ARTICLE IN PRESS

Psychology of Sport & Exercise xxx (xxxx) xxx–xxx

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Psychology of Sport & Exercise

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/psychsport

Struggling to stay and struggling to leave: The experiences of elite para-athletes at the end of their sport careers☆

A. Bundon[a,*], A. Ashfield[b], B. Smith[c], V.L. Goosey-Tolfrey[d]

[a] School of Kinesiology, The University of British Columbia, 6081 University Boulevard, Vancouver, British Columbia, V6T 1Z1, Canada
[b] The English Institute of Sport, 299 Alan Turing Way, Manchester, M11 3BS, United Kingdom
[c] School of Sport, Exercise and Rehabilitation Sciences, The University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15 2TT, United Kingdom
[d] The Peter Harrison Centre for Disability Sport in the School of Sport, Exercise and Health, Loughborough University, Epinal Way, Loughborough, Leicestershire, LE11 3TU, United Kingdom

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Para-athletes
Disability
Sport
Career transition
Retirement

ABSTRACT

OBJECTIVE: To explore the retirement experiences of elite para-athletes. Athletic retirement has long been of interest to sport psychologists. With a few exceptions, little attention has been paid to the retirements of elite athletes with disabilities. The research that has been done on para-sport was conducted in the late 1990s and the context of Paralympic sport has changed in the interim. DESIGN: An online survey was distributed to retired para-athletes (n = 60) and qualitative interviews were conducted with a purposive sub-sample (n = 13). SAMPLE: The sample included 48 Paralympians (21 had medalled at the Paralympic Games) and 12 internationally competitive para-athletes. The group included 39 males and 21 females and was diverse in age (22–77 years of age), impairment history and impairment type (35 acquired impairments and 25 congenital impairments), and sport (24 different para-sports). METHODS: Guided by a subjective and transactional epistemological framework, data was thematically analyzed. RESULTS: Although most para-athletes leave sport for the same reasons as their able-bodied peers, certain reasons for retirement, such as declassification, are unique to para-sport. Para-athletes facing these types of retirements had particularly difficult transition experiences and could benefit from additional support. Para-athletes also reported that the increasing professionalization of para-sport, combined with uncertainty about post-sport employment opportunities for people with disabilities, made it more difficult to retire. CONCLUSIONS: Understanding the experiences of retirement that are unique to para-sport will permit sport psychologists and other practitioners to provide better and more targeted support to para-athletes.

1. Introduction

The reasons for and circumstances of athletic retirement have long been of interest to sport psychologists and other practitioners. However, with a few notable exceptions, little work has been done to understand the transitions out of sport of elite athletes with disabilities. The work that has been conducted on the topic of how and why para-athletes end their sport careers was carried out in the late 1990s, when the context of disability sport was significantly different (Martin, 1996, 1999, 2000; Legg & Wheeler, 1998; Wheeler, Malone, VanVlack, Nelson, & Steadward, 1996; Wheeler et al., 1999). At that time, the Paralympic Movement (defined in this instance as the informal collective of athletes, coaches, officials, sport leaders and others whose activities culminate in the Paralympic Games [see Bundon, 2014]), was just entering what Howe (2008) referred to as the third era of para-sport. This era is associated with a focus on high performance sport and contrasted with earlier eras that emphasized sport for rehabilitation and sport for participation (Howe, 2008). In this third era, the organization and delivery of Paralympic sport has become more professionalized and dramatic increases in funding have occurred (Misener, Darcy, Legg, & Gilbert, 2013,). For example, UK Sport invested £72,786,652 in Summer Paralympic Sports during the 2016 Rio Paralympiad compared to £10,075,602 in the lead up to the 2000 Sydney Paralympic Games (UK Sport, n.d.). This investment has changed not only how the national sport governing bodies (NGBs) deliver para-sport programs but has also changed what is expected of para-athletes with regards to time

☆ Work was conducted while Andrea Bundon was a postdoctoral fellow affiliated with the Peter Harrison Centre for Disability Sport in the School of Sport, Exercise and Health, Loughborough University (United Kingdom).

* Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: andrea.bundon@ubc.ca (A. Bundon), Arabella.Ashfield@eis2win.co.uk (A. Ashfield), b.smith.4@bham.ac.uk (B. Smith), V.L.Tolfrey@lboro.ac.uk (V.L. Goosey-Tolfrey).

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2018.04.007
Received 1 August 2017; Received in revised form 24 April 2018; Accepted 25 April 2018
1469-0292/ © 2018 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

spent training and the achievement of podium performances (Hammond & Jeanes, 2017). In research with able-bodied athletes, the singular focus on winning has been reported to promote the formation of strong athletic identities, but often at the expense of developing other aspects of the individual's identity (Cosh, Crabb, & Tully, 2015; Sparkes, 1998; Webb, Nasco, Riley, & Headrick, 1998). That exclusive investment in sport has also been linked to less time invested in preparing for post-sport careers (Albion & Fogarty, 2005; Aquilina, 2013; Cavallerio, Wadey, & Wagstaff, 2017; Murphy, Petitpas, & Brewer, 1996). Yet the implications of an increased focus on winning and a decreased focus on post-sport planning have not been researched in connection with para-sport and the implications for retiring para-athletes are not well understood. The purpose of this study was to explore how the current organization and delivery of Paralympic sport are informing the retirement experiences of elite para-athletes by answering the following research questions: (1) How are elite para-athletes transitioning out of sport and into employment or education? And (2) How specifically do disability and/or impairment impact upon this transition?

1.1. Athletic retirement and reasons for leaving sport

Within the sport psychology literature, different ways of understanding sport retirement have been advanced and theories and models drawn from the fields of social gerontology and thanatology comparing the experience to retirement from the workforce and/or a form of social death (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985; Blinde & Stratta, 1992). In contrast to these largely negative portrayals of leaving sport, other scholars have described sport retirement as a form of rebirth (Coakley, 1983). However, while these works focused on retirement as a sudden and immediate break, more recent research has portrayed sport retirement as one of the many normative transitions that happen over the course of an athletic career (Park, Lavallee, & Tod, 2013; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Understanding retirement this way, shifts the focus from the specific moment in which a sport career terminates to more holistic explorations of the athlete's career including how experiences throughout that career shape and influence the decision to leave sport and the emotions involved in this process (McEwen, Hurd Clarke, Bennett, Dawson, & Crocker, ahead of print).

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations such as work and study commitments, loss of motivation, the politics of sport, decreases in performance, financial considerations, decreases in enjoyment, age, injury and deselection have all been reported as reasons (able-bodied) elite athletes terminate their sport careers (Lavallee, Grove, & Gordon, 1997; Werthner & Orlick, 1986; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Sport scholars have subsequently sought to further understand athletes' experiences by creating categories that position retirement as voluntary *or* involuntary, planned *or* unplanned, desired *or* undesired (Alfermann, Stambulova, & Zemaityte, 2004; Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Lavallee et al., 1997). Yet these binaries have been called into question because the distinction is not always clear and reasons for leaving sport are often interrelated (Alfermann, 2000; Fernandez, Stephan, & Fouquereau, 2006; Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). For example, while some athletes 'involuntarily' retire due to injury, others continue to compete while injured until the pain impacts upon their enjoyment of the sport resulting in the 'voluntary' decision to stop. Recognizing this interplay between reasons for retirement, some researchers have proposed models that move from binaries to concurrently acting push factors (negatives experiences that drive athletes from sport), pull factors (attractive opportunities outside of sport), anti-push factors (attachment to the current situation, ie. the sport career) and anti-pull factors (perceived costs and risks about life after sport) (Fernandez et al., 2006).

In addition to academic engagement with the topic, the past few years have seen many high profile athletes go public about their retirement struggles and a renewed public interest in athletic retirement as part of a broader societal conversation about athlete welfare and wellbeing (Duhatschek, 2016, August 29; Rumsby, 2017, May 9). The result has been increased scrutiny of the high performance sport sector "rais[ing] challenging questions about whether the current balance between welfare and winning is right" (Grey-Thompson, 2017, p. 4). In a recently produced report to the British Minister of Sport, Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson stated that "it is clear that the drive for success and desire to win should not be at the cost of individuals involved" (Grey-Thompson, 2017, p. 4). Moreover, the research evidence makes clear that, while athletes may experience poor mental health after they leave sport, interventions and protective measures need be taken *while they are still in sport* (Larkin, Levy, Marchant, & Martin, 2017).

Despite a growing body of research exploring athletic retirements and increased media reporting on the topic, few have considered the experiences of para-athletes. Wheeler et al. (1996, 1999) carried out a pilot investigation on the retirement experiences of 18 elite Canadian para-athletes and later interviewed 40 international para-athletes. They found that para-athletes shared many of the anxieties around sport retirement expressed by their non-disabled peers. Wheeler et al. (1996) also proposed five areas for future research consideration which they termed the 'quintuplet jeopardy' of para-athlete retirement: (1) loss of sport, (2) employment and financial issues, (3) overuse injuries contributing to a 'secondary' disability, (4) facing and coping with the original disability, and (5) issues associated with aging with a disability. These five areas, they stated, need further investigation as each has different implications for para-athletes than for their able-bodied peers. Martin (1996, 1999, 2000) also studied the careers and transitions of para-athletes and found that there are situations unique to para-sport that have implications for retirement. These included understanding that some para-athletes will have entered sport as a means of coping with an injury or as part of the rehabilitation program. In turn, leaving sport may raise unresolved emotions about the traumatic event and/or their identity as a person with a disability (Martin, 2017). Yet despite theorizing that para-athletes transitioning out of sport will encounter different challenges to able-bodied athletes and could benefit from additional, targeted types of support to assist them to cope (such as employment training programs that address the discrimination people with disabilities often encounter in the workplace), there has been little development in this area over the last two decades.

2. Philosophical and theoretical framework

The research sits within the interpretivist paradigm underpinned by ontological relativism (i.e., reality and truth are multiple and context dependent) and a subjective and transactional epistemology (i.e., knowledge is subjective and socially constructed) (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). In keeping with the epistemological and ontological foundations of the work, the research was designed to engage directly with already retired para-athletes to hear their experiences of leaving sport. No preconceived theoretical frameworks were considered before starting the work as it was determined this would be inconsistent with aims of seeking to understand the topic from the perspective of the para-athletes involved. We were, however, guided by the previously cited literature and, in particular, the concept of retirement as one of the many normative transitions in an athlete's career (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004), the multi-faceted and co-acting reasons for retirement (Fernandez et al., 2006), and the 'quintuplet jeopardy' facing retiring para-athletes outlined by Wheeler et al. (1996; 1999). The research team also brought to the project our own knowledge, perspectives and experiences garnered from many years of participating in para-sport as coaches, volunteers, sport practitioners and disability sport researchers. We had ongoing discussions about our shared values, our reasons for undertaking the research and our expectations for who would benefit from the research. As a result of these conversations, we position this project within the field of critical disability studies (CDS) (Smith & Bundon, 2018). For us, working from a CDS approach means being attentive to the processes and structures that contribute to the ongoing marginalization and exclusion of disabled people from everyday life.

Download English Version:

https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7253021

Download Persian Version:

https://daneshyari.com/article/7253021

Daneshyari.com