

ISSP POSITION STAND: CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSITIONS OF ATHLETES

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ABSTRACT

The ISSP Position Stand on Career Development and Transitions of Athletes draws attention to viewing athletes from the perspective of their career development and their broader historical and socio-cultural contexts. The particular focus of this paper is on career transitions as turning phases in career development. Successfully coping with transitions both within and outside of sport allows greater opportunity for an athlete to live a long and successful life in sport as well as being able to adjust effectively to the post-career. Alternatively, failure in coping with a transition is often followed by negative consequences (e.g., premature dropout from sport, neuroses, alcohol/drug abuse, etc). Therefore, helping athletes prepare for and/or cope with career transitions should be of primary concern for coaches, managers, athletes' parents, and sport psychology consultants. In this paper we emphasize the role of contextual factors in career development/transition research and practice. Based on the literature review, we propose six statements and related recommendations for athletes and their significant others, as well as for researchers and consultants.

Keywords: athletic career, transition, socio-cultural context.

Career development and transition research is currently conducted around the world; however, the majority of studies investigate nationally specific samples of athletes, and cross-cultural studies are still limited (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007; Huang, Schmidt, Hackfort, & Si, 2001). Analysis of the evolution and current status of the research and practice in this topic puts a cultural mindset on the agenda for its further development. As a leading international sport psychology organization, the ISSP focuses attention on the importance of international collaboration in career research and assistance, where cultural awareness and reflexivity is a virtue.

In the sections below, we first consider major historical trends and current status of the career development and transition topic. Second, we analyze major research tradi-

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tions in career transition studies. Third, we outline career assistance programs and related future challenges. Finally, we provide statements derived from the literature review and recommendations to optimize career development and facilitate athletes' adaptation to the post-career.

EVOLUTION AND CURRENT STATUS OF THE TOPIC

EVOLUTION OF THE TOPIC

Studies on career development and transitions of athletes started appearing in the 1960s and have shown a substantial increase both in their quantity and quality since the end of 1980s. Several major shifts in research foci, theoretical frameworks, and attention to contextual factors characterize the evolution of the topic in sport psychology (see e.g., Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007; Wylleman, Alfermann, & Lavallee, 2004).

First, there has been an observable shift in understanding "a transition" as a phenomenon, which also translates to a shift in theoretical frameworks for studying athletes' transitions. Historically, pioneer transition studies in sport focused on athletic retirement, which was considered analogous to retirement from a working career. Therefore, early theoretical frameworks were derived from thanatology (stages of dying) and social gerontology (the study of the aging process) (Wylleman, Lavallee, & Alfermann, 1999). As a result, the athletes' transition to the post-career was typically presented as a negative and often times traumatic life event. Schlossberg (1981) suggested a definition of transition as "an event or non-event [which] results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world, and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behavior and relationships" (p. 5). This general psychology definition was first well adopted in sport psychology, but was then challenged by transition research in sport, especially the part of the definition that identifies a transition as an *event/non-event*. For example, athletic retirement studies indicated that adaptation to the post-career took, on average, about one year, and far from all former athletes experienced career termination as a negative life event (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Alfermann, 2000). This new understanding of a transition as a *coping process* with potentially positive or negative outcomes is well reflected in the athletic career termination model (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994) and the athletic career transition model (Stambulova, 2003).

A second major shift in the career development and transition research is the departure from focusing almost exclusively on athletic retirement, to studying a range of transitions within an athletic career—the so called "a whole career" approach. In many countries this new trend in career transition research was inspired by talent development theoretical debates and research. Durand-Bush and Salmela (2001) analyzed athletic talent definitions and indicated a shift in understanding athletic talent, from focusing mainly on the innate part of the talent (in the 1970s and '80s) to emphasizing its acquired part (since the 1990s). This was followed by a shift in theoretical frameworks, from talent selection/detection models to talent development models (see also Lidor, Côté, & Hackfort, 2009). Bloom's model (1985) describing three stages in talent development, and Ericsson's (1996) 10-years rule to reach expert performance level can be

seen as predecessors of current career development descriptive models in sport psychology. It is also important to note that the talent development process occurs within a *career development context* and contributes to the athlete's *internal resources* to cope with career transitions.

A third major shift in the career development and transition topic is from focusing on athletes' transitions exclusively in sport to more of "a whole person" lifespan perspective, viewing athletic career transitions in their relation to developmental challenges and transitions in other spheres of the athletes' lives (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Finally, there is the fourth shift, which is relevant to understanding the role of contextual factors in career development and transitions. While earlier studies focused only on how coaches, parents, and peers contribute to athletes' career development and transitions (Côté, 1999; Wylleman, De Knop, Ewing, & Cumming, 2000) more recent studies also consider the role of macro-social factors (e.g., the sport system and culture) (Stambulova, Stephan, & Järphag, 2007).

As summarized by Wylleman, Theeboom, and Lavallee (2004), research into the career development of athletes has been evolving in recent decades from studies of the sport career termination into a holistic, lifespan, multi-level approach to the sports and the post-sports careers of athletes. A more detailed overview of this contemporary approach to understanding career development and transitions is presented in the next section.

CURRENT VIEW OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSITIONS OF ATHLETES

"Athletic career" is a term for a multi-year sport activity, voluntarily chosen by the person, and aimed at achieving his/her individual peak in athletic performance in one or several sport events (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). It means that "career" relates to all levels of competitive sports. Depending on the highest level of sport competition achieved by the athlete, an athletic career can be local, regional, national, or international; and depending on the athlete's status, the career can be amateur or professional. International level amateur or professional careers are often also labeled as elite careers.

Descriptive models of an athletic career (Bloom, 1985; Côté, 1999; Salmela, 1994; Stambulova, 1994; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004) define it as a succession of stages such as the initiation/sampling stage, development/specialization stage, perfection/mastery/investment stage, final/maintenance stage, and discontinuation stage of competitive sport involvement. These stages reflect a common pattern in the careers of athletes from different countries and sports, and also of both genders. This very general description can be made more specific when examining population subsets such as male and female athletes, athletes in different sports, and athletes in different countries. For example, female athletes typically start to specialize, achieve their peaks, and terminate athletic careers one to two years earlier than male athletes in the same sports (Stambulova, 1994). Furthermore, types of sport are different with regard to their demands on athletes and the capacities they require for performance excellence. In addition, they are also different in terms of the ages at which the athletes usually begin to specialize,

achieve their peak in performance, and terminate their sport participation. For example, in complex coordination sports (e.g., diving, gymnastics, figure skating) athletes start to specialize around 5-7 years old, capturing the most favorable periods in the motor development. They then achieve their performance peaks in adolescence (at 15-20 years of age) and terminate in early adulthood (at 20-25). In contrast, endurance sport (e.g., cross-country skiing, marathon) athletes might only start to specialize in adolescence and achieve their peaks in middle adulthood (at 25-35). This implies that the type of sport may influence a trajectory of sport participation (Côté, Baker, & Abernethy, 2007) in a way that gymnasts will more likely attain elite performance through early specialization and deliberate practice (i.e., high in structure/efforts and low in enjoyment) while marathon runners will use more sampling and deliberate play (i.e., more flexible and diverse sport involvement) with a later focus on specialized deliberate practice to attain an elite standing (Côté, Lidor & Hackfort, in press). There are also differences in sport systems, societal norms, and cultural traditions, which may further influence athletes' career development. For example, in Russia and China, professional coaches work with all age and performance levels, whereas in Sweden and the United States, volunteer coaches dominate in children's/youth sports. This single factor may influence career development in that although young athletes who are trained by professional coaches can get higher quality supervision in the formation of their technical skills, they can also experience more coaching control over their life and less overall enjoyment than the athletes who are trained by volunteer coaches. Finally, each athletic career, in addition to its shared features, has its uniqueness related to the athlete's innate potential, motivation, and sport/life circumstances.

Career development means proceeding through the career stages and transitions. *Career transitions* are normative or non-normative turning phases in the course of an athletic career. Subjectively, they are often associated with stress and uncertainty about whether the situation will change for the better or for the worse. Objectively, transitions normally come with a set of specific demands (related to practice, competitions, communication, and lifestyle) that athletes have to cope with in order to successfully continue in their sport or to adjust to their post-career (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). Normative athletic career transitions are relatively predictable and include, for example, the beginning of sport specialization, the transition from junior to senior level, and the transition from amateur to professional sports. *Career termination* is also the clearest example of a normative and even inevitable transition, which mixes sport-related and unrelated contexts in the athletes' retirement planning, reasons for termination, and adaptation to the post-career experiences including studies, work, identity change, and renewing social networks. Non-normative transitions are less predictable, such as transitions caused by factors like an injury or changing teams/clubs or coaches/sports partners. The predictability of normative transitions creates an opportunity to prepare athletes to cope with them in advance. Alternatively, the low predictability of non-normative transitions explains why athletes might find these more difficult to cope with. The same holds true for transitions in non-sport contexts, for example, in athletes' psychological, psychosocial, and academic-vocational development.

Existing career transition models (Schlossberg, 1981; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994; Stambulova, 2003) emphasize pre-conditions and demands, coping processes, factors influencing coping, outcomes, and later consequences of a transition. A common pattern in these models refers to viewing *coping processes/strategies* as central in a transition with an emphasized match between the transition demands and the athlete's resources as a key factor for successful coping. Transition resources are defined as all internal and external factors that facilitate the coping process (e.g., the athlete's previous experiences, motivation, social and/or financial support). Athletes perceive social support from significant others as the most important resource at the beginning and at the end of the career. Organizational support is usually the highest when athletes are at the peak of their career, and it decreases dramatically when athletes terminate (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). Transition barriers include all internal and external factors interfering with effective coping (e.g., a lack of specific competencies, interpersonal conflicts, difficulties in combining sport and studies/work). The same aspect of experience may work as a resource in one instance or a barrier in another depending on the situation. For example, *athletic identity*, which is the degree to which the individual identifies herself with the athletic role (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993), is usually an important resource for an athlete at the peak of the career, but it can become a barrier in the process of adaptation to the post-career. Successful transition takes place when the athlete is able to develop and effectively use all the necessary resources, and to overcome transition barriers in the coping process. Typically, it results in a more general feeling of adjustment and an increase in satisfaction with sport and life. Crisis transition is an alternative outcome, which is what happens when the athlete is not able to cope with the transition demands on his/her own, and requires psychological assistance/intervention.

Three perspectives are outlined in assisting athletes to cope with career transitions: (1) preventive, (2) crisis coping, and (3), negative-consequences coping (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). Preventive interventions help athletes to become better aware of forthcoming transition demands and to develop in a timely manner all necessary resources for effective coping. Crisis-coping interventions help athletes to analyze the crisis situation and find the best available way to turn ineffective coping into more effective strategies. Interventions dealing with negative consequences of not coping with the crisis (e.g., premature dropout, neuroses, eating disorders, etc.) are problem-specific and most often clinical interventions.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSITION STUDIES AROUND THE WORLD

In this section, an international perspective will be taken to demonstrate scientific traditions in athletic career studies in different parts of the world as well as how these studies incorporate relevant socio-cultural contexts. Researchers, no less than athletes, are influenced by historical and socio-cultural contexts in their respective countries. They select research questions and participants, develop theoretical frameworks and instruments, and interpret their results based on the messages they internalize from these contexts.

Cultural and cross-cultural psychology are two main approaches in analyzing an impact of culture upon human behavior and development. Both emphasize importance of a culture as “a social system of shared symbols, meanings, perspectives, and social actions that are mutually negotiated by people in their relationships with others” (Stead, 2004, p.392) but they have different foci. *Cultural psychology* (Greenfield & Keller, 2004) claims that cultural context creates meaning; thus, human behavior is context specific and should be studied within culture, not comparatively between cultures. This view advocates that culture is mostly inside people and influences how they think and behave. *Cross-cultural psychology* (Berry & Triandis, 2004) compares human behavior and experiences in different cultures. This view postulates that culture is outside people and plays the role of an environmental context for their experiences. Cross-cultural psychology also suggests a set of criteria, called “cultural syndromes” (Triandis, 2004), to compare cultures with each other, for example, collectivism/individualism (collectivist societies vs. individualist societies); ideology (empiric vs. ideological societies); planning (planning vs. spontaneity), and others. Most often an individualism-collectivism framework is employed. All the individualist cultures prioritize an individual and his/her rights. Horizontal individualist cultures (e.g., Sweden) value the person, but support modest behavior and low competitiveness. Vertical individualist cultures (e.g., the USA) stimulate competition between people. In contrast, collectivist cultures prioritize the group and put the interests of the group/state ahead of the interests of an individual. Horizontal collectivist cultures (e.g., some African cultures) stimulate cooperation and sharing between people, while vertical collectivist cultures, with their hierarchal systems (e.g., Russia, China, India), stimulate competition between groups and people. Besides cultural particularities, socio-historical context and even geographical location can influence sport, sport system, and athletes in their respective countries.

Until now, it has been difficult to identify career development and transition studies from a *cultural* standpoint, (i.e., conducted based on the cultural psychology approach). Instead there are numerous studies, which could be called *national studies*, focused on careers and transitions of athletes from particular countries. In the overview below, we start with major scientific traditions in these national studies across the world, and proceed with pioneering research on cross-national comparisons of athletes’ adaptation to the post-career.

NATIONAL STUDIES

Career development and transition research is unevenly spread around the world. North American, European, and Australian studies are the most visible and influential on the topic in terms of the theoretical frameworks and instruments developed, and the body of knowledge about career stages and transitions created. For example, North American studies (Baillie & Danish, 1992; Brewer, Van Raalte, & Petitpas, 2000; Bruner, Munroe-Chandler, & Spink, 2008; Côté, 1999; Côté et al., 2007; Danish, Petitpas & Hale, 1993; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993, and others) focus mainly on career stages, roles of coaches, teammates and parents in career development, transitions of student-athletes, athletic

identity, athletic retirement, and different trajectories in sport participation. European studies (Alfermann, 2000, 2005; Ceci Erpi, Wylleman, & Zupan i, 2004; Lavallee, 2005; Stambulova, 1994; Stephan, Bilard, Ninot, & Delignières, 2003; Torregrosa, Boixados, Valiente, & Cruz, 2004; Wylleman et al., 2000, and others) emphasize a coordination of transitions in sport and outside sport, the transition from junior to senior sports, crisis transitions, athletic retirement, social support, and professional assistance in career transitions. Australian studies are known for a holistic view of athletes, applied focus, and evaluation of career assistance programs (Anderson & Morris, 2000; Bennie & O'Connor, 2004, Gordon, 1995; Gorely, Lavallee, Bruce, Teale, & Lavallee, 2001). South American, Asian, and African studies reflect a growing interest in the topic, including athletic retirement issues (Brandão, Winterstein, Pinheiro, Agresta, Akel, & Martini, 2001; Chow, 2002) and careers of coaches (Baria, Nabli, & Oubahammou, 2005). Despite being not well-known/recognized internationally, these studies also bring their pieces into the whole puzzle.

Through an analysis of the main body of knowledge on career development and transitions, it is possible to see four major scientific traditions: North American, West European, Australian, and East European. The first three, despite having specific features, are rather similar to each other and at the same time, are different from the fourth. The similarities between the North American, West European, and Australian traditions have their roots in a resemblance between the socio-cultural contexts in the respective countries, which are characterized by democratic society structures and individualist cultures. It is possible to see three distinct lines in career development and transition research shared by these three traditions: (1) athletic retirement and athletic identity; (2) stages in talent/career development with an emphasized role on parents and coaches; and (3) transitions of student-athletes. In fact, all these topics are internalized from the corresponding socio-cultural contexts and meet their societal needs.

The first shared line in these three scientific traditions—the athletic retirement topic—is highly valued in individualist cultures, in which athletes decide upon career termination themselves and carry out full responsibility for their education/occupation in the post-career. The interest in athletic identity and identity change/crisis after career termination is also very relevant to cultures centered on the individual. The same holds true for a particular interest in the role of retirement planning for successful adaptation in the post-career, which can be explained by interrelations between cultural syndromes (i.e., individualist cultures are typically also “planning” cultures [Triandis, 2004]). The theoretical frameworks used in the athletic retirement studies are mostly North American (Schlossberg, 1981; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). When trying to summarize the main research results on career termination obtained by North American, West European, and Australian researchers, we can draw the following conclusions:

- Career termination is caused by multiple sources and is often the result of a longer process of reasoning and decision making.
- Though career termination may result in distress for many athletes, at the same time there are great inter-individual differences in these reactions.

- Regardless of the particular causes of career termination, research shows that the athlete's subjective feeling about the decision as voluntary or involuntary is a crucial point for adaptation. Voluntary retirement contributes to a smoother transition process.
- Making timely plans for life after the career helps tremendously to cope with transition and to build a new life.
- The coping process depends not only on the causes, but also on the individual and social resources of the athlete. Strengthening the individual resources by, for example, education, competence training, and goal-setting for the post-career, can help athletes to make a healthy adaptation. Social resources, like social support from the family and post-career services, can also help in the career transition process. This process will then lead to the successful adoption of new roles—in occupation, family, or/and the sport system.
- It was also shown that about 15-20% of elite retired athletes experience transition distress (Alfermann, 2000) and have a need for psychological assistance.

Therefore, it is not by chance that career assistance programs/services for retired athletes have been initiated in Canada, USA, Australia, and some West European countries (Great Britain, Belgium, and The Netherlands).

The second shared line in the North American, West European, and Australian traditions is related to the stages of talent/career development. This also reflects the socio-cultural contexts in corresponding countries (i.e., high competitiveness in combination with a high value of human rights, including children's rights in sport). Besides, in many related countries, volunteer coaches work at the lower levels of sport systems, and while parents/families are really important for young athletes, they can often be too pushy and value winning above all else. All these may explain why this line of research in North America, West Europe, and Australia advocates for (a) early diversification and later specialization in sports with parents/family having a very important role, especially during the earlier career stages and (b) a holistic perspective in viewing an athlete. Bloom's talent development model has become a basis for two recent career-stage models, including the developmental model of sport participation (Côté, 1999; Côté et al., 2007) and the developmental model of transitions faced by athletes (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004).

According to Côté et al. (2007), the developmental changes that mark the careers of elite athletes that achieve peak performance in adulthood are in agreement with the sampling (ages 6-12), specializing (ages 13-15), and investment (ages 16 and up) years as distinct stages of sport participation. In the *sampling years*, parents are responsible for initially getting their children involved in sport. Children are given the chance to sample a wide range of different sports and develop fundamental motor skills through involvement in various sports and deliberate play activities. The main purpose of the sampling years is to experience fun and excitement through sport. An important transition point occurs at around age 13 when athletes begin secondary school, reduce their

involvement in other sports, and begin to compete at the state or provincial level in their main sport. In the *specializing years* (ages 13-15), the athlete focuses on one or two specific sporting activities. While fun and excitement remain central elements of the sporting experience, sport-specific development through more serious training emerges as an important characteristic of the adolescent's sport involvement. Another transition point occurs at approximately age 16, when athletes make the decision to become elite athletes and consequently invest all their leisure time in training. In the *investment years*, the athlete is committed to achieving an elite level of performance in a single activity. The strategic, competitive, and skill development characteristics of sport emerge as being the most important elements of the investment years. In sports where peak performance is achieved before puberty (e.g. women's gymnastics, figure skating), early specialization is often necessary to reach elite performance. The early specialization pathway is characterized by high volumes of deliberate practice and low amounts of deliberate play in a context that focuses on performance as early as age 6 or 7. Thus, "early specializers" usually skip the sampling years, and consequently, may experience some negative physical and psychosocial outcomes during this period such as overuse injuries, reduced sport enjoyment, and dropout (Law, Côté, & Ericsson, 2007; Wall & Côté, 2007). Transitions between the sampling, specializing, and investment years are operationalized by significant changes in athletes' engagement in deliberate play, deliberate practice, and other sporting activities (Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2007; Côté et al., in press).

In the developmental model of transitions faced by athletes (Wylleman & Lavalley, 2004), Bloom's talent development stages are adopted as athletic career stages but also complemented by stages and transitions in athletes' psychological, psychosocial, and academic-vocational development. In fact, this model views an athlete as a person doing sports but also other things in life. It advocates for importance of a multiple personal identity, balancing/combining different activities in life, such as sport and studies/work.

Student-athletes with a focus on combining sport and studies, especially on the university level, is the third line in the research shared by the North American, West European, and Australian traditions. This focus again has its roots in socio-cultural contexts characterized by well-developed university sports, as well as importance of higher education for the successful occupation in the post-career. This line of research is often very applied in terms of focusing on strategies for helping student-athletes to successfully combine sport and studies (e.g., to plan their careers in and outside sports, to develop and use transferable life skills, to prepare for athletic retirement) (Carr & Bauman, 2002; Mayocchi & Hanrahan, 2000; Petitpas, Champagne, Chartrand, Danish, & Murphy, 1997). Many universities in the USA, Canada, Australia, and West Europe also have psychological programs/services for student-athletes.

To summarize, similarities between the socio-cultural contexts within the North American, West European, and Australian traditions facilitate international co-operation, such as the sharing of research topics, theoretical frameworks, and instruments.

In contrast, the East European tradition represented mostly by Russian studies is infused with vertical collectivist and ideological Russian culture, which clearly puts interests of the group/state ahead of the interests of an individual. On the other hand, it stimulates

competition among groups and people, a "readiness to give all", and a "struggle for winning." It is also reflected in the Russian sport system with its centralized power, professional coaches at all levels, sport boarding schools for prospective young athletes, state support for elite athletes, and availability of jobs in sport for retired athletes. Correspondingly, elite athletes and their performance success are traditional focuses of Russian sport psychology. In such a socio-cultural context, the athletes' transitions within the athletic career have been seen as a more important topic than athletic retirement. Again, in such a context, early sport specialization is taken as a necessary reality of the contemporary sport, and nobody struggles against it to protect children's rights for a "normal childhood". Instead, professional coaches working with athletes from their first steps in sport are educated on how to use all the benefits of early specialization and how to compensate for one-sided development and other related costs.

Research on transitions of Russian athletes (Hvatskaya, 1997; Ilin, 1998; Stambulova, 1994) supports the Analytic athletic career model (Stambulova, 1994) with six normative career transitions of an elite athletic career, including: (1) the beginning of sport specialization, (2) the transition to more intensive training in the chosen sport, (3) the transition from junior to senior/high achievement sport, (4) from amateur to professional sports, (5) from peak to the final stage, and (6) the transition to the post-career. Markers for the Russian athletes' transitions are relevant to the Russian sport system and do not refer to chronological age or educational system markers. For example, the beginning of sport specialization starts when an athlete comes to the specialized sport group to practice under the guidance of a professional coach, whereas the transition to senior sport begins when the athlete shows international level results for his/her age group.

In the time of the Cold War, the West and the East European traditions were politically separated, but as a result of several historical shifts in Europe during the 1990s (unification of Germany, disintegration of the Soviet Union and "the socialist camp", etc.) political barriers were removed and new opportunities for international co-operation have evolved. Since 1995, the Career Transition Special Interest Group actively co-operates in Europe (Lavalley & Wylleman, 2000), which has led to more overlap between the West and the East European traditions during the last decade. One example is the European Perspectives on Athletic Retirement Project focusing on how elite athletes from different European countries adjust to the post-career (see the next section). Another example is a common focus on the transition from junior to senior sports (Alfermann, 2005; Stambulova, 1994, 2009; Vanden Auweele, Martelaer, Rzewnicki, De Knop, & Wylleman, 2004) encouraged by National Sport Federations and Olympic Committees in many European countries because of their concerns about reserves for the senior national teams in various sports.

The transition from junior to senior sport plays the most critical role in the overall athletic career. Athletes frequently describe it as the most difficult transition, and many of them have acknowledged that they failed to cope with it. In fact, this transition divides athletes into two unequal parts. The larger subset can not cope; they stagnate and move on to recreational level sports, or drop out. The smaller subset continues on to the elite senior level. For example, Vanden Auweele et al. (2004) evaluated careers of 167 Belgian

track and field athletes from 14-18 years old, who were age-group national champions in their events, two times: right before their transition from junior to senior sport, and then again five years after the first evaluation. It was realized that only 17% of the elite junior athletes made senior national teams, 31% stagnated, 28% performed irregularly with ups and downs, and 24% dropped out.

This transition from junior to senior sport comes with a set of demands/challenges for practice, competitions, and life in general. For example, in a series of qualitative studies of Russian athletes, Stambulova (1994, 2009) identified five high-order themes as the perceived *demands* in this transition: (1) to balance sport goals with other life goals and to reorganize lifestyle, (2) to search for one's individual path in sport, (3) to cope with pressure of selections, (4) to win prestige among peers, judges, etc., and (5) to cope with possible relationship problems. Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) showed that the transition from junior to senior sports may coincide with transitions in other spheres of life (e.g., from school to college or university) making it even more difficult, and requiring additional resources to cope. According to the aforementioned Russian studies, athletes' perceived coping resources include: (1) interest in sport science knowledge, (2) summarizing and drawing upon their own sport experience, (3) implementation of psychological strategies in competitions, (4) learning from mistakes of others, and (5) family and federation support. Paradoxically, the most prospective young athletes, those who demonstrate quicker progress than their sport peers at junior ages and experience early social recognition, find this transition especially difficult. In addition, they often focus too much on sport and are vulnerable to "one-sided development" problems (Stambulova, 2009). All these cause some extra barriers for them in this transition (e.g., high self- and others expectations). Typically, athletes are ambitious to succeed in this transition, but because the level of uncertainty is very high, they often become more anxious and worried, yet at the same time are more sensitive to social influences. The latter confirms an importance of psychological support to athletes in this transition. Research also shows some developmental outcomes of the transition, such as an increase in athletic identity and ego-orientation (Alfermann, 2005; Ilna, 1998). These studies are also related to the talent development topic because they try to examine why talented juniors so often fail to make this transition, and why many "junior stars" are lost in the senior sports.

CROSS-NATIONAL STUDIES

Cross-cultural research design has been introduced to sport psychology by Duda and Alisson (1990), Duda and Hayshi (1998), and recently by Si and Lee (2007). In the career development and transition topic, cross-cultural analyses are still in their infancy, and the current studies deal mostly with *cross-national* comparisons. Such studies on the athletes' adaptation to the post-career showed both common and nationally specific patterns in retirement of athletes from different countries. The aforementioned European Perspectives on Athletic Retirement Project considered the post-career adaptation of German, Lithuanian, and Russian athletes (Alfermann, Stambulova, & Zemaityte, 2004), as well as French and Swedish athletes (Stambulova et al., 2007) based on the Athletic

Retirement Survey. Schmidt and Hackfort (2001) compared former elite French and German athletes using the Athletic and Post-Athletic Questionnaire, and Huang et al., 2001; Hackfort and Huang, 2005 used the same instrument to compare German and Chinese retired athletes.

These studies confirm that retirement planning, voluntary termination, identity change, and active coping are factors facilitating the post-career adaptation. But what the cross-national studies add is a link between these factors and corresponding socio-cultural contexts. For example, the number of athletes who planned retirement in advance varied across the cultures: West European athletes did this significantly more often than East European athletes, confirming that *individualist cultures* tend to be also *planning cultures* (Triandis, 2004).

Among culturally specific features found in the cross-national comparisons, it is worth noting that in China, Russia, and France retired athletes tend to relocate within sport (e.g., by starting a career as a coach) while this occurs less frequently in Germany and Sweden, where sport systems do not provide many paid jobs. In China there is "a close relationship and co-operation between university and sport system" (Huang et al., 2001, p. 10), which can help elite athletes with sport-related education and can provide them with jobs in sport after they finish their athletic careers. The same tendency can also be seen in Russia, whereas in Germany, France, and Sweden, athletes themselves take full responsibility for their education and employment. The perceived duration of the post-career adaptation depends not only on job availability in sport but also on culturally specific criteria for satisfaction with the transition quality. For example, Swedish athletes reported a high quality of the transition, but the longest duration of the post-career adaptation compared to German, French, Lithuanian, and Russian athletes. This may relate to the Swedish cultural value, the so called "Jante-law", which emphasizes "being within the standard" (i.e., not higher but also not lower than a majority of people) as a basis for personal satisfaction and self-esteem. It takes time for retired Swedish athletes to form this feeling of adjustment as to get it, they need to reach Swedish living standards, which are among the highest in Europe.

CONSEQUENCES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Analysis of the four major traditions in the career development and transition research shows that cultural awareness and reflexivity should be a virtue in international cooperation and exchange of ideas. For example, the transition research in China or India, with their vertical collectivist cultures, may easier adopt the East European rather than the North American tradition. Very often young researchers all over the world find it safer to use internationally recognized theoretical frameworks related to the North American tradition and do not attempt to create culturally specific frameworks. For further progress on this topic to occur, culturally specific approaches should be encouraged to make career development and transition studies more socio-culturally informed. Although most current cross-national studies do not go deeply into analyses of cultures, they draw our attention to culture as an important context, and advocate for a *culturally specific*

approach in career assistance, such as helping athletes to adjust within a particular society and culture.

CAREER ASSISTANCE AROUND THE WORLD

A need to help athletes in coordinating their sport participation with other activities, and in preparing for career transitions, especially for athletic retirement, was recognized about 20 years ago and resulted in career assistance programs established in different parts of the world (e.g., "Olympic Athlete Career Centre" (Canada), "Career Assistance Program for Athletes" (USA), "Athlete Career and Education" (Australia and UK), "Life Style Management Program" (UK), and "Retired Athlete" (The Netherlands). Career programs are defined as integrated and comprehensive combinations of workshops, seminars, educational modules, individual counseling, and/or a referral network providing individualized and/or group-oriented multidisciplinary support services to athletes with regard to their athletic participation, developmental and lifestyle issues, and educational and vocational development (Wylleman et al., 2004). These programs combine preventive interventions with crisis coping and clinical interventions, if necessary. Individual counseling, career planning, goal setting, mentoring, and life development interventions, with a focus on transferable competencies to use both in and outside sport are most often involved in career assistance. Target groups for career programs/services include prospective junior athletes, student-athletes, elite senior athletes, and retiring/retired athletes.

Career assistance is generally based on a set of principles, such as "a whole career" and "a whole person" approach, a developmental and an individual approach, as well as a multilevel treatment and an empowerment approach (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). Cultural mindset in career assistance starts with the aforementioned *culturally specific* approach. But taking into account the increasing international mobility of athletes, coaches, and sport psychology consultants, this approach is now turning into a *multicultural approach*, with the consultants' "ability to work effectively with individuals who are of a different culture" (Gill, 2007, p. 837). Considering different aspects of *multicultural sport psychology*, Gill (2007) refers to the American Psychological Association multicultural guidelines, which "call for moving to action for social justice" (p. 838). She also draws attention to the RESPECTFUL Sport Psychology model (D'Andrea & Daniels, 2005), which acknowledges clients' diversity in terms of their religious/spiritual identity, economic class identity, sexual identity, psychological maturity, ethnic/racial identity, chronological challenges, trauma and threats to well-being, family history, unique psychological characteristics, language, and location of residence. To keep all these factors in mind is a real challenge for a career consultant, which requires multicultural competencies and skills. According to Mio, Barker-Hackett, and Tumaming (2006), such basic competencies include awareness of one's own cultural values and biases, understanding of the client's worldview, and development of culturally appropriate intervention strategies. Current challenges for career assistance include cross-cultural services (e.g., helping athletes to adjust in the new culture), international networks of career consultants, and comprehensive assessment systems reflecting athletes' culturally specific beliefs and values.

STATEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Career research confirms several normative (predictable) athletic career transitions for which athletes can be prepared in advance. Therefore, athletes are recommended to search for a balance between current demands and anticipated future demands in their athletic careers. Parents, coaches, and sport psychology consultants must help them to make decisions “from the future,” through increasing their awareness of forthcoming demands and the resources/strategies necessary to cope with them. This will help to prepare in a timely manner athletes for normative career transitions and to prevent athletes’ crises.
2. Both career research and assistance models emphasize the importance of a holistic view of an athlete—that is, as a person who is doing sport but also other things in life. Therefore, athletes are advised to search for a balance between demands in sport and outside sport, to prioritize in their lifestyles, and to emphasize transferable competencies (e.g., goal setting, planning, time/stress/energy management) that can work as resources in coping with transitions both in and outside sport. It is recommended that athletes’ significant others support athletes’ athletic and non-athletic interests and identities.
3. As shown in the research, the transition from junior to senior sports is crucial for the athletes who want to reach the elite level in sport. This transition relates not only to a sport context; besides new challenges in practice and competitions, the athletes experience new demands in psychological, psychosocial, and in academic/vocational development. As a result, the athletes found themselves under high life stress. Therefore, career planning, balancing lifestyle, stress/time/energy management, and effective recovery, as well as continuity in coaching and support from significant others, are recommended to facilitate athletes’ coping with this transition.
4. Research shows that retirement planning, voluntary termination, multiple personal identity, availability of social support, and active coping strategies facilitate athletes’ adaptation to the post-career. Therefore, athletes are recommended to prepare in advance for their athletic career termination. Coaches and managers are recommended to talk to athletes about athletic retirement in advance, when they are still active in sport. Sport organizations are expected to provide more support to athletes during their retirement from sports.
5. Literature review shows that career researchers around the world have different research foci internalized from relevant socio-cultural contexts. Therefore, more studies on both athletic and non-athletic transitions focusing on cultural and cross-cultural aspects are required. Cultural adaptation of internationally recognized theoretical frameworks on career development and transition, and/or the development of culturally specific frameworks and research instruments should be encouraged in the sport psychology field. International co-operation in career research should be based on the researchers’ mutual cultural awareness and reflexivity.
6. Multicultural practice is considered as a new challenge for career assistance. There-

fore, career consultants should be prepared for dealing with cultural and cross-cultural experiences of athletes. International collaboration in applied work should be developed further through international networks of career consultants (e.g., the ISSP eAcademy, the European Forum of Applied Sport Psychologists). Applied sport psychology education should pay greater attention to cultural/multicultural competencies of the students, for example, by preparing them to work with athletes of various cultural backgrounds.

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