

An evaluation of how employers can enhance the career progression process for elite athletes

The increase in mental health issues and a government call for action around the Duty of Care for professional athletes prompted this research study.

The aim is to improve the transition process for professional rugby players upon facing sporting retirement.

Seeking to identify the modern players' needs and acknowledge any fears they may have. It will attempt to balance those with the organisations' requirement to run a sustainable business and its responsibilities for developing their players as people.

Aims & Objectives



The aim of the literature review was to compile & compare academic theory and models surrounding the issues of career transition in professional sports. This was done to inform both organisations and players of the key factors that can negatively influence a major period of change within a young players life. There has been an increasing amount of academic research focused on career transition within professional sport over the past 30 years but there are still many issues linked to the quality of transition outside of sport.

Literature Review



“ Only half of former rugby union players are satisfied with their second career ”

Following Institutional ethics approval, primary research was conducted via a combination of semi-structured questions in an informal interview format to gather qualitative data. The questions were formed following a detailed literature review and were recorded on an audio device.

Followed by an interview with the organisation's CEO which enabled the completion of data triangulation analysis and further validation. An acknowledgment of first-hand experiences will be reflected by the study adopting Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

“ 90% of pro athletes need to work after retirement from sport ”

Methodology



“ 61% of Professional Rugby Players have an injury that has impacted on their life ”

“ A third of former pro athletes did not feel in control of their lives two years after finishing ”

By using a matrix to compare both academic research and primary data, an evaluation of supporting & conflicting data was collected. Both sets of data reported a lack of preparation and a high athletic identity as two key factors that negatively influence sporting career transition, with the first two years identified as being the most difficult. All participants identified with different stages of the Kubler-Ross Change Curve, which highlights seven stages of dealing with grief.

Findings & Analysis



There is a clear recognition and acceptance from both the former players and the Organisation that more could be done to assist current players. Preparing players with knowledge and assisting them to develop their transferable skills will help them build an identity away from sport.

Conclusion



Training, education and career development were not high on any of the participants priority lists. Therefore, a recommendation would be to ensure that at least one of them becomes compulsory and included within playing contracts. An organisation could offer additional support during the first two years of retirement and it is hoped that this will become accepted and normal procedure over time.

Recommendations

