

Área temática: Gestão de Pessoas

SHORT CYCLES CAREERS: RESEARCH ON PROFESSIONAL ATHLETES

Abstract

The way we understand careers have been changing in the 21st century, as they have been presenting shorter cycles. Traditional careers used to be linear and have no displacements, but we can see that the competitiveness of business has not allowed professionals to be safe and stable in a job. The sport career encompasses special features mainly because the cycle is brief when compared to other careers, and we can preview that this will be a trend for future workers. The general goal of this study was to identify evidence on higher performance athletes for the short cycles careers, and how the outcomes of this trend were designed. In order to meet this goal, a qualitative research was conducted with a sample composed by 13 former individual sport athletes, and 10 played the olympic games and 6 of which received medals. In-depth interviews were conducted in addition to secondary data collected from the Internet. Data analysis was performed through content analysis. Regarding results, the athletes had to deal with relevant career transitions and they performed well both inside and outside the sport field. A strong development network—diverse or not—showed to be important for the transition process, as they were concerned about their next cycle.

Keywords: Careers; sports; athletes.

Introduction

In the 21st century, we have noticed that careers in modern organizations have shown different configurations. Pressure on better results, new styles of leadership, immediacy, work conditions and flexibility, automation and intensive technology, and the influence of social media are variables that have transformed the way we understand careers. Thus, we can say that these phenomena have stimulated professionals to have short cycles careers, and not a linear and constant work trajectory.

Some occupations have already presented these characteristics in an extreme mode, like TV artists, information technology (IT) professionals, musicians, top models, and athletes. The sports career present unique features since it is more dynamic and short-lived, even if started early. The sports theme in career theories is still relatively little studied in the academy and, for this reason, it is necessary to emphasize the importance of investigating the career of the athlete. The career of a sportsperson has short cycles, and on average athletes retire when they are between 28 and 30 years old (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Additionally, they need to continue their working life after retiring from sport.

The fact that athletes carry a position of demi-gods or heroes in society adds complexity to this subject, which implies abandoning the role of a protagonist in elite sport. In addition, there usually is no preparation for this professional to continue working in new functions and/or in different areas, which require another type of qualification, as well as broader contact networks, financial investments, and an effective change of identity.

The problem of this work is based on these concerns for the new ideal worker, who will have to face these challenges, and the athletes are already struggling with this issue. The general goal of this study was to identify evidence on higher performance athletes for the short cycles careers, and how the outcomes of this trend were designed.

Sport occupies an increasingly important place in social life and an even greater part of communication media. There are countless programs on television, radio and on the Internet, and there are even exclusive sports channels, while athletes and coaches have become famous and great personalities, frequently seen together with politicians and public figures (Gómez, Kase, & Urrutia, 2010).

Moreover, in a world where life expectancy is increasing, it is unlikely that sportspersons will not participate in the labor market after their exit from their main career. It becomes important to understand how this process of short cycles in careers occurs and how the study of this phenomenon may contribute to the individuals who make their career transitions (and retire) in organizations in general.

Theoretical Framework

Career transitions

Since a career involves sequenced experiences in a person's life, one of the needs of any mature individual is the ability to plan his/her own career. To this end, it is essential

to consider personal and professional goals that accompany the growth of the individual.

In general, considering the adult life, Brim and Kagan (1980) argue that the transition points have a fundamental role in the development of an individual, shaping and directing the various aspects of each person's life. The authors work with the premise that people are capable of changes throughout their life. They also believe that the changes suffered in childhood and adolescence have great impact on future transitions, when the individuals are more mature. According to Schlossberg (1981), the transition can occur if an event or non-event results in the change of assumptions about the individual himself and the world, requiring a corresponding change in their behavior and relationships. Complementing this vision, it is possible to highlight that transitions can be classified as anticipated or unanticipated: anticipated transitions correspond to events scheduled and/or expected, that will really happen to the individual and can even be rehearsed, while unanticipated transitions are related to unscheduled and unforeseen events (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995).

According to Schlossberg, Waters and Goodman (op cit.), the expected transitions, such as retirement, although occurring at different ages for each individual, are similar concerning the kind of problems faced. This shows that the transitions are more relevant than the chronological age to understand and assess the behavior of an individual.

As the transition is a complex phenomenon, Schlossberg (1981) proposed a model to understand human adaptation to transition. When the change happens, there is an impact on: (1) perceptions of the transition itself, (2) characteristics of the contexts before and after to the transition, and (3) characteristics of the individuals. Such factors lead to adaptation, which consists in the movement through the stages after the change, depending on the balance of resources and shortcomings of the individual, and the differences in perceptions and support between the moments that come before and after the transition (Schlossberg, op. cit.).

The most modern career models, such as of DeFillippi and Arthur's careers without borders (1994), Arthur, Claman and DeFillippi's smart careers (1995), and Hall's protean career (1996), can be characterized by development processes of a professional who had work experience in one or more organizations. It is suggested to understand the career as a life trajectory: the new career models include various options and possible directions for development which, according to Baruch (2004), are the lateral movements, changes of direction, changes in organizations, and aspirational changes.

According to Ribeiro (2009), with the flexibility and heterogenization in the labor world and organizations in recent years, the rupture of the job as a predominant work insertion model has occurred. The careers suffered changes in their design, structure and development. As a consequence, the fragmentation of the organizational career and its expansion beyond the limits of the companies was generated.

Thus, Baruch (2004) points to resilience as a constitutive factor of this new multidirectional model. People now work to build their careers and not stability in their

jobs, because such stability can no longer be guaranteed by the labor market. Anyway, rethinking and changing careers is an increasingly common trend in our society.

According to Briscoe, Chudzikowski and Unite (2012), career transitions are important to understand and identify the critical points of change in each career plan. These points can be conceptualized as a phase that connects two jobs or careers concerning the change in role or responsibility of the same job configuration.

There is a variable key that Reardon (2010) claims to be paramount in corporate life-and-death situations, similar to heroic impulsiveness: courage. For Reardon, courageous actions are a special type of calculated risk. These kinds of risks already occur in organizational contexts, but they are different in sports because athletes do not necessarily need to be brave when changing a job. Athletes need to be brave when they constitute a new career, based on sports or not.

Higgins and Thomas (2001), considering the contemporary aspects of career, believe that a career depends on professional relationships, and propose the concept of mentoring constellations, proposed by Kathy Kram in 1985. This concept goes beyond the formal manager- collaborator relationship, and considers the entire set of developers (peers, subordinates, friends, bosses etc.), who contribute, at a given moment, to the formation of the individual regarding his/her career and psychosocial function, and that do not necessarily have a level of seniority in the organization. According to the authors, the mentoring constellation approach better represents the reality of personal experiences than the prospect of a single relationship.

To Higgins and Kram (2001), the theory and methods of social networks are one way to understand mentoring in the current context of careers when introducing network development. Social networks, if classified according to contact diversity and tie strength, can generate a phenomenon of multiple relationships.

According to Higgins and Thomas (op cit.), the current era of organizational restructuring and globalization hinders the existence of sole sources of career development, since these are involved in an environment of borderless and less safe careers, which does not facilitate the establishment of single development relationships, hierarchical and internal to the organization.

Athletes and sports career

Although athletes can dedicate themselves exclusively, or not, to sports, there are studies that characterize them according to their personality. Ogilvie and Tutko (1971) highlight that athletes are motivated for performance and tend to set realistic and demanding goals, being highly organized and disciplined, with high disposition for leadership and social communication skills. The authors also found that athletes are people who have high self-esteem, psychic strength, self-control, emotional control and even a tendency to aggressive behavior.

Among the athletes, there are the problem-athletes, which Ogilvie and Tutko (1971) describe as those who have neuroses, such as anxiety, fear of failure, depressive tendencies, and exaggerated sensitivity to defeat or external criticism. Anyway, Samulski (1992) states that athletes who usually achieve more prominent results have lower values of anxiety and depression than those who are not athletes.

In general, athletes are extroverts, and are rarely less motivated for performance, less aggressive, with less endurance and fighting spirit when compared to non-athletes (Samulski, 1992). In his study on athletics, Kane (1970) concluded, for example, that quarterbacks are more extroverted than halfbacks, with introversion apparently increasing as the covered distances rise, so marathon runners are fairly introverted. However, Samulski (2002) points out that the biggest differences arise when athletes of individual and collective modes are compared.

Ogilvie and Tutko (1971) argue that individual sports athletes tend to be more introverted, are less motivated for social contacts, tend to be more aggressive, and seem to be more creative than collective mode athletes. Additionally, differences were found between individual modes, since the personality profiles of a ski jumper and a formula 1 pilot are very distinct (Kemmler, 1973 apud Samulski, 2002).

As for the sports career, researches have shown that the development of an elite athletic career usually consists of ten years building experience needed to become a professional athlete, and five to ten years to compete at its highest level (Wylleman, Alfermann, & Lavallee, 2004; Sosniak, 2006). However, Ogilvie and Tutko (1971) found that sport can generate failed sports careers and athletes with problems, increasing their depressive attitudes, anxiety and emotional sensitivity.

Wylleman and Reints (2010) state that, despite the appearance of having a continuous nature, elite athletes describe their sports career in terms of events (for example, the first call to the national team, a late-season lesion, a victory in a particular competition), or non-events, which are expected feats that did not occur (for example, not being selected for the olympic games, not achieving a record). Athletes usually confront what they are with what they wanted to be (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007), as a combination of events that not only will bring a strong mix of emotions, thoughts and behaviors, but in fact will also take athletes to a development challenge.

Athletes need to be able to deal effectively with these challenges, in order to make headway and achieve a successful transition to the next stage. If they cannot, athletes will be faced with a crisis transition that can slow down or restrict their development. Athletes will face two types of transition throughout their career, which are predictable, anticipated or regulated (for example, from junior to senior, from amateur to professional, the sports career termination), and the more or less unpredictable, involuntary or unregulated (e.g. an injury at the end of a season, non selection in a team, the loss of a personal coach); a deep understanding of the phenomenon of career transitions and steps is certainly needed in order to support the career development of talented athletes (Wylleman & Reints, 2010).

The career of the athlete has some points in common with traditional careers: there is a linear organizational career structure, relatively stable contracts are established with clubs and the (non-)selection is determined by some manager or superior. However, it would be possible to say that athletes would have the so called career without borders that, according to Arthur and Rousseau (1996), involves various forms whose foundations are distinct from those of a traditional job. Additionally, the athletic career could be seen as one that Templer and Cawsey (1999) call portfolio, in which the professional develops a set of skills, and therefore his/her value is pegged to the results

he/she produces. Or, in a broader sense, this type of career would also be characterized as a sequence of experiences related to functions during one's life (Hall & Moss, 1998).

Baruch (2004) states that, finally, there are a variety of definitions for career success: internal satisfaction, balance between personal and professional lives, autonomy and freedom, and other perceived issues, besides what is considered traditional success (accumulated capital, status, amount of promotions). For athletes, the mental model of success must be more related to traditional features, which would be number of titles, records, public recognition, income obtained, and presence in the media, for example. In relation to the sport identity, Harris (1994) and Rubio (2001) believe that athletes are heroic figures, the role of the sportsperson being relevant in society, since people are used to seeing them as references. With the growing importance of sport in many countries, one can see the tendency to consider these professionals as models to be followed.

It should be noted that young people in the United States tend to choose athletes – more than personalities from the world of entertainment, politicians or military leaders – when they have the option of selecting someone admirable, famous and heroic (Harris, 1994). According to Rubio (2001), the myth of the hero is created when an athlete performs a feat appreciated by most or all the people. That way, everybody wants to follow the life and career of this athlete, seeking an ideal type. However, the athlete is a human being like any other, and ends up being heavily criticized and underappreciated when he/she makes a mistake or violates rules.

Methodology

Through the qualitative approach, it is possible to describe the reality being studied, enabling an analysis in greater depth. The qualitative research considers that there is an inseparable link between the objective world and subjectivity of the subject that makes it impossible to understand the phenomenon only through numbers.

The research universe corresponds to former athletes who ended their sports career, i.e., who have renounced athletic practices in the last ten years. Such a universe also includes all professional athletes who have passed their development phase and are currently in the discontinuation phase (Wylleman & Reints, 2010), which usually happens between 25 and 35 years of age, depending on the modes or on the individuals themselves.

Data collection procedures initially involved identifying individuals purposely selected for the proposed study, i.e., participants who will be more useful helping to understand the research problem, and indicating the types of data to be collected, preferably more than one (Creswell, 2009).

To meet the objectives of this work, personal interviews were conducted with the subjects of the research. The interviews were recorded (voice) and transcribed with the formal consent of the researched, whose identity was preserved. When the subjects were not available for a face-to-face interview, the research was conducted through an instant communication tool via internet. According to a pretest conducted with an individual retired 13 years ago, but outside the sports field, we estimated that

each interview should have a duration of 60 to 90 minutes. Because of emotional issues involved, there were huge time variations in the interviews (shorter or longer). Additionally, we collected a lot of information about the research subjects, available publicly on the web. This material corresponds to electronic encyclopedias, pages of sports associations, both national and international, news sites, personal sites and blogs.

After contacts and confirmations by email and/or phone, the interviews were conducted: 13 of them face-to-face, and two by Skype software. On average, the interviews, recorded in audio, lasted approximately 45 minutes each. 15 interviews were held and two of them were dropped because they did not comply with the requirements established in this work.

The script for the interviews was structured in three main blocks, but also allowing the researcher to go beyond the issues previously elaborated, according to the subjects addressed by the respondent, as well as having broader responses, in order to make better use of the opportunity of the interview. In this way, the proposed research script includes eleven parts, resulting in 21 questions. All questions were open, seven of them optionally answered in writing as well: five correspond to markings on a timeline, and two are related to the relationship development network (Higgins & Kram, 2001). For the data encoding, Creswell (2009) mentions four softwares that can assist in the process, HyperRESEARCH being one of them. We point out the advantages of ease-of-use for coding and tabulation, the possibility of constructing theories, and conduction for data analysis. This was the program purchased and used for this work, taking advantage of its codebook and text organization functions.

Data analysis was carried out through the analysis of content. According to Bardin (2011), content analysis can be defined as a set of communications analysis techniques that aims to obtain, through systematic and objective description of message content procedures, the inference of knowledge relating to the conditions in which these messages were produced. Thus, since the purpose of content analysis is to produce inference, we seek to identify traces and/or indexes evidenced by certain procedures (Puglisi & Franco, 2005).

Results' Analysis

Respondents' profile

All valid respondents in the research were native or naturalized Brazilians who had practiced individual sports and had 32 to 47 years of age. With the exception of one of them, who claimed to be in transition, all had retired from high performance sport in the last ten years.

Among the respondents of the survey, there were three para-athletes, two with visual impairment, and one with a motor disability. There were ten men and three women, and two of the women were para-athletes. Regarding participation in the olympic games, ten of them competed in this event at least once in their career, and one of the respondents participated in six editions; of these ten, six were gold, silver and/or bronze medalists. Regarding the three who failed to participate in the Olympics, all participated in at least four editions of world championships of their sport. The sports

represented by the participants were all olympic sports: athletics, canoeing, fencing, swimming, tennis, and table tennis.

There are some characteristics of the sample:

- Only tennis does not have the Olympics as the main competition of the sport, which could prove different from the time of retirement standard; therefore, considering the seven participants who have participated in at least one edition of the olympic games, and who retired voluntarily, five of them ended their athletic career in an olympic year.
- Even though successful, the former para-athletes were less likely to remain linked to the sport after retirement, since two of them are still partially attached to their previous achievements.
- Of the 13 participants, there are eight, who despite having changed their career, continued in the sport, working as commentators on television sports programs, coaching athletes and/or teams, managing gyms and education foundations related to the sport mode, acting as representatives of sports projects, promoting workshops, giving talks about their background and training methods, among other activities.
- As expected, the voluntary retirements occurred later than the involuntary, and women also ended their athletic career before men.
- Of the four respondents who mentioned having had a serious injury, two of them abandoned the sport for a reason directly related to the physical problem they suffered, and the two others did not claim to have retired because of the injury, but by choice, since other variables had greater influence on their retirement from their athletic career.

Discussion on short cycles careers

The concept of value creation is strongly present and evident in sport-related business, whose main protagonist is the athlete. His/her potential is exploited to the maximum to optimize sports performance, and his/her career is quite short. In a world where life expectancy is increasing, it is unlikely that sportspersons will not participate in the labor market after their exit from their main career. It becomes important to understand how this process occurs and how the study of this phenomenon may contribute to the individuals who make their career transitions and retire in organizations in general.

The histories of each individual, besides being very distinctive, were also reported in a number of ways, some more detailed than others. The common factors were that they all talk of their family environment and how they started their sports life, being it in the mode in which they stood out or not. They showed how they handled sports and studies when they were children and adolescents, and how sports came about in their lives. All respondents stated that they had the dream of being sportspeople, although I6, and I10 I13 had not seen themselves as athletes in the beginning. Complementing this idea, I1, I3, I6 and I10 stated that the fact that they had become athletes was by destiny, or God.

The history – during childhood and adolescence – of the subjects interviewed also was permeated by sacrifices, except only for I1, I2, I5 and I7. Such sacrifice is related mainly to the tradeoff that they had with the intense dedication to sports practice and doing well in school, because their parents expected good results at school. This situation was worse for those who needed to travel frequently for championships (I4

and I12), and for those who had to merge sport with their higher education studies (I6, I9, I10, I13).

Another important point for these individuals to have continued in the sport is the role of the coach, since they spotted the talents of the athletes (I1, I2, I6, I9), or at least were invited to participate in high performance training centers (I5, I7, I10, I13). This recognition before professionalism was fundamental so that they could keep the dream of being athletes.

As for their professional history, i.e. as professional athletes, I1, I2, I3, I6, I7, I8, I9, I10, I11 and I12 described their trajectory in a linear manner, describing the routine of training and the conditions they had to practice sports. Some were very detailed when reporting what their life as a sportsperson was like (I9, I10 and I11), while others did not follow a chronological order when speaking of their major accomplishments (I4 and I13), and one was quite succinct in his account (I5).

As stated by Wylleman and Reints (2010), athletes have their past based on events/non-events and/or milestones, and that was exactly what occurred in the interviews. The selections, the stakes in major championships, achievements, pressures suffered, challenges overcome, the medals, and the defeats, are mentioned and described as reference points for the report.

However, there is a day when an athlete retires. For Ogilvie and Taylor (1993), there are four main causes for terminating a sports career: age, deselection, injury, and free choice. With the exception of I1, who claimed two items as reasons for his retirement, injury and age, all other respondents claimed just one of the factors for the termination of their athletic career. In turn, I7 did not address the subject for being in transition, and I11 stated he never had the desire to stop rowing.

In addition to I1, I2 and I5 mentioned age as the main factor for the end of their athletic careers, that being an indirect reason of other former athletes. Thus, I3, I4, I6, I8, I10, I12 and I13 explained that their retirement was due to personal reasons, namely free choice. Hackfort and Huang (2005) identified less frequent reasons, such as the desire for change, also present for I5, but more evident for I8 and I13, and the desire to devote more time to other relationships, which was the case of I6 and I10.

More than these causes, it was also possible to observe other factors that contributed to the decision of retiring. I1 and I12 stated that physical pain was draining them during practice and competitions, while I2 said it was frustrating to lose to people whom he used to beat. And four respondents (I2, I3, I4, I12) emphasized that seeing new opponents coming to compete was disheartening because they (the interviewees) were younger when they had started practicing their modalities, however they were the oldest now.

I6 and I10 made it clear that they had decided to leave the sport for having reached their goals. Indeed, both had the same goal, which was to participate in at least one edition of the Olympic games, and the two went to Athens in 2004. Satisfied with the results obtained in their careers, they stopped competing a few years later. I10, besides having claimed that reason, also reported that it was time to devote herself to her family, as declared I8. And motivated to start a new career, when he opened a

canoeing school, I13 had this reason to stop being an athlete. Even though seven of the 13 participants of the research clearly abandoned the sport by free choice, there was quite often the feeling that they could have done more as athletes.

The research respondents were also asked about how they described themselves as athletes before the time of retirement and after this transition. If the answers were different, they would also be asked about the reason for the change of identity.

For Rubio (2001), athletes create the myth of the hero when they leave their records for athletic feats. However, although the respondents reached several relevant sporting results, such as first time Olympic medals for Brazil and even world records, none of them described him or herself as a heroic figure.

The answers regarding self-description before retirement, considering the time when they were high performance athletes were very diversified. I1 and I2 portrayed themselves as full of achievements, and I1 still pointed out that his career was marked by very positive points and opportunities, besides the feeling that he owes his life to the sport, while I2 saw himself very confident in an activity that only depended on him. In turn, I3, I5 and I10 saw themselves as individuals in constant learning and growth, and I4 and I11 as very hardworking and dedicated to training. I3 and I8 saw themselves as accomplished people, while I7 described himself as disciplined and one who pursues his goals. Separately, I5 revealed himself as young, I8 as a dreamer, I10 as someone happy, I13 as a competitor, and I6 as a stressed and tense athlete due to competitions of which he used to participate. Negatively, I9 described herself as a misunderstood person with no space in the press for never having won an Olympic or world championship gold medal.

It was possible to notice that three respondents described themselves not just as sportspeople, but also showed features related to their specific mode: from tennis, I4 described himself as someone who was not as talented, so he trained a lot, and was also irreverent, inside and outside the courts, and I12 as a very closed person, even because of the individual aspect of this sport, and from fencing, I10 saw herself as being very technical due to the demand of that kind of sport.

After retirement, the former athletes also presented a lot of different answers from each other, and also from the earlier period. However, some answers given by some for before retirement were the same for the after this event. I7 and I12, for being in a period of transition, had no definite answers, but even so, I7 was describing himself as a coach (the role he assumed part-time), and I12 as a person without routine, because he was not developing any steady professional activity.

I1 and I6 described themselves as professionals who were reaping the benefits of life as athletes, both in their new jobs and in personal life. Although I2 saw himself as a first-class ex-athlete, also had a moment when he thought things were not working out and was feeling lost. I5 and I12 saw themselves as applying what they had learned as athletes and I8 saw himself exactly as a former athlete.

While I3 saw herself in that new moment as someone full of challenges and also disciplined, I6 felt more relaxed and comfortable. I8 described himself as a person committed to his job, but he also had a conflict between the role of athlete and dentist,

especially from the look of his patients, who saw him as a swimmer. And I4 showed himself as someone who has love for sport and who works meaningfully in tennis.

I9 described herself in a few ways: she was mature and focused, but also termed herself as a nothing, even frustrated by her age and that she still had to decide her life. Finally, I10 saw herself as an architect, I11 as an accomplished person, and I13 as a physical educator and a seller of well-being.

The change of the self-description from one stage of life to another was clearly noticeable in the answers given and their explanations, but it was not evident for I1, I6, I9 and I11. We should recall that I9 and I11 were the only two athletes who had an involuntary retirement. Additionally, I3 and I13 answered that nothing changed for them, even though they described themselves differently in the two moments. For I3, perhaps for the more gradual transition and for the length of the interval that she had, and for having described herself more by adjectives than by personality or profession features, while for I13, probably for working in the same mode, although as a trainer, and still competing eventually. In turn, I4 saw himself very similarly in both moments, and also reported more characteristics of his personality, such as restlessness, and of feeling good about the meaning of his work. In fact, he disagreed that there could be a change this self-description.

However, I2 understood this change by the fact that, from the time of retirement, the results no longer depended on him alone. I5 stated that what he learned in the different moments made the difference, whereas I6, I8 and I10 justified the change by the fact that they gave priority, from the time of retirement, to their careers in their formation professions. And I7 stated that what distinguished it was the distance from the athletes, because he would become a coach gradually.

For Petrigilieri (2011), the identities of an individual can have individual and social associations, besides being involuntary and voluntary. That way, people have multiple identities, and what changes is how central an identity is for each situation. While athletes, respondents have this identity voluntarily and in individual modes it is more common to also have individual identities unless they see themselves in a group representing Brazil or a competition team. Markus and Wurf (1987) recognize that identities are changeable and dynamic, taking on a variety of formats.

The majority of respondents did not see themselves distinctly when they compared the two moments. For those who showed significant changes, Petrigilieri (2011) asserts that the threat to identity causes a process: people recognize an experience that threatens the identity, they assess its impact, and they decide how to proceed from that point. This change in identity was more critical for those who changed the nature of their work, and less notable to those who already dealt with another profession at the same time.

Finally, we asked the former athletes to describe how the career change after retirement was. According to Schlossberg, Waters and Goodman (1995), career transitions can be anticipated or not; the anticipated are those expected, such as retirement, that even occurring in different ages for each person, the same kinds of problems are faced. The process of change is related to the subjectivity which

influences the psychological well-being, and such actions may be palliative or instrumental.

With the exception of I9 and I11, the career transition can be considered as anticipated, because every athlete acknowledges that the sports career will come to an end, for the most diverse reasons, but he/she does not always know when. Therefore, the majority of respondents – I1, I4, I5, I6, I7, I8, I10 and I13 – sought new possibilities for work while still competing at the highest level, as they predicted their departure from that athletic career.

The research respondents followed very different paths, but also showed some points in common. Eight of them remain linked to sports, four of them partially, and only one respondent is no longer linked to it. It is worth noting that all those who are still active in sport remain dealing with the same specialty (athletics, swimming, tennis, table tennis, fencing and canoeing). However, even though they are living in a similar context to the previous, the nature of the work and the new routine are very distinct. Despite the differences, some of them converge in current activities: They became managers, created social projects, teach new sports talents, coach teams, promote various events, and even work on television as commentators.

Specifically I1 and I2 were invited to work with a paid sports project, traveling to promote workshops and publicize their sport, managing social projects that they themselves have created (I1 with Information technology and athletics, and I2 only with athletics) and are commentators on television (I1 in an open channel, and I2 in a closed channel). I4 also started working on television, initially his own program, and then with another program, at a sports channel, in addition to being a tennis game commentator. I2, however, had also tried to be a realtor before the mentioned activities, and at the time of the interview he was giving lectures. And I4, before television, worked as a radio commentator. As for the workshops, I4 and I12 also reported promoting and participating in tennis events.

In turn, I5 became a business investor and a manager in the sports business, while I13, an entrepreneur, opened a canoeing school. I13 also sees himself as an administrator, instructor, event promoter and translator; after he retired from the sport, he took a physical education course. I7 took on the position of head coach of a women's team while he was in the winding down period, that is, reducing his hours of training as an athlete.

With greater changes, there are cases of I6, I8 and I10, who are three of the four respondents who, at the time of the interview, were partially involved in the sports environment. I6, while working as foreign trade manager in a private company, also helped in table tennis workshops; I8, an active dentist, also opened a swimming gym that caters for people with disabilities, and I10, an architect in an office, had taken over as president of an fencing association.

And differently, I3 and I9 were clerks (I3 in a public bank, and I9 in a private bank). I9 had no further contact with the sport, but occasionally I3 is invited to lectures and maintains a blog to inform about the sport, encouraging the current swimming para-athletes.

Initially, the respondents pictured the future, because, generally speaking, every athlete has the notion that his/her career in high-performance sport will have an end, and several of them reported that. Athletes in the sports environment and often in the context of their specialty, showed certain skills, needs and values; thus, they saw individual differences, they saw themselves as successful sportspeople, they identified themselves with the people in their circles, even though being in individual sports, and they knew that the moment of retirement would come sooner or later.

In the next stage, they started to make an assessment of their career, looking at the past, considering the stages of life, their adjustment as an athlete to the routine of training and competition, their level of engagement decreasing gradually, and also concern with the new career, most of the time coinciding with the beginning of the future professional activity. Finally, the athletes effectively transitioned to the termination of their career as a sportsperson, and so they saw themselves more or less motivated at that moment, observing the financial part of the change, because they would have to deal with new sources of income, with greater or smaller values than in the previous stage. In this way, it would be possible to understand the results of the career, both objectively and subjectively, especially when they knew their goals.

Final Considerations

The goal of this study was to identify evidence on higher performance athletes for the short cycles careers, and how the outcomes of this trend were designed. It was possible to verify that the career transition involves a process of preparation, encounter, adjustment and stabilization, and all participants of the research went through these four stages (with the exception of one, who was still in the phase of adjustment, since he was in transition).

After the transition, the career change occurred in a variety of ways, as opportunities arose by means of contacts, television, sports projects, the opportunity to work as coaches, training jobs, and commercial vision to open a business (or not, as in the case of the two visually impaired interviewees). This shows that a new career can be followed by very distinct impulses and stimuli, and continued in the sport or not.

Regarding the development network that supports the athlete at the end of his/her career, the networks were fairly heterogeneous, but were unable to predict success or failure in the transition. In fact, some respondents mentioned that the retirement decision was made alone and without the support of other people, the result of which was a successful transition. And other respondents emphasized the importance of formal and/or informal contacts, in addition to a strong and/or weak relationship. It is understood that everything depended on the need that the individual had of this network; if he/she formed it properly and there is support, he/she will probably be successful. In general, the transitions were well carried out, continuing in the sporting context or not; those who remained involved with the sport seemed to be even more satisfied because they all demonstrated love for modality they practiced.

A finding of this research was to notice the transitions that occur in the athletes' own sports career, even while high-performance athletes. Although the literature considers the terms athletic career and sports career as synonyms, it would be important to distinguish them, because the former athlete who remains in the sport continues a

similar trajectory. However, the academic works, when presenting the term sports career, refer to the career of the athlete. More than that, it was possible to notice differences as to the moment when the athlete is training and competing for an Olympic or Paralympic event and when he/she is out of that environment, although still in a high performance sport. However, the term Olympic career was found only on news websites and non-academic material.

We highlight that successful transitions are independent if they are of the same or of another nature, but they involve preparation, various feelings, contact networks and care for financial aspects. As for professional performance, one can understand that career changes must be well planned and numerous factors can influence the success of the transition, independent of the change being within the same organization with a change in functions, between organizations, or of profession. This shows to be a trend for future ideal workers, as modern companies will be looking for professionals who will have shorter business cycles.

We also recognized the importance of the development networks because they can give the necessary support for the transition. However, according to Ibarra (2004), strong and non-diverse contacts (usually the closest people) may not help in the change, being harmful for not understanding the reason for the career transition. Networks should be well constructed, both in sport and in the business context, depending on the need of the individual. If the decision is made without a network, there must be good orientation to have success in the new career.

Another point found to contribute broadly is the possibility of career cycles: an athletic career is a short cycle, which requires some specific skills, with a length of time almost predetermined, and several non-sports careers have acquired this trait. For example, the technology area careers are already quite changeable, demanding numerous skills and knowledge that are sometimes temporary, which make these short cycles clear. In addition, with the greater dynamism of the market, new functions have appeared and disappeared, causing that effect of short cycle careers.

Finally, it was possible to note that the winding down process is recommended in sport, a gradual cutting of training and links with the sport. There are retirement practices adopted by some organizations that act in this direction, i.e., from one to three years before an employee retires, companies reduce their workload gradually, and indicate new possibilities for work or general activities to the retirees. Such practice could become a more widespread policy in every kind of organization that employs older people, since career transition is quite complicated in any context.

One of the limitations of this study is the sample size, since it had few participants, representing only six individual sport modalities. Another limitation is related to the time elapsed since the transition until the time of the interview, which ranged from a few months to ten years. When the former athletes had left the sport for at least a year, their ideas were more mature and consolidated. Respondents who had been retired longer were usually better adapted to their new career. For future studies, we suggest to research professionals who are already facing these challenges of short cycles projects and more dynamic business.

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