



Post retirement experiences of former Swedish elite athletes

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Elite Sport Retirement Research Program

The first investigation by Eriksson, Patriksson and Stråhlman (1990-1991)

The second investigation by Järphag, Stambulova and Stråhlman (2002-2004)

The third investigation by Eriksson, Fahlström, Patriksson and Stråhlman (2012-2014)

Prospective study: N=27
Occasion 1 2 3

Preparation
for the first
study

Main study:
Field
investigation
interview N=39

Main study:
Questionnaire
n=880

Analysis
and results:
First study

Preparation
for the
second
study

Analysis and
results:
Second study
n=343

Main study:
Questionnaire

Preparation
for third
study

Analysis
and results:
Third study

Main study:
Interviews
n=36

1989

1991

2002

2004

2012

2014

Ref:

Eriksson, Patriksson & Stråhlman (1992)
Patriksson (1995)
Stråhlman (1997)

Ref:

Stråhlman, (2006)
Stambulova, Stephan & Järphag (2007)

Ref:

Fahlström, Patriksson & Stråhlman, (2014)





Swedish Elite Sports Council 1984:

Concerning the post elite sport life, the former elite athlete must have the possibility to live as an ordinary member of society ...

It is the sport organization's task to design their activities, so that the individual athletes could have a positive development, not only as performers, but also as human beings (p. 4)

It must be both in the sports movement and the society's interests and responsibility, that the athlete could establish a decent social life when the elite sport period is over (p.13)

The sporting organisations and the society should take responsibility for Swedish athletes, so they do not experience social problems depending on an ambitious elite sport investment (p. 32).



The aims of this study are to describe;

- (1) the perceptions and experiences of the road through the elite sports career
- (1) experiences of the transition from elite sport to a post retirement life



Theoretical perspectives

Transition theory (Schlossberg & Leibowitz, 1980;
Schlossberg, 1984)

Conceptual model of adaptation to career transition
Taylor, Ogilvie & Lavalley (2006)

Theories of identity (Douglas & Carless, 2009; Warriner &
Lavalley, 2009; Stambulova & Alfermann, 2009)



Method (semi-structured interviews)

36 athletes were interviewed (26 men -10 women) all with experience of top-level sport on international basis.

One third of the group had finished their career before or during the 1990s and the others in the 2000s.

The respondents represented various sports.

The issues discussed highlight the aims of the study, and the questions where formulated to grasp the essence of the respondents' experiences.



Respondent's age, gender and sport

	Born										
Sport	Before 1960		1960-1969		1970-1979		1980-1989		1990-		Sum
	Man	Women	Man	Women	Man	Women	Man	Women	Man	Women	
Archery	1										1
Athletics					4	1					5
Badminton			1	1							2
Basketball	1		1	1							3
Canoe				1							1
Cross-country					1	1					2
Cycle			1								1
Fencing										1	1
Figure skating							1				1
Handball	1		4								5
Ice hockey	1		1				1				3
Ice-bandy			1								1
Orienteering				1							1
Rowing				1							1
Sailing					1						1
Soccer			2		1		1				4
Sport shooting				1							1
Tennis			1								1
Wrestling					1						1
Sum	4	0	16	7	4	1	2	1		1	36



The period during the elite sports career and the transition out of elite sport

Individual adaptation strategies

**Consequences of
changing conditions**

Identity development

**Different reasons to stop
and its consequences**

Types of termination

The results show that:

- that the transition phase is a complex and lengthy process

I could say that I basically felt that in 1997 it was time to end. But I struggled with these knee problems. (Male)



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The results show that:

- top athletes have a long-standing and committed relationship to their sport

I had a very long career and the termination was a long process. I do not leave something I love in a hurry. It was a severe separation anxiety that ultimately became great. And the secret of it is that I have been aware all the time of where I was in my career. (Male)



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The results show that:

- exit from the elite sport role was a conscious planned decision

I retired in 2000. I had mentally prepared myself for it one year before so I felt that motivation was not quite what it should be. It was planned. (Female)



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The results show that:

- few transitions were abrupt and involuntary

I asked if I still could go to the European Championships. But the coach said that the team was already decided. It was very tragic for me (male).



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The results show that:

- almost a third of the interviewees returned to sport

So really, I was not finished, I loved to train ... and I missed the sport friends above all ... and you lose the identity you have had throughout your adult life. (Female)



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The results show that:

- almost all former athletes had some form of employment

It was probably a little bit easier in the old days to get a good civilian career without having an education, but now it is hard business, you can not live on your name. My reflection is that the work environment has become tougher.(Male)



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The results show that:

- most athletes had jobs where the main focus was sports-related

... The year before I finished I started a company with my colleague, where we organize training trips and events ... I have made a plan where I step by step will make use of the different parts of my career ... and right now, it is very much about training. I love to try and pass on my skills ... it's tough because you have got to twist and turn every euro. (Male)



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The results show that:

- most of the athletes had several reasons to quit

That was when age began to take some tribute. I did not have the same motivation, especially for playing in Sweden. (Male)



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Reasons to quit:



Lack of motivation	13
Injuries or health problems	8
Age	4
Lack of success	4
Family reasons	2
Economic reasons	2
The sporting environment	1
Not qualified	1
Other	1



The period during the elite sports career and the transition out of elite sport

The assessment resulted in a three-category system, where each respondent was placed into one of three categories. The categories were based on how well the former elite athletes have managed the transition from elite sport to civilian life.

The three categories are interpreted as:

Virtually without problems (61%)

Mostly good but with some minor problems (28%)

Very problematic (11%)



The period after elite sport

The results show that:

Environmental Factors

**Education
(general and sport)**

**Employment
(work - economic
conditions)**

**Family and other related
persons (coach)**



- education (both civilian and sporting) plays a major role in the outcome of elite sports career
- opportunities for training during the elite sports career should be strengthened
- ability to "fall back" on a civilian work gives confidence in the retirement situation
- It is important with a supportive family and an understanding coach, who realizes that there is a life after elite sport



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