

Title: The Role of Psychological Characteristics in Managing the Transition to University

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Year: 2010

Tags: psychological characteristics, university, education and sport, transition, talent development

Sports: Athletics (running)

Journal: Psychology of Sport and Exercise

Main theme: Transition

Secondary themes: Personal Characteristics, Social Support

Aims: The purpose of the study was to explore the experiences of young high-level athletes during their expected transition into university, and identify what factors prepared them to cope with the challenges that they faced. More specifically, the study focused on how psychological characteristics that athletes hold can facilitate the transition into university.

Method: Data was collected through interviews with 6 international-level athletes, both before and after the transition into university.

Results and Practical Implications: Results suggest that the athletes perceived the transition to be a long process, rather than a singular event, with the process beginning more than a year before they started university. This suggests that athletes should be proactive and begin making preparations well in advance of the transition. Student-athletes found that by forecasting some of the potential challenges (e.g., having a new coach, entering a new educational environment) they may face in the transition (with coaches, support staff and parents) before they arrived at university, and considering how they might cope with these, they were able to adjust more successfully. Parental emotional and financial support was described as significant by athletes during the transition, but direct input their sporting career progressively became less. Athletes also described difficulty in maintaining

relationships with peers who were not involved in sport. Results also suggest that some athletes were not prepared to cope with injury, and as a result, lost motivation and commitment to continue with their sport. It is suggested that in the preparation phase, support staff should focus on both the predictable transitions of development (e.g., new training group), as well as preparing athletes to cope with potentially unpredictable transitions (e.g., injury). In both athletic and academic contexts, results suggest that athletes had to become more independent and proactive in their approach to training and thus began to self-monitor and self-correct mistakes. It is suggested that the young athlete who does not take personal responsibility for their own development, but instead relies on others to guide and structure their practice and training will find this transition challenging. Some of the psychological characteristics suggested to be important during the transition into university for student-athletes, and which should be discussed with athlete's pre-transition include: seeking out learning opportunities, challenging themselves, a willingness to make sacrifices, commitment and motivation, realistically evaluating performance, prioritising long-term development, remain confident, adjusting goals, patience and time management.

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