adulthood / adulthood). Wylleman

and colleagues identify that following a period of time at the childhood level, which is characterized by the degree of their interest in competitive sport and their understanding of their role, responsibility, and relationships within their sport, athletes will transition into a stage of adolescence at the age of approximately 12. During adolescence, athletes are confronted with several developmental tasks which have to be managed effectively to ensure maturity, including managing and developing new and more mature relationships with peers, developing a masculine or feminine role in society, and attaining emotional independence from parents and others (Wylleman et al., 2004, 2013). Athletes also start to develop an athletic identity. Following this phase of self-identity development, at the age of approximately 20, athletes will then transition into young adulthood / adulthood. During this transition and the young adulthood / adulthood stage, athletes will continue to engage in tasks associated with managing and developing more mature relationships and development of self-identity (i.e., establish identities which are determined by the key facets in their lives).

Psychosocial level

The psychosocial level of Wylleman and colleagues' (2004, 2013) models outlines the social networks which are important for athletic development relevant to their athletic career stage. By understanding the changes in psychosocial network which occur throughout athletic development, athletes and support practitioners can identify and utilise key support more effectively. This level of the model was based on earlier athletic family and marital relationships frameworks (e.g., Hellstedt, 1995; Coppel, 1995) and suggests that, concurrent with the initiation stage of the athletic level, until the age of 13, parents, siblings, and peers are the most influential people in (athletic) development. Following the transition into the development and adolescence stages of the athletic and psychological levels, respectively, peers, coaches, and parents are considered key to athlete development. Between 22-29 years old, concurrent with the mastery and young adulthood / adulthood stages of athletic and psychological levels, respectively, relationships with partners and coaches are considered influential. Finally, from the age of 29 (approximately) onwards, the relationship with their family and coaches is of primary influence.

In addition to the importance of the changes themselves which occur during the transitions from one stage to the next, one of the other key elements of the changing social network is the changing function and role which such support provides. For example, research shows that the quality and content of athletes' relationships with coaches can change during the different athletic stages. Specifically, for instance, Bloom (1985) revealed that during the initiation stage, coaches reward young children for the effort they put in, rather than for the result itself. This positive reinforcement may encourage the children to remain in sport. During the development stage, Bloom (1985) identified that coaches adapt their support and become more focused on emphasising and developing the technical proficiency, discipline, and hard work of the young athletes. In the mastery stage, coaches place greater demands on their athletes in terms of outcomes and results (Bloom, 1985).

Academic / vocational level

At the academic / vocational level, the model outlines the transitions into (a) primary school between the ages 4-7, (b) secondary school at the age of 12 or 13, (c) a combined higher education and (semi-) professional sport stage or a (semi-)professional athlete status at age 18 or 19, and (d) post-athletic career at the age of 30. Wylleman and colleagues (2004, 2013) emphasized that the transition into (semi-professional) sport may occur at an earlier stage for some athletes than others. Additionally, they emphasize that, for some, if they have semi-professional status, they may also have to have additional vocational employment to fund their sport, creating additional pressure to balance competing demands on time (Wylleman et al. 2004, 2013).

Financial level

The final level of the model outlines the sources of financial support throughout and after their careers. Specifically, it outlines the importance of financial support from family in the early stages of athletes' careers, the shift in support from family to sport governing body, national Olympic Committees, private organisations, and / or sponsors at the end of the developmental stage and during (elite) sport careers, back to family support towards the latter end of their sporting career and into early retirement, and finally to employer support post-career. Again, these changes in support occur concurrently to transitions at the athletic, psychological, psychosocial, and academic-vocational levels.

Understanding Dan's case using The Holistic Athlete Career model

The Holistic Athlete Career model (Wylleman and colleagues (2004, 2013)) is useful in helping evaluate the case of Dan. When we consider Dan's situation, he is experiencing transitions at a variety of layers across the model. Specifically, Dan is experiencing the

a) junior-to-senior transition at the athletic level,
b) the transition from adolescence to adulthood at the psychological level,
c) changes in who he receives support from and differences in the type of support provided at the psychosocial level,
d) the possibility of moving to University at the academic/vocational level, and
e) changes in who he receives income from and the amount he receives at the financial level.

The model represents a step towards a holistic approach to athletic development and helps practitioners to support cases like Dan because it suggests that a broader understanding of athletes' lives is important. Although it is valuable to consider each layer of the model on its own merits (e.g., the challenges within each of five domains), Wylleman and colleagues (2004, 2013) posited that there may be interaction among the different levels in the model. This means that it is possible that more than one transition may occur concurrently across these domains, as is the case with Dan, which could have an adverse effect on overall development.

The term transition has been extensively used to describe many of the changes which occur during an athletic career. However, some argue that the term transition may be inappropriate when considering these constructs. The spotlight section that follows explores this claim.

Spotlight on: Transition or critical moments?

Nesti et al.(2012) argue that the term transition could easily be interpreted as signifying something "that is relatively smooth, steady and relatively easy to negotiate" (p.25). Nesti et al. (2012) suggest that a more appropriate phrase may be "critical moments" as it has connotations of being dramatic in nature, which many of the transitions in the current chapter may be considered as. Critical moments have been described as anxiety inducing moments associated with an important change in athletes' identity.

They can be described in positive or negative terms and can be around personal, professional or vocational matters, amongst other elements. Indeed, critical moments can range from being non-events to large, one off events, and planned or unintentional. They may have a negative or positive effect on a person's sense of self (self-awareness and self-knowledge; Nesti et al., 2012). Ultimately a critical moment will, according to Nesti et al. (2012), involve the subjective lived experience of the individual and invoke an emotional response and be dependent on timing (i.e., the individual's personal and contextual circumstances at the time).

Explaining the process of within-career transitions

In addition to predicting when transitions will occur, frameworks have also been proposed as a means of trying to explain the process which occurs when going through specific transitions. In a review of literature, Drew et al. (2019) identified that most transition research is underpinned by one main model describing and explaining transitions in sport: Stambulova's (2003) athletic career transition model. Other models which underpin transition research have included the model of human adaptation to transition (Schlossberg, 1981); the differentiated model of giftedness and talent 2.0 (Gagne, 2009); job demands-resources model (JD-R; Demerouti et. al., 2001); the athletic talent development environment model (ATDE; Henriksen, 2010); the ecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979); and the cognitive theory of stress and coping (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980).

One framework, which has been offered as a progression of these theories of transition, is the individual, external, cultural model of the junior-to-senior transition (see Drew et al., 2019). The authors posit that there are a series of transition preconditions and variables that are underpinning features which influence the outcomes that athletes may experience. These underpinning features can be found at the:

- individual (e.g., motivation to succeed),
- external (e.g., level of social support available),
- or cultural levels (e.g., values and beliefs emphasized in the environment).

These factors can be either facilitative or debilitative to development. See Figure 3.2, which outlines the framework and the key features therein.

[FIGURE 3.2 SHOULD BE PLACED HERE]

Transition preconditions

The preconditions outlined in this framework (on the left of Figure 3.1) may influence the subsequent athlete experiences. Athlete identification refers to initial awareness that the athlete may be about to undergo or is capable of undergoing the transition. For example, when considering transitions such as

transitioning to a new training group, a new team, or a new competition (e.g., moving from the European Tour to the Professional Golfers Association Tour), there is the need for initial identification that the athlete has the possibility to be successful. This identification may be self-selection via achieving a pre-requisite level or may be via coach selection. Without identification the subsequent transition experience may not occur or a different transition experience may occur.

Drew et al.'s (2019) proposed environmental pre-conditions also may or may not include support, including financial, social, and material provision. For instance, when considering relocation transitions, in sports such as canoeing there is the need to have access to appropriate specialised training facilities and equipment (e.g. boats). Broadly, the pre-existing conditions available for a transition may influence, both positively and negatively, the potential success athletes may have when going through this process.

Transition variables

Once the preconditions exist athletes' transitions are then influenced by a series of variables shown in a series of central rectangles in Figure 3.1. These variables are at the individual (e.g., motivation to succeed), external (e.g., level of social support available), or cultural levels (e.g., values and beliefs emphasized in the environment) and can be either facilitative or debilitative to development. For example, in the Dan case at the *individual level*, variables which would facilitative his development include the focus he has on his personal development. The facilitative or debilitative aspect might include his perceptions of the transition which if he has positive, yet realistic, perspective of what he has to manage he is more likely to experience a positive transition and outcome (see Drew et al., 2019). If athletes have a perspective of transition that they believe the transition to be particularly easy or difficult, they may be unable to match expectation to reality, making the process more challenging (Drew et al., 2019).

At the *external level*, it is suggested that social support is, generally, facilitative of transition; appropriate emotional, esteem, financial, and provision support can ensure that athletes are able to seek out help where required. Contrastingly, sources of stress such as demands and expectation from fellow athletes around how successful the team should be and increased physical demands (e.g., training demands), can have a debilitative effect if not managed. Also at the *external level* 'performance development motivation' refers to motivators depending upon athletes' expectations and initial transition experiences. For instance, if in Dan's case when first making the transition, he performs well, performance may become facilitative to transition due to the increased confidence received from this. The opposite effect may occur with early poor performance making transition more difficult.

The *culture and values level*, refers to the varying influence of youth culture and values and/or organisational culture and values. Youth culture and values refers to the broader youth culture and values present; this may include aspects of development and socialisation (e.g., partying and drinking) which may be debilitative should athletes engage in this type of behaviour during transition. Organisational culture and values refer to the specific organisation within which the athlete trains and competes, and the key culture and values they emit, which may be either facilitative or debilitative. For instance, if there is a change of coach within a team, the specific organisational culture and values which are a prominent part of the environment may change. For the athletes in a team, this change may be facilitative (i.e., their values and beliefs match more closely to the new coach) and result in increased confidence and performance. For other athletes in the team, however, this change of coach may be debilitative.

Possible interventions

Throughout the transition, interventions may have a positive effect on the process (Drew et al., 2019). Interventions which have been proposed as potentially having an influence on transition include: (1) development and utilisation of coping strategies, (2) mentoring/modelling, and (3) education programmes.

Coping strategies are the internal resources which athletes develop and utilise to manage the demands being placed upon them throughout transitions. This could include, for instance, their knowledge and experience of previous transitions based upon what helped them to manage previous transition and what did not (see Morris, Tod, & Oliver, 2015). Other coping strategies which may be developed and utilised include emotional regulation, listening to music, problem solving, and problem-focused coping (Morris et al., 2015).

Mentoring/modelling refers to the 'buddying up' of athletes with senior peers or someone who has gone through the transition previously; this can help the athlete as they are able to see modelled the expected behaviours and key skills and knowledge required (Pummell and Lavallee, 2018). Education programmes focused on helping athletes, coaches, teammates, parents, sport science staff, and friends/peers to understand their role and how to cope with the demands of the process can help to increase athletes' readiness and knowledge of the transition (see Drew et al., 2019; Pummell & Lavallee, 2018). Education interventions have focused on – mental skills, developing independence and responsibility, and potential performance and lifestyle adjustments (see Drew et al., 2019).

Transition Outcomes

Once the transition is negotiated, there are a number of possible outcomes which fall under *mental health and wellbeing* and *sporting performances* categories on the right side of Figure 3.2 (Drew et al., 2019). In relation to mental health and wellbeing, athletes may experience positive outcomes, including increased levels of health and wellbeing and daily functioning (e.g., happiness). Contrastingly, negative mental health and wellbeing consequences may occur; for some, transitions may result in feelings of being overwhelmed and maladaptive behaviours (e.g., depressed mood). Athletes may also experience feelings which are in between these extremes, where they are still able to function normally in everyday life.

In relation to performance, it is not uncommon for athletes to experience initial performance decreases as a result of transition; this is primarily when athletes are becoming used to their 'new' context or situation and are engaging in a change in demands that are being placed upon them (see Drew et al., 2019). For example, if athletes are changing weight category or their playing position within a team, they may not be familiar with some of the challenges they may experience during this which may result in them feeling uncertain about their capability to perform well. Thereafter, athletes may continue to experience negative performance outcomes as a result of transition or engage in more adaptive and positive behaviours, resulting in positive performance outcomes.

Understanding Dan's case using the individual, external, cultural model of the junior-to-senior transition

In addition to understanding the case of Dan using Wylleman and colleagues work (2004, 2013), The Individual, External, Cultural Model of the Junior-to-Senior Transition can also be useful in helping evaluate the Dan's experience. The model posits that when going through transition, there will be several factors which need to be considered (such as the individual, external, and cultural variables), and the types of interventions which may be appropriate. In the case of Dan, consideration can be given to aspects of his transition highlighted by the model, like his (a) perceptions of the transition

(individual), (b) his motivation to undergo the transition (individual), (c) sources of stress he may be experiencing (external), (d) organisational values and beliefs (cultural), and (e) the interventions which may be most appropriate given these circumstances.

Dan perceives that he has a very good chance of becoming a senior player and is highly motivated to do so, having moved away from home and trained for approximately 30 hours per week to support his development. In addition, he also believes that the organisational values and beliefs (i.e., being supportive of youth development) will mean that he has a good opportunity to be successful in the senior team. There are, however, several sources of stress Dan is experiencing directly associated with his transition, including having a fear of being away from his friends and family and recent injuries. These sources of stress can be managed using a range of interventions, including coping strategy development, mentoring, and / or education programmes, which can take place before or during transition.

The model used here to assess the case of Dan provides a lens through which practitioners and athletes can start to conceptualise areas of strength and weakness in athletes' knowledge and skills which can be cultivated to support their development. In breaking the transition down in this manner, areas of development arguably become clear; specifically, in helping Dan to negotiate his transition, consideration needs to be given to how to help him manage the sources of stress he is experiencing so that they become facilitative rather than debilitative to development. This ability to manage sources of stress could be what ultimately results in a successful or unsuccessful transition.

Research exploring key transition variables

Several empirical studies have focused on understanding athletes' transition experiences and the key variables associated with the process. Such work (e.g., Bruner et al., 2008) has highlighted that transitions can be positive and/or negative experiences for athletes, and, similar to what was proposed earlier in the models of transition, embody several competing variables which crossover athletic and non-athletic (e.g., psychosocial, educational) domains. The research has highlighted several transitional challenges and demands, and the value of social support and internal resources in the process.

Throughout the empirical literature, it is regularly foregrounded that transitions can be a negative and / or challenging event; an event that may question who and what an athlete is and their ability to manage and cope effectively. For some, this can lead to the process being particularly demanding, leading them to have feelings of worry, isolation, and ultimately, wellbeing issues which may, in extreme cases, lead to maladaptive coping behaviours including drug and alcohol abuse (e.g., Morris et al., 2015, 2016). Contrastingly, a number of athletes report positive transitions experiences, highlighting the progression opportunities that the process may offer them which they have not had before (see Pummell et al., 2008).

Challenges and barriers to transition identified in the literature have included higher technical and physical demands, the need to prove their value to new teammates where necessary, the need to build and establish new relationships with new coaches, managing educational demands, a lack of control over transition, and reduced confidence (e.g., Finn & McKenna, 2010). Additionally, athletes may be challenged by physical, philosophical, and/or cultural distance demands which can occur (e.g., Relvas, 2010). For instance, during deselection athletes may experience challenges with understanding their identity and the nature of 'who am I?'. This may especially be prevalent in instances where they have spent many years training in pursuit of sporting success, only to be deselected and told they are no longer of value to the team.

Empirical literature on transitions in sport have identified that there are several resources which athletes use to overcome challenges and barriers they may experience during transition. These resources include excellent sporting skills (e.g., physical, technical, tactical, and psychosocial skills relevant to the sport; Morris & Deason, 2020), goal-directed attributes (e.g., a professional attitude; Drew et al., 2019), intelligence (e.g., emotional intelligence; Mills et al., 2012), and social competence (Drew, 2020).

Social support from family, friends, coaches, and teammates can also be a mechanism which can be valuable for athletes. Specifically, support from these persons can ensure appropriate emotional, technical, and tangible provision is in place throughout any transition (Finn & McKenna, 2010). When support is provided to athletes which is emotional and facilitative to their development, it is more likely to support a positive transition as it may protect athletes from unrealistic expectations from key stakeholders (Jones et al., 2014). Where support is focused on performance outcomes, however, athletes are likely to experienced enhanced difficulties during transition (Morris et al., 2015). During an injury transition, for instance, if support provided is focused around performance outcomes, there may be a lack of support for emotional and physical challenges of this process, with focus instead aimed at returning the athlete to performance as soon as possible. This may mean that the injury recovery process happens too quickly, leaving the athlete vulnerable to further injuries and distress.

Understanding Dan's case based using the research

In addition to understanding the case of Dan using transition-related models, the main research exploring key transition variables can also be useful in helping direct required support. One of the common variables identified in the research as being helpful is the social support, in particular from family, friends, coaches, and teammates who can provide appropriate emotional, technical, and tangible support. In the instance of Dan, as he has moved away from home, he may have reduced his opportunities to access support from friends and family. Consideration, therefore, could be given to ensuring that Dan still receives appropriate support, which may not be forthcoming from the usual sources due to his move. This is especially important when transitions can lead to athletes questioning who they are and what they want to be, which can lead to further worry and isolation. Ultimately, if the appropriate support is not in place, or, in this instance there is no replacement for the regular support Dan may no longer be receiving he may suffer the consequences of the worry and isolation he may encounter (e.g., maladaptive behaviours).

When athletes get deselected, become injured, transition to a new club, or encounter many of the other transitions which may be prevalent in an athletic career, support mechanisms can disappear or become unclear. In the spotlight section below the question of who is responsible for transition is explored.

Spotlight on: Who's responsibility is it?

Consider the example of when athletes are deselected from a programme and they may not receive any support from the organisation who release them. Athletes can often feel a sense of anger and disappointment towards the organisation who has released them when they do not provide support, as Brown and Potrac (2009) discussed -

> "[Athletes] perceived that there was little meaningful support made available to them once they had been notified of their deselection. Interestingly, the participants displayed some anger when discussing this topic, as they felt that they had committed themselves to their clubs for a number of years only to be disposed of with little thought or care when they were considered as lacking the ability to progress to professional status. For example, David noted: 'The club didn't do anything really. All they are is talk and talk is cheap. They just want to get you out of the door and they don't want to see your face again. They just want to wash their hands of you. They don't lose any sleep over it. That makes me angry because I have given them everything for the past ten years and it's as though that counts for nothing.' (David)".

This scenario can be viewed in two ways. Firstly, it is not uncommon for the academic literature to suggest that organisations should maintain a level of responsibility to support athletes when they deselect them. The suggestion is that they have used these athletes to better their organisation, but as soon as the athlete becomes disposable, there have been examples of them doing so without another thought and without providing the appropriate support. They have a moral responsibility to help deselected athletes maintain positive health and wellbeing. Contrastingly, it could also be argued that, when being deselected, athletes are in a similar scenario as any other member of the public in that, when they get released from a job or their contract ends, they are left to manage the scenario on their own with limited or no support. Why does the responsibility lie with sports organisations to support athletes they deselect, when other employers are not levied with the same responsibility?

Academic principle in practice: Dan's case summary

Throughout this chapter, we have drawn on the case of Dan and some of the key literature which may help unpick his case and assist as we look to provide the best support for someone in his situation, or similar. If we view his case in the context of the models and empirical literature highlighted, there are several factors which need to be considered when supporting him -

- Firstly, Dan is going through the transition to senior sport. This transition, in and of itself, can challenge athletes. There is the possibility of Dan experiencing increased expectations placed upon him to train and compete at a higher level; there is likely to be increased physical and mental demands placed upon him; he has to create new peer / friendship groups plus he may have to cope with a reduction in confidence which may happen as a result of a lack of playing time and poor training sessions as a result of failure to manage such challenges (see Drew et al., 2019). In addition, Dan has experienced injuries recently, so a consideration of the challenges these might pose to his ability to train and compete fully may need to be considered.

- Second, Dan is experiencing the addition and adaptation to his broader social support environment, especially as a result of moving away from home. Having moved, Dan now needed to explore where and when he could call upon other social support mechanisms. These new support mechanisms may include partners, coaches, support staff, and teammates (see Wylleman et al., 2004; 2013); however, in Dan's current circumstances, none of these relationships are established. Specifically, Dan is moving in alone, and is now working with new coaches, support staff and teammates. His interpersonal skills and approach he takes in developing these relationships may help or hinder his development.

- Third, Dan is also exploring the possibility of going to University. Specific considerations in this regard include, for instance, helping evaluate if this is the right decision at this stage; exploring what his options are in terms of study in terms of course choice and study intensity (part or full time); and his future career aspirations. University may also present its own challenges in terms of youth culture and environment which may influence Dan's experience, specifically how much he would like to nurture relationships with university peers and have a university social life (see Drew et al., 2019).

- Finally, each of the above also needs to be considered holistically. Although each individual element of Dan's life has their own challenges as outlined, as can be seen in both the literature (e.g., Wylleman et al, 2004; 2013) and in the current case, many of these elements can and do occur concurrently. Decisions made in one facet of Dan's life may influence others; for instance, if he chooses to go to University and have a student social life, he may be distracted from his sport and establishing himself in the squad. Dan may also be trying to develop a new social support group at the same time as both transitioning to senior sport and starting university. Although in some respects this may be facilitative to development (i.e., there are more people from which to gain support), it could have a hindering effect as there is less time to spend with each person to establish appropriate rapport.

In light of this summary, in the context of Dan, the three interventions outlined earlier - (1) development and utilisation of coping strategies, (2) mentoring/modelling, and (3) education programmes - may be appropriate to help him with his transition. For Dan, enhancing coping strategies may include the development of key mental skills required to cope with the transition to senior sport and the demands this may present in terms of expectation and expected outcomes (e.g., resilience, motivation, anxiety control). Coping strategies also include his interpersonal skills to help him develop relationships with his new peers, coaches, and support staff. He will also require key problem solving skills to help him determine if, when, and what his approach should be to entering Higher Education.

In relation to mentoring/modelling, a formal relationship with a senior peer may help Dan in several ways. Specifically, being mentored by a senior peer may mean that Dan has an avenue for developing important peer relationships with the rest of the squad and coaching and support staff and may also mean that Dan is able to get a sense from peers as to the expected behaviours in senior sport. If Dan is mentored by a senior who has previously been to university and / or moved away from home, he may also be able to explore his own current circumstances and compare and learn from colleague's experiences. Doing so could mean Dan has greater self-awareness of some of the potential benefits and pitfalls of his situation.

Finally, an education programme which outlines to Dan the key challenges he may be about to experience, potential solutions to those challenges, and explores with him personalised solutions given his context may also be helpful. For example, by exploring and explaining to Dan the common

features of the junior-to-senior transition and the challenges it may present, he may become more aware of what to expect, less nervous about the process, and, therefore, cope better when such instances do occur. Additionally, education on key strategies he may be able to utilise during transition, from which he can then choose and develop to use as necessary, can also help him to overcome transition difficulties.

The case of Dan is not an uncommon one; athletes in transition often experience the process in a broader context which also needs to be considered. For others, the challenges and broader considerations may be different. Regardless, it is important these elements are considered so that the best individual solutions are available for all transitioning athletes.

Closing thoughts

As athletes progress through their sporting career they experience several careers transitions, both expected and unexpected, which can impact on their mental wellbeing and athletic development. This chapter has explored various transitions faced by athletes and the potential psychological challenges of these. It has covered theoretical models, transition into sport, and within-career transitions (e.g., moving teams) and considered strategies to ensure athletes have positive transitional experiences. In doing so, this chapter has highlighted some of the key considerations and challenges which may pose difficulties for athletes who are in transition, and some areas which need to be the key focus of intervention. Additionally, using the case of Dan uncovers the challenges which can be apparent when working with athletes during transition. In particular, it highlights how difficult it can be to research and work as an applied practitioner in this area since each athletes' experiences are context and biography specific, meaning generalisability may not always be possible. Instead, transferring and extrapolating from case studies, as in this instance, may be more appropriate in determining how best to support athletes in transition.

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