Successful transition out of elite sport: what is the influence of the national context?

Seminar
“Talentudvikling” og “Dual Career”
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Overview

- Background
- Objectives
- Framework
- Methods and design
- Results of comparison between former Swiss, Danish, and Polish athletes
- Dual Career in Denmark
- Discussion
- **Background as an elite athlete**
  Ski-jumping World Cup Tour (1995-2011), participation at three Olympic Games

- **Dual-career pathway**
  Sports studies at ETH Zurich (1999-2006)

- **PhD project 2013-2016**
  University of Southern Denmark
Athletic retirement

- The end of an elite sports career entails significant changes in different areas of an athlete’s life (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004)

- There are many different factors which influence the quality of the transition out of elite sport. However, all these factors work differently in different countries/cultures (Park et al., 2013; Stambulova & Ryba, 2013)

- Cross-national comparison studies about the transition out of elite sport are limited (e.g., Alfermann et al., 2004)
Objectives

- To compare transition out of sport of former Swiss, Danish, and Polish athletes in terms of
  
  (a) Individual characteristics
  (b) Characteristics of the career end
  (c) Quality of adaptation to the post-sport life
Cultural framework for the transition out of elite sport
(adapted from Stambulova et al., 2007)

Macro level
(Country)
- Welfare system
  - Domestic living standards
  - Cultural traditions, values and beliefs

Meso level
(Sport system)
- Elite sports climate
  - Financial support for athletes
- Job / Dual career possibilities for elite athletes
- Athlete Career and Retirement Services

The transition process and outcomes:

Micro level
(Athletes and close environment)
- Transition demands
- Support received and adaptation strategies used
- Identification with new role and demands outside elite sport

Part 1: Survey with former elite athletes
Part 2: Interview with stakeholders
Why these countries?

- **Similarities**
  - European context
  - Similar ranking at London 2012 Olympics

- **Differences**
  - Dual Career support
  - Structure of sport system
  - Cultural dimensions
  - Welfare system
  - Living standard and size of population
Methods

- Cross-sectional research design, retrospective study using an online-survey among former elite athletes (retired between 2008-2013)
- Questionnaire based on Athletic Retirement Survey (Alfermann et al., 2004)
- Instrument translated into Danish, German, and Polish
## Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Switzerland</th>
<th>Denmark</th>
<th>Poland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>N athletes</strong></td>
<td>231</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong> years at career end (SD)</td>
<td>30.5 (6.3)</td>
<td>30.4 (5.4)</td>
<td>32.7 (5.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong> (female)</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
<td>36.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Amount of sport disciplines</strong></td>
<td>34</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Top 3 at OG/WCS</strong></td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Total sample: **401 former international elite athletes**
- **Response rate: 60-65%** in all countries
Transition out of elite sport

Situational characteristics

- Personal/motivational
- Performance
- Sport environment
- Job/educational
- Financial
- Family
- Health
- Loss /relief (perception of career end)
- Concrete plans for future
- Voluntariness to retire
- Timing (on-time/off-time)

Environmental characteristics

- Social support private environment
- Social support sport environment

Individual characteristics

- Gender
- Age
- Athletic Identity
- Educational level
- Total income
- Income from sport (in %)
- Popularity (individual)
- Confidence in skills
- Work experience
- Sport success (top 3)
- Career balance (gains/losses)

Quality of adaptation

- Emotional difficulties
- Social difficulties
- Health/body difficulties
- Financial difficulties
- Vocational/educational difficulties
- Duration of adaptation
- Perception of transition

Variables from systematic review by Park, et al. (2013)

(Model adapted from Schlossberg, 1981)
## Results

Table 1. Comparison of individual characteristics of Swiss, Danish, and Polish athletes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item (range)</th>
<th>Switzerland</th>
<th>Denmark</th>
<th>Poland</th>
<th>Effect size</th>
<th>F/χ²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education</td>
<td>39%&lt;_a&gt;</td>
<td>62%&lt;_b&gt;</td>
<td>85%&lt;_c&gt;</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>53.27***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income from sport</td>
<td>46%&lt;_a&gt;</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>59%&lt;_b&gt;</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>3.41*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous work experience (h/week)</td>
<td>13.35&lt;_a&gt;</td>
<td>14.12</td>
<td>11.88</td>
<td>13.07</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence in skills (1-55)</td>
<td>38.97&lt;_a&gt;</td>
<td>9.13</td>
<td>33.35</td>
<td>8.25</td>
<td>.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletic identity (1-7)</td>
<td>5.28&lt;_a&gt;</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>5.54</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popularity (1-5)</td>
<td>2.47&lt;_a&gt;</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investments vs. benefits (1-5)</td>
<td>3.18&lt;_a&gt;</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job related to sport after career</td>
<td>35%&lt;_a&gt;</td>
<td>34%&lt;_a&gt;</td>
<td>75%&lt;_b&gt;</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>42.70***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Means with different subscripts in a row are significantly different from each other. Effect size .1 = small; .3 = moderate; .5 = large

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.
# Results

Table 2. Comparison of *situational characteristics* of Swiss, Danish, and Polish athletes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item (Range 1 - 5)</th>
<th>Switzerland</th>
<th>Denmark</th>
<th>Poland</th>
<th>Effect size</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family-related reasons</td>
<td>2.47&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>3.30&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal/motivational reasons</td>
<td>2.71&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>3.19&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial-related reasons</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health-related reasons</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job/educational reasons</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntariness</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plans for future</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career end as loss vs. relief</td>
<td>3.12&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>3.31&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>.37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Means with different subscripts in a row are significantly different from each other. Effect size .1 = small; .3 = moderate; .5 = large

*<i>p < .05</i>. **<i>p < .01</i>. ***<i>p < .001</i>.
## Results

Table 3. Comparison of *adaptational characteristics* of Swiss, Danish, and Polish athletes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item (Range 1 - 5)</th>
<th>Switzerland</th>
<th>Denmark</th>
<th>Poland</th>
<th>Effect size</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emotional difficulties</strong></td>
<td>2.76&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>3.20&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>3.69*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social difficulties</strong></td>
<td>2.43&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>2.92&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>5.91**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Health/body difficulties</strong></td>
<td>2.00&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>2.41&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>5.19**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vocational/educational difficulties</strong></td>
<td>1.81&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>2.40&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>8.30***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Financial difficulties</strong></td>
<td>1.71&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>1.88&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>2.75&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>26.91***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perception of transition (5 = v. good)</strong></td>
<td>4.45&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>4.45&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>3.61&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>45.19***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Duration of adaptation (months)</strong></td>
<td>9.23</td>
<td>10.44</td>
<td>9.05</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Means with different subscripts in a row are significantly different from each other. Effect size .1 = small; .3 = moderate; .5 = large

*<sup>p</sup> < .05. **<sup>*p</sup> < .01. ***<sup>*<sup>*<sup>*p</sup> < .001.
Summary of comparison between CH, DK, and POL athletes

- The national context and the sports system had a strong influence on individual characteristics (pre-conditions) for athletic retirement.

- A more common pattern emerged in terms of career-end characteristics.

- The social/emotional adaptation was generally perceived as most difficult.

- The adaptation was easiest for Swiss athletes and more difficult for Polish athletes.

- It is important to consider the socio-cultural context when studying the transition out of elite sport.
Dual Career Environment for elite athletes

Athletic career programs

Education  Life skills  Employment
Education level of Danish athletes

Dual Career

Highest completed educational level at career end:

- Gymnasium: 28%
- Bachelor (3-4 år): 26%
- Master/PhD (5-6 år): 29%
- Short tertiary education (1-2 år): 6%
- Vocational education: 5%
- Elementary: 6%
Development of skills and competences

Importance and expectations of Danish athletes (n = 86) for skills development during their sports career

- Help Career Programmes/courses: Importance 1-5 = 1.95, more expected = 46%
- Help Sponsoring/Management: Importance 1-5 = 2.47, more expected = 44%
- Help vocational environment: Importance 1-5 = 3.03, more expected = 5%
- Help educational environment: Importance 1-5 = 3.22, more expected = 23%
- Help sport environment: Importance 1-5 = 4.33, more expected = 63%
- Help private/personal environment: Importance 1-5 = 4.41, more expected = 14%

Importance 1-5:
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

More expected:
- 46%
- 44%
- 5%
- 23%
- 63%
- 14%
Reasons for finding job (self-reported)

Reasons for Danish athletes to find their job after the career

- Karriereprogrammer og -vejledning: 5%
- Kontakt og forhold til sponsorer/ medier: 17%
- Forhold til sportsklubber/specialforbundene: 20%
- Min popularitet/mit velkendte navn: 31%
- Mit professionelle netværk: 42%
- Mit personlige og/eller private miljø: 67%
- Min uddannelse: 73%
- Kompetencer og færdigheder fra elitesporten: 76%
- Min personlighed/mit karaktertræk: 83%

Note: Percentage of athletes who named reasons as helpful or very helpful
Job situation

Job situation after sports career

- 25% had periods without employment (avg. duration 7.6 month), but for some it was their own choice
- 20% self-employed
- 68% employed
- 20% under education
- 4% looking for a job

- Many former athletes have more than one occupation
- About 1/3 of Danish athletes relocate in the field of sport
Questions?

Thank you for your attention!

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