



Coaches' perspectives on athletes' transition to a new, post-athletic career

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ABSTRACT

Athletes' transition into a new, post-athletic career represents a challenging part of athletes' careers. Due to the diverse combination of demands that athletes may face when retiring (e.g., adjustment to the new social status, changing social network, physical deterioration), an increasing demand is being placed on athletes' sporting entourage to provide athletes the necessary support both during and after the sporting career (e.g., Gledhill & Harwood, 2015, Wylleman et al., 2020). While research is clear on the value of coaches in supporting athletes throughout different transition processes, studies investigating coaches' perspectives on athletes' career development towards a new, post-athletic career is scarce. This study therefore aimed to gain an insight in coaches' perspectives on athletes' preparation for and transition to a new, post-athletic career. A qualitative study design using eighteen semi-structured interviews with coaches was adopted. Participating coaches included active or former coaches (100% male) who supervise or supervised elite athletes competing at minimum national level in team sports (56%) or international level in individual sports (44%). Inductive thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) allowed us to gain a detailed picture of meaningful patterns within coaches' perspectives on supporting athletes in their preparation for and transition to a new, post-athletic career. While most of the coaches believed that certain preparation pathways, such as a dual career 'elite sport and study or work' hold multiple benefits (e.g., competency development, sense of security, welcome distraction from the elite sport demands), others expressed their fears of a dual career distracting elite athletes too much from their sporting goals. Nevertheless, the majority of coaches indicated to be willing to support athletes in their preparation for a new, post-athletic career. Examples of support indicated by the coaches were, amongst others, adapting the timings of training moments to an athlete's study scheme and using the coach's network to facilitate an athlete's job search. However, while reaching out to elite athletes in their preparation for a new, post-athletic career seemed obvious to most coaches, it was perceived that it is not a coach's responsibility to foresee guidance and help during the transition itself. Generally, coaches found they lack the necessary competencies to adequately support athletes in the transition phase. Study findings can serve as a basis to raise awareness within coaches on the importance of athletes' holistic development and to develop methods for coaches on how to integrate such holistic perspective in their coaching.

KEYWORDS

Dual Career; Coach; Elite Sport; Post-athletic Career; Holistic Perspective

