

Title: Retirement Difficulties in Spanish Athletes - The Importance of the Career Path

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Aims: The aim of the present study was to analyse the relative importance of voluntary termination, pre-retirement planning, satisfaction with one's sport achievements, and type of career path on the difficulties perceived by athletes in the transition out of sport.

Method: A descriptive, quantitative research study with the use of a survey was carried out. An online questionnaire based on both the Social and Working Integration Questionnaire previously applied by the National Olympic Committee of Spain (Barriopedro, Muniesa, & López de Subijana, 2016) and the Spanish adaptation (González, & Torregrosa, 2009) of the Athlete Retirement Questionnaire (Alfermann, Stambulova, & Zemaityte, 2004) was sent to Spain's retired elite athletes. Four hundred seventy-seven elite athletes (298 males and 179 females) completed the questionnaire.

Results and Practical Implications: Eighty-three percent of the athletes retired voluntarily and only 39.3% planned their retirement. The majority of them confirmed that they were satisfied with their sport achievements (78.6%). While 62.6% of the retired athletes studied and developed their sport career at the same time during their mastery stage, 35.3% of them gave priority to sport, and the rest gave no priority. Further, 21.4% combined work and sport, and 16% were focused only on sport. Athletes who retired involuntarily reported

more problems with their professional career, health, and finances. Planning the retirement in advance predicts difficulties in the areas of studies, family, and leisure, while satisfaction with one's sport achievements predicts the degree of difficulty in areas such as social network, leisure, and finances. As expected, career path predicted difficulties related to studies and finances. The current study confirms greater difficulties reported by athletes focused solely on sport while those who worked or studied while simultaneously training for their sport seemed to deal better with the retirement in educational and economic areas. The results predicted 2.5 times more severe and 3.7 times more moderate difficulties related to finances for subjects focused only on sport than those who combined sport and work. Although a dual career plays a crucial role in ensuring an athlete's future, particularly for career direction after sport, it does not significantly contribute to predicting difficulties in other areas. Support programs for elite athletes based on a holistic perspective should take into account the different components of an elite athlete's life.

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