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The game of (your) life: professional sports careers

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The game of (your) life: Professional sports careers

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Introduction

So much has been written about sport and people's engagement with it that it makes it difficult to know where to begin to draw together some strands for future potential researchers. The study of sports careers has attracted scholars from anthropology, philosophy, sociology, psychology and medicine who are keen to explore and explicate the workings of sport from almost as many perspectives as there are people interested in it. With this plethora of possible avenues for research, in order to achieve any depth, some decisions have had to be made on focus for this chapter. As the title suggests I have decided to discuss careers of sports professionals, i.e. those athletes who have for a period of time made a living from their sports-craft, in particular I will discuss the early and often abrupt end of the sports career and the need for transition. This firmly locates our interest in the notion of sport as work. Taking this focus enables us to apply and discuss career theories that have emanated from studies of the intersection of the individual and the institution of work and apply them to professional sports careers. There are strong arguments that support the notion that professional sport is more like work and less like play or leisure. Simply demonstrated: performance is publically measured, penalties occur if ability fades, routines and practices are determined by others and contracts of employment depend on performance (Coupland, forthcoming).

Although there is no agreement of a common definition of career, a recent review of the literature provided the following comprehensive description; 'an individual's work-related and other relevant experiences, both inside and outside of organisations that form a unique pattern over the individual's life span' (Sullivan and Baruch, 2009, p1543). Physical movement across and within real or imagined boundaries and contexts and the individual's interpretation thereof are recognised by this definition.

Having a career as a professional sports person has a large degree of uncertainty about it. However, there is one certainty to this career, that is, it will end rather prematurely in comparison to other careers (in terms of life span) and will therefore require the individual to re-craft a new career and re-construct a version of their selves in order to move forward with their working lives. One role of career theorists is to explore and explain how we make sense of life transitions. Some scholars, seeking certainty, endeavour to craft normative models in an attempt to predict and control these processes. Normative models are valuable principally because they enable better conceived attempts at intervention to render the process a more positive, or at least less negative, experience for the sports professional who is working through this. That said, the standard career is an abstraction a set of expectations, linear career paths have given way to non-linear, discontinuous careers (Sullivan, 1999) causing the non-traditional career (however defined) to be

increasingly the focus of empirical research. People's actual careers are different, career performance varies. It is this very variation in performance and how an individual makes sense of their progress through life that makes the understanding of careers important for understanding social life. Basic principles around work careers apply to professional sports' careers in several ways; they are socially differentiating, differences in career performances lead to differing rewards, rewards are not necessarily material and the ultimate reward is prestige or a satisfactory sense of self (Goldschmidt, 1990, p109).

In the chapter I will briefly outline how professional sports careers have been studied traditionally. In contrast, career theory as applied to work features differing levels of attention being paid to; contexts, structure and agency, boundaries, dynamics and methodologies (Chudkowski and Mayrhofer, 2011). In the main, in contemporary work contexts, the most influential contemporary career theories have largely assumed positions of choice for the individual around career change (see for example Boundaryless and Protean career theories (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996a; 1996b; DeFillipi and Arthur, 1996; Hall, 1996a; 1996b)). I propose that by looking at professional sports contexts as necessarily bounded through body-work and thus body-decline, the notion of choice is constrained but that these theories offer some explanation of boundaries as understood by the boundary crosser. Further, some career theorists have focused on stages within a career, this relates to the notion of dynamics, i.e. change over time. Although it has been contested how fixed or universal these may be there is an assumption of increasing skill and knowledge mastery in life followed by gradual decline. I argue that it would be worthwhile to consider some kind of stage theory applied to the professional sports person that may be crafted around patterns of increasing body-mastery (perhaps precluding alternative and potentially oppositional skill/knowledge mastery) with a sudden decline requiring a new start in a new career. Furthermore, scholars who have considered the sports person as relatively unique in honing the body for their work have drawn upon Bourdieu's notion of bodily capital where the individual and the trainers are engaged in an entrepreneurial project – turning the sports person into a lucrative project. According to studies of social and career capital within work careers, again, this is expected to accrue over experience. For the professional sports person this is by no means a predictable outcome and merits further consideration thus some evaluation of the usefulness of theories of embodied, social and career capital will be presented.

A review of sports-career oriented scholars' interests

Research on career transitions in sport has grown over the last 30 years and themes around; 1) predictors of transition (choice/agency) 2) the quality of the transition (positive or negative and interventions possible) 3) consequences of transitions (i.e. what happened next) 4) types of transitions (e.g. drop out/injury), and 5) models of transitions, have emerged as foci of interest for scholars (Park et al., 2013). Reviews have been carried out of sport career transition research from host disciplines of social gerontology, thanatology and life transition, which, while providing some insight, require further integrative conceptual development and research (e.g. Gordon and Lavalley, 2011; Taylor and Lavalley, 2010; Wylleman, Alfermann and Lavalley, 2004).

Park et al. (2013) summarised some key findings from a recent extensive review of sport career research. First, just under 50% were empirical studies of the physical, psychological, emotional and social consequences of athletes' retirement from playing sport at a high level. Furthermore, a number of studies considered the impact of a sports person's agency (or lack of) in their retirement decision. Ideas around social death or dying were drawn on to describe and explicate the process (e.g. Blinde and Stratta, 1992; Zaickowsky, King and McCarthy, 2000). Loss of identity (Butt and Molnar, 2009, Lynch, 2006) as the playing career ends was also a focus of some research. A sense of social exclusion (McKenna and Thomas, 2007) or betrayal and rejection (Butt and Molnar, 2009), featured from the findings of the research in differing contexts. With regard to physical concerns; injuries, pain and other health issues were found to be a source of career transition difficulties (Muscat, 2010) Perhaps predictably, active professional and Olympic athletes experience higher physical self-worth than former active sports people and the transition time is an acute period of distress caused through perceived negative body image (Kerr and Dacyshyn, 2000; Lavalee and Robinson, 2007). Some research focused on the degree of preparedness of the professional and high performing athletes for career transitions from playing at a high level to either a lower standard or not at all. Research indicated that pre-retirement planning did result in better vocational adjustment (Coakley, 2004). However, Lavallee (2005) found that many athletes did not take advantage of career transition intervention programmes, even if they were available. There was a perception that by focusing on the end of their playing career, even if planning the inevitable, it would somehow provide a distraction from their sport performance. Finally, there can be no doubt that the professional sports person, for varying reasons, may encounter difficulties at moving from a high level playing career to something else. From Park et al.'s (2013) review studies noted a range of concerning maladaptive coping strategies during this phase of a sports' career, including; alcohol dependence, increased smoking, drug use and suicide (Douglas and Carless 2009; Wippert and Wippert, 2008).

Over time researchers' foci on providing effective interventions for more successful sports-career transitions has moved from a traditional therapeutic approach, where the athlete is treated as coping with possible trauma, to providing life and social skill support programmes, pre-transition, thus the attention is drawn away from remedy towards prevention. Today's researchers, in the main, see transition as a process rather than an event (Wylleermann et al., 2004), where the career is viewed from a holistic life span perspective which encompasses playing at a professional level, lower levels and beyond to a post-play career and includes all domains of athletes' lives. Some authors argue that transition from playing to not-playing sport at a high level is unlike retirement from work occupations for three main reasons; it occurs at an earlier age; will progress into an occupational career of some kind and that the termination of a work-career need not always be a negative event requiring adjustment (Wylleermann et al., 2004). I argue, contrarily, that the athletes' experience is actually similar but more acute and thus this transition actually demonstrates a more intensified career-transition, hyper real in some sense, condensed into shorter periods allowing little time for adjustment. The professional sports person does retire from playing at an early age but still with a requirement, an expectation, to get another job in order to be financially secure. This means that they are under similar pressures to those who are retiring from work (more so if there has been insufficient time to accrue a retirement pension of some kind). Furthermore, a successful

professional sports person will already have experienced other transitions from amateur, youth and pre-professional to a more elite level which requires greater and increasing dedication to sports activities, resulting in, one could argue, less time to spend on other life activities (Baker et al., 2003). A drive to excel at sport may engender a lack of skill in dealing with non-sport activities (simply due to intensive focus elsewhere) and a less developed understanding around life choices (Stronach and Adair, 2010). Research has illustrated that former athletes showed difficulties dealing with non-sport situations. Arguably, then, delayed identity shifts may be predicted to occur at the end of a playing career due to a lack of non-sporting life experiences during sport careers (Muscat, 2010). Thus, I propose that immersion in the field of professional sports is so strong that it will be difficult to imagine or prepare for exit. So, it is more intense, with greater if different pressures to move on with a working sense of self. On a more positive note, it can be argued, utilising a holistic, life-story, perspective that a professional playing career termination could be regarded as an opportunity for social rebirth (Coakley, 1983). A transition process effecting a re-engagement with non-sporting life experiences, an adjustment which is mediated by degree of voluntariness with regard to at what time and in what manner the process is instigated. Therefore, it is suggested that career theorists have a relevant and practical contribution to make to the field that will benefit from the application of non-traditional, or multiple, theoretical perspectives.

Boundaries and choice

In keeping with a professional sports context, contemporary work careers too are characterised by fragmentation and a need to transition, which leads individuals to have to manage their careers by being prepared to be flexible. Hall's (1996a; 1996b; 2004) protean career theory describes a career as managed by the individual according to their own values. It describes a career orientation that is driven by the individual's decisions based on their own core values and is measured by subjective success criteria (Hall, 2004). Its conception came about during a time of a de-stabilization of organizationally-controlled careers. Contexts of de-layering, downsizing and decentralization precluded opportunities to effectively plan ahead in terms of recognising, developing and rewarding talent with an organizationally defined 'successful' career path. When it was first conceived it was positioned as different from a 'traditional' career where control was firmly located in the individual who saw success in psychological terms rather than through principally objective signs such as salary, position and status, see the table below for a comparison to prevailing thought:

The view from 1976 cited in Hall (2004, p4)

Issue	Protean career	Traditional career
Who's in charge?	Person	Organization
Core values	Freedom growth	Advancement
Degree of mobility	High	Lower
Success criteria	Psychological success	Position level salary
Key attitudes	Work satisfaction professional commitment	Organizational commitment

What may be of interest to sports careers' scholars is that research based on successful mid-life career changers (whose goal was to make 'more authentic definitions of self and success' utilising both subjective and external evaluators of

success) found that, in addition to measuring high on a protean orientation scale, the biggest difference compared to population means is on the 'openness to new experiences dimension' (Hall, 2004). This has some explanatory value for the professional sports person who is so immersed in current playing activities that this kind of thinking is rare. The protean careerist views the career as a series of learning cycles (Hall, 1996c) brought about by considering and trying out new possibilities. The emphasis is not, perhaps surprisingly, on developing competencies (i.e. vocational training for some other profession) but rather on developing metacompetencies around adaptability and self-awareness (or identity) so the individual learns from their experiences and are able to identify and develop appropriate competencies as required (Briscoe and Hall, 1997).

Although there are evident boundaries within the playing professional's career, the one most researched appears to be the transition from professional playing status to something else. Some research indicates that pre-retirement planning including psychological preparation before the end of the playing career and a clear goal outside sport facilitates adjustment (Warriner and Lavalley, 2008). However, Lavalley (2005) found many athletes did not use career transition intervention programmes even if they were available due to a perception that it would be a distraction from their sport performance. That said, for sports people who appeared to have a balanced attitude to life while competing, Kerr and Dacyshyn (2000) found that this was retained once the playing career was over. This suggests that Hall's idea of protean attitudes to career may be relevant throughout a sports career. That is, the person's values and ability to psychologically adapt, evidenced through self-directed career management and the pursuit of personal goals and values (Hall, 2004), can surface whether immersed in a sport or not. Sargent and Domberger (2007) combined image theory with the development of a protean career orientation in their study of graduates transitioning into work. The shock of transition was compared with self-images (of values, goals and plans) and occasionally resulted in image violation which precipitated a change of career. Although the quality and quantity of these shocks represented a new avenue of research for researchers who are interested in turnover and retention (Sargent and Domberger, 2007), I argue that post-professional sports careers could benefit from research attention from a similar perspective.

Boundaryless careers were, initially, broadly described as the opposite of organizational careers and indicated a progressive approach to the study of careers. In the large amount of research generated since the evolution of 'boundaryless careers' as an explanatory concept (see Sullivan and Arthur, 2006 and Inkson et al., 2012, for a re-examination of the concept), the notion of what a boundary is has expanded. When Arthur and Rousseau (1996b) re-formulated the following two concepts it was in the light of increasing understanding of a future of uncertainty around work careers.

“Career”: *Old meaning:* a course of professional advancement; usage restricted to occupations with formal hierarchical progression, such as managers and professionals.

New meaning: the unfolding sequence of any person's work experiences over time.”

“Boundary”: *Old meaning:* a limit; the division between familiar and hostile territory.

New meaning: something to be crossed in career behaviour or in taking on complexity”
(Arthur and Rousseau, 1996b, p29-30)

According to career theorists, there are two types of mobility—a physical movement, the transition across boundaries and the psychological, which is the perception of the capacity to make transitions. Most research in this area has focused on physical crossings, thus there remains much that can be done to demonstrate the usefulness of paying attention to movement and meanings simultaneously (Coupland et al., 2012). I argue that any movement in terms of career progression requires both psychological readiness and physical opportunity.

The boundaryless career has evolved in its meaning from one that describes a changing relationship with the employing organization in the early days of its use to an evocation of potential freedom (Cohen and Mallon, 1999) which has generated much debate. In order to develop the debate and in keeping with Pringle and Mallon’s (2003) call to attend to individuals’ changing perceptions of boundaries, our interest, as sports’ scholars, lies in how perceived boundaries are negotiated in order for people to make sense of ‘one’s place in the world’ (Gunz et al., 2000, p 50).

A review of stage theories – sport and life cycle

Career theories of work and sports contexts are embedded in their own cultural environments. According to a recent critical evaluation of developmental theories and their impact on work-career research by Sullivan and Crocitto (2007) early theories presumed the worker was a man who would work for one or two organizations until retirement while his wife stayed at home caring for the children. These assumptions led to the development of linear stage models of career development such as Super (1957) and Levinson (1978) and were based on psychological perspectives such as Erikson’s (1963). These theories, which were based on a system of structured hierarchies at a period of economic growth, are less applicable now in a time of instability and unpredictability in the area of work. Super’s theory developed from an understanding that at different stages in life we attend to different priorities; his 1957 four stage model reflects the presumed contextual stability for individuals:

- Growth:** Become concerned / aware about the future and starts to take control
- Exploration:** of both self and world of work, moving from general to specific choices
- Establishment:** settling into occupation and adopting a lifestyle
- Maintenance:** holding position, keeping abreast of developments
- Disengagement:** slowing down, ideas for retirement, establishing alternatives to work

Despite criticisms around contextual relevance in unstable work conditions, the stage theory still emerges in empirical studies of careers (e.g. Chen, 2011; Hom et al., 2010; Lyons et al., 2012). Super’s work has progressed to consider life span and life space, while relating work decisions to other life decisions for a more rounded theory (Super, 1980). More recently Savickas (2006) has integrated the stage theory approach, much criticised for ignoring the social contexts of career enactment, to include environmental and social variables. In his development of the theory of career construction (Savickas, 2006; 2012), which acknowledges that as individuals

and circumstances are constantly moving so the individual/work institution interface evolves, he extends Super's stage theory to include the external environment. The theory seeks to retain the most useful theoretical elements while concentrating on how individuals use what skills and opportunities they have had. For example, instead of measuring personality traits, personality scores can be replaced with a focus on accounts or stories of career experiences and how individuals use vocational identities to adapt to a sequence of job changes while remaining coherent to themselves and recognizable as plausible by others (Savickas, 2006). The argument is made that in contemporary times an individual can expect to occupy and transition from 10 or more jobs in a working life – thus how an individual makes sense of these transitions is relevant for understanding what matters and gives meaning to work.

In other than work contexts early research looked at how talented individuals in the fields of art, science and sport developed in terms of the stages that they appeared to progress through; 1) initiation 2) development 3) mastery (Bloom, 1985). Stambulova (1994, 2000) further developed a stage theory and applied it specifically to elite sporting careers. The stages thus identified were; 1) the beginning of a sport specialisation, 2) the transition to intensive training, 3) the transition to high achieving adult sports, 4) the transition from amateur to professional, 5) transition from culmination to the end of a playing sports career, and, finally, 6) the end of a sports career.

Thus, career transition in sport includes a view from 'the stage in the lifecycle' research where researchers consider how things such as age or pressure from others' influence whether an athlete decides to carry on in sport or retire. Wylleman et al. (2004) developed a life span model around a series of predictable transitions through athletes' careers. These are regarded as normative transitions as part of a universal sequence of age related to; biological, social and emotional events which occur across a lifespan. Normative transitions involve sports people exiting one stage and entering another so they are predictable and anticipated. Non-normative transitions result from important events that take place which require a response from the athlete, thus are unpredicted unanticipated and involuntary, e.g. the loss of a personal coach, de-selection from a team or threat of injury. Some transitions for athletes are not negative, moving from one level to a more elite level of the sport which involves greater dedication and time spent on sport activities. However, other life activities decrease (Baker et al., 2003) and the focus of athletes narrows from other life activities to focus more on sport, arguably promoting an obsessive drive to excel.

A more holistic view was argued to be pertinent by Wylleman et al. (2004) as it needs to incorporate a beginning to end perspective and include other domains of life, for example; academic, psychosocial and professional influences at particular stages in a person's life. One contrast with vocational stage theories is that the sports scholar's attention ceases at the age of 35, in Stambulova's model, for example. This suggests a lack of scholarly interest in how the professional sports person develops later in life, which may well mirror the professional sports person's own perspective, but nonetheless implies that they are no longer of interest.

Many athletes begin competitive sport at an early age, thus involvement in sport is reinforced by significant others. When associated with personal success this leads to a strong self-identification of the self as athlete (Baillie, 1993 p400). As previously suggested the level of dedication and commitment required thereafter may result in a premature narrowing of focus with academic and social goals being subordinated to athletic achievement, hence a potential lack of consideration of alternative career options (Blann, 1985). Drawing upon theories of career development Gati (1986) has argued that the career development decision making model works on the understanding that the individual sequentially eliminates occupational alternatives to arrive at career decisions at different stages of their career. It may be argued, therefore, that athletes' focus on the promise of a professional sporting career has resulted in a premature elimination of other alternatives. The subsequent and ongoing investment in the self-as-athlete reinforces a lack of consideration of alternatives beyond the playing career. This explains to some extent a lack of take-up of post-playing career planning (Lavalley, 2005) by some professional sports people.

In professional sport there is an inevitable end to playing, whether it occurs suddenly through injury or slowly through deterioration in skills over time it is a transition which cannot be avoided. Scholars have argued that these are difficult transitions due to the intense identification of an athlete with their sport 'who am I if I can no longer compete' (Day et al., 2012 p420). Further, these authors argue that similarities may be drawn between elite sport people and high potential managers. They are; selected for special scrutiny, are given developmental opportunities and performance expectations are high. Fractured, fragmented and multiple career paths have become more usual for working individuals due to changing work contexts. Thus, there is evidently room for potential integration around the study of difficult career transitions and their identity implications in work and sports contexts.

Social, career and bodily capital – explanatory potential for sports careers

Social capital as a concept has been a popular export from social theory into everyday language that describes relationships between people and groups. It directs attention to those non-monetary forms of capital as important sources of power and influence (Portes, 1998). One definition describes social capital as any aspect of social structure that creates value and facilitates actions of individuals within the social structure (Coleman 1990). The first systematic contemporary analysis of social capital was made by Bourdieu (1985, p248) who defined it as 'the aggregate of actual or potential resources which are linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintances or recognition'. The acquisition of social capital requires deliberate investment (in terms of time etc.), constructed and maintained through investment strategies oriented to the institutionalisation of group relations. Because of an athlete's immersion in sport and often lack of social interactions outside sporting circles, their social capital may be low. Processes of social capital are characterised by uncertainty, unspecified obligations, uncertain time horizons and possible violation of reciprocity expectations – so they are not typical market exchanges (Portes, 1998).

Chudzikowski and Mayrhofer (2011) argue that Bourdieu's work (e.g. Bourdieu, 1977) may be used as a framework for theoretically organizing career studies. It can be

drawn upon to describe and explain the overall functioning and dynamics of a given social order. Other career theorists have attempted to conceptualise social capital with regard to career success and have identified some useful arguments around weak tie theory and structural hole theory (Seibert et al., 2001). I will elaborate on these arguments further and demonstrate their potential to understand sports career progression.

Weak tie theory (Granovetter, 1973) considers the strength of a social tie (relationship) used by a person finding (typically) a job. If the ties are with a close social group they are thought to be strong. Information possessed by any one member tends to be shared quickly. Ties outside one's own social clique are likely to be weak. Weak ties tend to bridge densely interconnected social cliques and thus provide a source of unique information and resources e.g. information about new job openings or promotion possibilities or new projects etc. (Seibert et al., 2001). We could apply this argument to sports people transitioning within their playing careers and exiting from them. It clearly has explanatory potential with regard to lack of resource or alternative understanding from outside the close social group of professional sports people. Furthermore, it explains an initial reluctance to leave the sphere of sport even when the playing career has ended.

Structural holes are about the pattern of relationships among people in a network. A structural hole exists when two people are not connected to each other, for example, your ex-school friend does not know your co-worker. It is suggested that it is an advantage to have many unconnected relationships, i.e. many structural holes, as they provide; more unique access to information and greater visibility to more people, thus increased career opportunities Burt (1992). Park, et al. (2013) in their review of studies of sport career transitions found a number of cases of former professional athletes who had difficulties in dealing with non-sport situations. They were found to have delayed identity shifts due to a lack of non-sport life experiences during their sports careers (Muscat, 2010). It can be argued that this is an example of strong ties and possibly a description of relationships with few structural holes. In other words, the sports person has operated professionally, mainly closely connected to a small clique, a social group which is emotionally intense, has frequent contact and connected in multiple ways (e.g. friends as well as co-workers etc.). Information which is possessed by any one member is shared quickly; however the range of information is limited.

This kind of thinking has been applied to how people move from job to job, become knowledgeable about other spheres of work, are psychologically prepared for change and subsequently make career moves. It is clear that applying this kind of thinking to professional sports people and their careers may provide new perspectives on the process. Studies have found that athletes have attributed limited life choices post professionally playing sport to a lack of opportunities for personal development (e.g. Chow, 2001; Stronach and Adair, 2010 and Swain 1991). Professional sports people, it is argued; regard post-play planning when actively competing as a distraction from their sport performance (Petitpas et al., 1992). It is thus suggested that this may, with hindsight, be recognised as lost opportunities for the development of career and social capital which would better enable a future transitional process.

Social relationships create habitus which is expressed in everyday contexts, however, specifically with regard to sport, beliefs which order our behaviour are not just states of mind but states of body (Coupland, forthcoming) where the body is a living memory pad operating through practical metaphors (Bourdieu, 1990). Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and cultural capital have explanatory potential here as theoretical schema in terms of explaining broader relationships between the embodied self and the organized individual. Behaviour is not determined by this system but it provides a practical sense that inclines us towards one way of being rather than another. The concepts are linked together in a formula '(habitus) (capital) + field = practice' (Bourdieu 1984). Where practice is the result of various habitual schemas and dispositions combined with resources (capital) being activated by social conditions (field) which they in turn reproduce and modify (Crossley, 2001).

Using an example from professional sport, Wacquant (1995) found in his ethnographic study of boxers in Chicago that objective structures of the social world of boxing became embodied in the boxers' habitus. A particular habitus makes it more likely that an individual acts, perceives and thinks according to the rules of the field and the moves appear as 'natural' (Chudzikowski and Mayrhofer, 2011). In other words, an individual acts 'intentionally without intention' (Bourdieu, 1990, p12) and according to one's sense of possible options.

Bourdieu's thinking included attention to the body, which can be called 'bodily capital' and is relevant to a study of professional sports people's careers. He proposed that; 'The way people treat their bodies reveals the deepest dispositions of the habitus' (Bourdieu, 1984, p190). It follows therefore that sport training produces a particular type of body with mastery over particular kinds of movement which is socially produced through diet, exercise and etiquette. Furthermore, if we compare the creation of physical capital through changes in materials to facilitate production; human, or bodily, capital involves changes in individuals' skills and capabilities. We can apply this to the professional sports person. It can be argued that traces of physical capital are converted into economic capital through sport or training for sport, or other physical endeavours, called bodily capital (Wacquant, 1995). Those who are engaged in crafting this bodily capital into optimum playing capital (both those instigating training and those who carry it out) may be regarded as entrepreneurs in bodily capital as it is possible to produce value in terms of income and recognition for the benefit of the individual and the industry more broadly. As a means of production, therefore, the sports person's body is worked upon to accentuate talent and body shape for the requirement of the sport. However, one certainty of this process is its temporality – despite all best efforts the body will succumb to injury, wear and tear and an ageing process that renders the sports person unable to compete with younger, faster, stronger bodies. The body will erode under physical pressures thus rendering the opportunity to take entrepreneurial advantage from it short and likely to be curtailed rapidly in the event of severe injury.

If we apply this to professional sports people intensely engaged in their playing careers it is evident that alternatives for the post-playing career are rarely considered and even if they are, they may be regarded as inappropriate or undesirable for their current attention.

Discussion

In the chapter I have briefly appraised traditional sports career transition research in order to identify key themes, patterns and foci which have been the concern of sports' scholars. Furthermore, I have identified and described some of the vocational career theories which have been more normally applied to the individual who is in intersection with the institution of work. Although there are important differences in the perspectives which guide the research I argue that there is much that can be useful for sports scholars who are interested in understanding more fully how professional sports people come to terms with moving on from the active, playing, part of their lives.

Sports scholars' interests have clearly developed from simply evaluating the process of retirement from playing professionally to also considering how best to provide interventions prior to retirement, so the individual is better equipped for this transitional phase of their life. In contemporary work contexts readiness for transition is the basis of all career counselling. With an expectation of changing jobs (not always voluntarily) on average 10 times in a working life span, effective research has been demanded to understand and enable this process from an organizational and an individual perspective. Empirical research has enabled important theories to be developed to attend more closely to context and to demonstrate the importance of utilising a range of theoretical perspectives in order to address different questions of the work/individual relationship.

One example of this process has occurred around Super's stage theory of life span (1957; 1980). It was originally based on traditional questionnaire research measuring personality traits and has remained very influential. It was primarily applied in the field of vocational counselling where it became apparent over time that a major criticism included a lack of attention to individuals' particular accounts of what was important at certain times in their lives. Further, in such an unpredictable work environment a sense of progression through stages was difficult to ascertain. Put simply, the context of work has changed so it is less predictable, less organized, it is a space in which the individual makes sense of opportunities and challenges presented to them over time. This has caused a shift in career theorists' concerns and an increasing number are looking at how people make sense of this readiness for transition. Thus, I argue the developed versions of these theories (e.g. Savickas, 2006, 2012) may be useful for sports scholars in order to better understand how professional sports people may be encouraged to develop a meta competency around adaptability but without a loss of focus on their playing career.

Some studies of sports professionals have already identified that there are individuals who exhibit an element of balance throughout their playing careers (Kerr and Dacyshyn, 2000) and thus are balanced in their approach to moving on to something else. I suggest this may be recognisable as a similar set of competencies outlined by Hall (2004) as 'protean' where the individual draws upon a set of personal values that sustain movement across and between work organizations and career moves. This is not to suggest that the protean individual is any more agentic, the structures of work that they experience are just as real and difficult to navigate around, rather they appear to have a set of skills that enables them to temporarily psychologically disengage from the path they are currently taking and imagine another path as quite possible. This individual is able to create coherence for their selves even though the paths may be perceived to be quite divergent externally. This

meta competency would be valuable to professional and other elite sports people and suggests some potential for the application of this work career theory to sports careers in future research.

Ideas around embodied capital have already been utilised effectively to explain the total immersion of sports people in their playing world, see for example Wacquant (1995; 2011). What I have attempted to contribute in this chapter is to provide some developed ideas around how this immersion affects sports people's ability to build social capital to go beyond playing sport. The career capital theories that are based around weak and strong ties (Seibert et al., 2001) have potential to explain some people's ability to move from job to job. Future research could apply this kind of thinking to sports people at different points in their playing careers to identify whether it has any explanatory potential in their field.

One element which is apparent from the sports' scholars' studies of transitions is the required increasing engagement of sports people as they progress in terms of performance. The elite athlete is expected to spend more time honing performance as a result of their success. It is evident that this precludes paying attention to very much else and it is perhaps not surprising that even if transitional programmes are offered to professional sports people their take-up is low (Lavalley, 2005). This is perhaps explainable utilising Bourdieu's notion of habitus where a particular habitus makes it more likely that an individual thinks according to the rules of the field (Chudzikowski and Mayrhofer, 2011).

Examples from professional sports people who are currently playing at a high level when asked about their craft:

It was always part of my life, kept growing up and that's probably the only thing I was really born to do (Player)

It is all I know (Player)

It's in my blood (Player)

(adapted from Coupland's (forthcoming) study of professional rugby league players)

It's a kind of possession

(adapted from Wacquant's (1995) study of professional boxers)

The extracts quite simply demonstrate the powerful hold that being a professional sports person has on their ability to imagine themselves as anything else.

As entrepreneurs in developing (and selling) others' bodily capital professional sports organizations have some remit to provide conditions that may engender the development of meta competencies around adaptability. These would not only enable the survival of the athlete beyond playing but encourage the holistic development of the individual. Therefore, it may be that it is more clearly the responsibility of sports organizations to manufacture changes in the field (and thus the habitus, where habitus is regarded as an organised way of asking questions of the social world (Wacquant, 2011, p91)). These would be required to render discussions around the currently active sports professional, which demonstrate balanced thinking about working and contributing beyond playing as quite normal and to be encouraged and expected. Thus, the rules of the field can be seen to

increasingly incorporate legitimate plans for disengagement and the post-playing career may be seen as a progression to something equally valuable rather than an end to a useful contribution.

Concluding comments

The chapter has been a discussion of careers of sports professionals, i.e. those athletes who have for a period of time made a living from their sports-craft. This firmly locates our interest in the notion of sport as work. Taking this focus has enabled us to apply and discuss career theories that have emanated from studies of the intersection of the individual and the institution of work and apply them to professional sports careers. It is clear that new understandings may be gained by applying inter-disciplinary perspectives to differing social contexts and that opportunity exists for future empirical research in the sports field that develops the utility of theories of work careers.

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