

Beyond Sport: Understanding the Retirement Experiences and Support Needs of Retired Elite Athletes

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Abstract : Retiring from elite sport can have detrimental effects on the mental health and life satisfaction of retired elite athletes. To aid in this transition, sporting organisations use retirement interventions. The aim of this study is to understand the experience of elite sport retirement from a holistic perspective, exploring the experiences of retiring athletes, retired athletes, and sport support staff. A secondary aim is used to uncover any recommendations both retiring/retired athletes and sport support staff suggest towards improving retirement programs or interventions. A total of N=15 participants took part in semi-structured interviews to explore their experiences with sport retirement. Retiring and retired elite athletes were asked about how they felt during their transition into retirement, and sport support staff were asked about their experience working with retiring athletes. Data collection and iterative qualitative analysis are still ongoing; however, it is anticipated that the final key themes to emerge will include isolation, identity loss, and lack of support, with varying sub-themes such as organisational support and family support. Relationships across and within themes will be explored within the study. The anticipated findings present retiring from elite sports as a challenging life and career transition; however, current support and resources for elite athletes are not addressing the core difficulties experienced by retiring elite athletes. The findings of this study will inform future development of new co-designed elite sport retirement interventions.

Keywords : elite athlete, retired elite athlete, retirement interventions, transition into retirement, interviews

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