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Career Termination and Transition Experiences of Former Collegiate Student-Athletes in Japan

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Career termination and transition experiences of

former collegiate student-athletes in Japan

(TITLE)

BY

Junya Adachi

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master in Science in Sport Administration

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2017

YEAR

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Career Termination and Transition Experiences of Former Collegiate Student-athletes in Japan

By

Junya Adachi

Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Science in Sports Administration

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Eastern Illinois University

Charleston, IL

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Abstract

Athletes are unique groups of individuals who make a career out of sports. They face challenges to get into a sport, to stay in it and to adapt to life after their athletic career. The primary objective of this study was to explore the challenges and experiences that Japanese student-athletes encounter when they terminate their athletic career. More specifically, this study examined personal and sport characteristics, emotional responses, psychosocial support, coping strategies and other variables (e.g., gender, athletic identity) that may have impacted the athlete's reactions to career termination. Participants were 76 former Japanese student-athletes (ages 22-38 years; M= 38, F= 38) from various sports (Basketball= 26, Tennis= 13, Badminton= 10, and Handball= 9). Data was collected through an online questionnaire with 6 sections: General; Sport Biographical Data; Reasons and Preparation for Sports Career Termination; Transitional Period (Emotional Responses, Psychosocial Support and Coping Strategies); Athletic Identity (AI); and Sports Career Effects. Responses were indicated on a 5-point Likert scale, as well as a forced-choice and open-ended format. Data were analyzed by using descriptive statistics for participants' characteristics. Group differences were explored by using an independent t-test. The findings of this study provided insight into student athletes' perceptions of career termination related variables. Japanese student-athletes (64 participants) decided to end their career voluntarily, while only 12 participants ended their career because of job related reasons (finding a good professional position, graduation from University). Nearly half of the participants felt that they needed time to adjust to their new life after their sport career ended. Their main emotional response to career termination in this study could be described as more relaxation and less aggression. The student-athletes felt that psychologists, counselors, college staff members, and coaches were the least supportive groups during their transitional period after their sport career

ended. Although there was not a significant result, it is interesting to note that there were higher AI mean scores in the female participants. Female student-athletes tended to feel more relieved, happy, joyful, free, sense of accomplishment and less anxious, uncertain, and empty than the male student-athletes. Female and male athletes were using similar coping strategies to deal with career termination, except that females preferred to spend time talking with others to make them feel better. Females perceived themselves to gain benefits/skills from their sports more than men, including empathy, communication skills, interpersonal relationship skills, and knowledge and skills for their current profession. Evidence indicated some Japanese student-athletes have been struggling with athletic career termination similar to their western counter parts (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007; Murdock, et al., 2016).

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family, wife, mom, dad, and elder brother, who have helped to individually shape me into the person I am today. The appreciation I feel goes well beyond words for the guidance that my family has instilled in me to pursue my educational goals. I am truly grateful for every day I have with each of you, and know that the only way for me to be truly happy is to be with you all.

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Introduction

It is speculated that engaging in athletics and sports has always provided participants with positive qualities of inspiration, motivation, and courage; however, it is possible for individuals to experience negative consequences before, during and after athletic life. For this study, career termination is the moment in time at which an individual's intercollegiate athletic career has ended. While transition experiences are defined as the emotional and psychological experiences that follow the termination of the individual's intercollegiate athletic career, adjustment difficulties are seen as problems that accompanied their career transition experiences.

One of the areas that researchers have focused on is career termination and transition experiences of former athletes. In fact, between 15-20 % of athletes reported adjustment difficulties (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007; Park, Lavalley, & Tod, 2012).

Some top athletes expressed career transition difficulties or emotional disturbances, including feelings of loss, identity crisis (Stambulova, 2000) and distress when they ended their sports careers and adjusted to post-sport lives (Park, et al., 2012; Alfermann, Stambulova, & Zemaityte, 2004; Petitpas, 2009; Stambulova, Alfermann, Statler, & Côté, 2009; Blinde & Stratta, 1992) while others might experience a sense of relief and freedom (Coakley, 1983).

A variety of factors have been identified that influence the quality of the career termination, and transition (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Factors such as athletic identity (AI), social/emotional support, planning before career termination, type of exit, the individual's coping style and the loss of special/preferential treatment are cited in the literature (Adler & Adler, 1991; Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985; Brewer, Van, & Linder, 1993; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994; Wooten, 1994). It seems navigating through athletic life is a complex and multidimensional transition process in which personal, social, as well as psychosocial factors interact. The quality

of athletic career transition may depend on how these variables complement each other. For example, a higher athletic identity (AI) (the degree to which an individual thinks and feels like an athlete) corresponds to a longer duration of adaptation to the post-sports' career, to more negative and less positive emotions after career termination and to less satisfaction with the time of career termination (Alfermann et al., 2002; Stambulova et al., 2009). Higher-level athletes (professional athletes) exhibit a higher AI when compared to low-level athletes (e.g., college and high school) (Hagiwara & Isogai, 2013; Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993). While high AI might benefit athletes in active athletic life, it may be related to adaptation issues after career termination (Brewer et al., 1993; Hagiwara, & Isogai, 2013; Meeker, Stankovich, & Kays, 2000; Wylleman, et al., 1999; Alfermann, et al., 2004). It is also interesting to note that nationality could play a role in forming AI (Alfermann, et al., 2004). For example, in a typically collectivist society, such as Japan, AI forms in a different manner, as opposed to a more individualistic culture, such as the United States, therefore, AI is still a worthy variable to explore in a variety of contexts, e.g., Japanese student-athletes and American student athletes (Stambulova et al., 2009).

Another variable of interest in this study is psychosocial support as mentioned in previous research (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993). Athletes with strong psychosocial support systems are more likely to navigate career termination effectively (Bernes et al, 2009; Crook & Robertson, 1991). It seems parents, coaches, family, friends and counselors might help athletes to be more aware of the demands of the future and the resources/strategies available to make the transition period go smoothly (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007; Paul & Ian, 2014). Meeker, Stankovich, and Kays (2000) claim that social support also serves as a coping mechanism for student-athletes (through parents, family, friends, peers, coaches, athletic trainers, physicians, academic athletic advisors, and career counselors). Earlier studies stated some helpful coping strategies during the

first few months of transition such as (1) finding another focus of interest, (2) keeping busy, (3) training/exercising, (4) talking with someone who listens, and (5) pre-retirement planning. On the other hand, nonproductive coping strategies were (1) drinking alcohol/drugs, (2) counseling for personal difficulties, and (3) ignoring difficulties (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Wylleman, et al., 1999).

Current research states that athletes, who terminate their career, experience a wide range of challenges and difficulties, and that many variables possibly contribute to the athlete's experiences. There is still a need for further research to understand individual responses to the career termination and transition with a variety of athletes (e.g., college athletes, male/female athletes) and in a variety of settings. Therefore, the present study focuses on personal characteristics (e.g., gender, student-athlete) of Japanese student-athletes as well as their reactions and responses to athletic career termination and transition.

Context of the Study

Japan, as an Eastern and Asian society, resembles the West in terms of athletics and sports getting considerable attention from the citizens as participants, spectators, and consumers. In Japan, according to a recent 2015 survey from Japan Association for Financial Planners, four out of ten children in school dream of sports related future careers. With a number of current high profile athletic events and developments taking place in Japan presently, a new sports trend is currently sweeping Japan, which will add value to athletics and sports in the society. For example, in 2016, as a new development, the Japanese professional basketball league named B.LEAGUE, was established. In 2019, the Rugby World Cup will take place in Japan; and in about 3 years, the 2020 Olympics will be held in Tokyo. In 2016, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry announced the strategy of the sports industry in Japan, which will increase

the amount of sales about two times by 2020 and three fold by 2025 as compared with recent years.

Understandably, the value and interest in athletics and sports are increasing in Japan. The present conditions and value shift inspire and encourage some younger Japanese to chase a career in athletics and sports. However, similar to Western countries, the possibility of being a professional athlete is quite low. According to a recent 2016 reported by the Japanese Basketball Association (JBA), only 154 men's basketball players were registered including foreign players in a top professional league in 2015. This compared to approximately 100,000 high school players, and about 9,000 college players. Although there is no official data about the proportion of high school and college players to professional players, the proportion appears very low.

Besides individuals having a hard time getting into and surviving in the professional athletic environment in Japan, they have a tendency to leave their career much earlier than ordinary occupations (e.g., the average age of Japan Professional Football League (J League) and Professional Baseball League players retirement age were 26 and 29.8 respectively) (Inoue, 2009; Tachibanaki, & Saito, 2012). Even though an athletic career is relatively short in both Japanese and Western countries, athletes still invest a considerable amount of time and effort in their sports, which makes it harder for them to leave their athletic career. The significant sacrifice and dedication might prevent athletes from engaging in different roles and behaviors during their athletic career, causing them to be less prepared for the transition out of sports.

Student-athletes are those who are at a higher level than high school but at a lower level than professional athletes. However, student-athletes, as opposed to professional athletes, have a unique set of circumstances that they can pursue other interests and academic training and might have multiple roles so that they are better prepared for career termination and transition

(Baillie & Danish, 1992).

Although in Japan, the Olympic Committee and some professional sports leagues, such as the Japanese Professional Football League, have already started supporting programs for athletes' post-sport careers, there are limited support systems to help student-athletes for their career termination and transition (Oba & Tokunaga; 2002, Stambulova & Ryba, 2013).

According to Oba and Tokunaga (2002), in Japan, an immediate increase in performance receives increased attention and support, such as mental training to enhance performance. On the other hand, the holistic development of athletes throughout their entire life span seldom gets attention and consideration.

Even though athletic career termination is an important phase in athlete's lives, Japanese people may have underestimated or did not even recognize the difficulties and challenges of athletic career termination (Bernes et al., 2009). Recently, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology has recognized the need for helping individuals facing difficulties or problems with athletic career termination. Therefore, Japan has been trying to begin a new support system for top-athletes to help them to prioritize and organize their athletic life, as well as life after athletics, by using the "Dual Career" program developed in Europe (Debois, Ledon, & Wylleman, 2015).

Japan has been trying to build a sport organization like the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) in the U.S.A. for controlling each Japanese college in an effort to enhance student-athletes' academic and athletic abilities. It is hard to help student-athletes properly without understanding the reality that the sports career transition is unique and complicated phenomenon and is depends on the athlete's sports status and the characteristics of their sport. For example, in complex coordination sports, such as diving, gymnastics, figure skating, athletes

begin to specialize in their sports around 5-7 years old; they generally achieve their peak performance in adolescence, at 15-20 years old; then they terminate their sports career in early adulthood at 20-25 years old (Côté, Baker, & Abernethy, 2007). These short cycle sport athletes have different strategies for their athletic career compared to a longer cycle sport, e.g., golf and track and field (Torregrosa, Boixadós, Valiente, & Cruz, 2004).

Each sports organization in Japan has its own structure to cultivate their athletes from early ages and strongly shape their sports careers. For example, the 2014 national Japanese soccer team, called SAMURAI BLUE, consisted of just 2 players who attended college out of 23 players. Thirty-nine percent of the players in the J.LEAGUE graduated college in the 2011 season. This tendency for elite soccer players to get into the professional league directly after high school or youth team of a professional club without going to college, may come from the general recognition against an “elite soccer player” in Japan (Tachibanaki & Saito, 2012). On the other hand, 97 % of the Japanese rugby players in the top league graduated from college. The reason for this drastic difference is the top league of the rugby was operated by a workers team—a sport team that is financed and run by a manufacturing company or other business. Players are expected to work at the company after their sports career termination (Tachibanaki & Saito, 2012). This data denotes that an athlete’s career choice in Japan may be more affected by sports structure than by the athletes’ own values or choice. The age of collegiate period, around 20 years old, is important phase for an individual’s psychological, psychosocial, academic and vocational level as well as in an athletic development (Wylleman & Lavalée, 2004; Wylleman, De Knop, & Reints, 2011). In this premium period in their lives, concentrating exclusively on sports activities, without thinking of their holistic career, places them at critical risk for difficulties when their athletic career ends and they move into the next career. In fact, only a few

athletes who participate in sports achieve athletic excellence and elite careers. A majority of athletes drop out at earlier stages or stay on the lower level in sports (Alfermann, & Stambulova, 2007).

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the challenges and experiences that Japanese student-athletes encounter when they terminate their athletic career. More specifically, this study examined personal and sport characteristics, emotional responses, psychosocial support, coping strategies and other variables (e.g., gender, AI) that may have impacted on the athlete's reactions to career termination. Since the possible challenges of student-athletes' career terminations have been reported in European settings (Wylleman, Alfermann, & Lavalley, 2004) and North American research literature (Meeker, Stankovich, & Kays, 2000), a similar tendency is likely in the Japanese context as well.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The following research questions were addressed in the current study:

A. Descriptive Characteristics of Participants

1. What are the reasons for the athlete's retirement from sports?
2. Did student-athletes adapt to their new life after career termination?
3. Are student-athletes satisfied with their achievement in their sports in college?
4. What are the most and the least typical emotional responses among student-athletes toward career termination?
5. Who is the most and the least supportive group for student-athletes during career the termination phase?

6. What are the most and the least typical coping strategies among student –athletes during career termination?

B. Cross Gender Difference

It is hypothesized that there would be a difference between male and female athletic identity (AI), emotional responses, coping strategies, benefits/skills they gain from sport participation, and psychosocial support during career termination phase.

1. Is there a difference between male and female AI during the career termination phase?
2. Is there a difference between male and female emotional responses during the career termination phase?
3. Is there a difference between male and female coping strategies during the career termination phase?
4. Is there a difference between male and female athletes in terms of the benefits/skills they gain from their sport?
5. Is there a difference between male and female athlete' psychosocial support ratings during the career termination phase?

C. Unique Emotions of the Participants

It is hypothesized that there would be a difference between athletes who have a “life plan” or “no life plan” in terms of emotional responses during the career termination phase.

1. Is there a difference among athlete's emotional responses that have a “life plan” during career termination phase?

Significance of the Study

This study is designed to enhance insight into the challenges and reactions Japanese student-athletes face during their transition from their athletic career. Systematic research about

career termination and transition is not sufficient in Asian settings, with only three studies about athletes' career transitions which were written in English conducted as of 2010. During the same time period, there were 60 studies in North-America, 45 studies in Europe, and 10 studies in Australia (Park, et al., 2012). The number of studies and supporting systems for Japanese elite athletes has been increasing; however there are almost no systematic studies about Japanese student-athletes' transitional challenges after their sport career ends. It is important to pursue such a study when one considers that athletics and sports can contribute to the overall development of an individual's post-sport career, even though active athletic participation is a short period out of their holistic life span (Park, et al., 2012).

Previous research has already shown that sports career termination is a distinct, complex, and individualistic phase (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Fernandez, Stephan, & Fouquereau, 2006) with the possibility of negative consequences if one does not have future planning and interests outside of sports, transferable skills in the form of communication skills, and coping skills (Meeker, et al., 2000; Wylleman, Lavalley, & Alfermann, 1999; Toyoda & Nakagomi, 2000). More positive transitions may be achieved if the characteristics of the pre- and post- transition environment are made clear from an early stage to high-level college athletes and if the transition process is supported at an institutional level (Paul & Ian, 2014).

This study will also be beneficial to student-athletes, their families, significant others, college staff members, psychologists and counselors, as well as coaches and trainers, in order to consider the athletes' whole life, not just their college athletic life. A more in-depth understanding of collegiate athletes and the interactions of variables like gender, AI, emotional responses, coping strategies, and psychosocial support during career transition may assist educational and athletic stakeholders in providing necessary support for the retention and

postgraduate achievement of collegiate athletes (Murdock, Strear, Jenkins-Guarnieri, & Henderson, 2016).

By understanding the reality of the challenges faced by student-athletes, each institution, and, similar to the American National Collegiate Athletic Association, the new Japanese collegiate sports organization can recognize the potential risks and help them to prepare student-athletes properly during pre- and post-career termination.

Definition of Terms

- **Athletic career:** term for a multiyear sport activity, voluntarily chosen by the person and aimed at achieving his or her individual peak in athletic performance in one or several sport event(s) (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007).
- **Athletic Identity:** the degree to which an individual thinks and feels like an athlete (Brewer et al., 1993).
- **Athletic career termination:** transition that require a former athlete's adjustment in occupational, financial, psychological, and social spheres of life; individual's intercollegiate athletic career end (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994; Wylleman, et al., 1999).
- **Transition (in a broader sense):** an event or non-event which results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behavior and relationships; the emotional and psychological experiences that follow the termination of the individual's intercollegiate athletic career (Schlossberg, 1981, p.5; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994).
- **Competitive sport:** any organized sport activity in which training and participation are time-consuming and in which the level of performance meets relatively high standards of expectations (Coakley, 1983).

- **Life Skill:** psychosocial abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. They are loosely grouped into three broad categories of skills: cognitive skills for analyzing and using information, personal skills for developing personal agency and managing oneself, and interpersonal skills for communicating and interacting effectively with others (UNICEF, 2003).
- **Sports career retirement for students:** it is simply seen as a part of other normal developments such as leaving high school, entering college or the labor force, and settling down into new relationships associated with family and career (Coakley, 1983).
- **Dual career:** in sports encapsulates the requirement for athletes to successfully initiate, develop and finalize an elite sporting career as part of a lifelong career, in combination with the pursuit of education and/or work as well as other domains which are of importance at different stages of life, such as taking up a role in society, ensuring a satisfactory income, developing an identity and a partner relationship (EU Guidelines, 2012).

Delimitations of the Study

The following were delimitations imposed upon this study within the context of the research question:

1. Only former Japanese collegiate student-athletes were investigated in this study.
2. Only 14 selected sports were represented in the sample: Basketball, Tennis, Soccer, Handball, Rugby, Budō (modern Japanese martial arts such as Judo), Volleyball, Baseball, American Football, Track and Field, Badminton, Cheerleading, Lacrosse and Field Hockey.

3. Only selected schools were represented in the sample due to purposive and/or snowball sampling.

Limitations of the Study

The following items were recognized as possible limitations of this study:

1. Results may only apply to the limited number of former collegiate athletes from Kansai University (36.8%), Yokohama National University (13.2%), and Kansei Gakuin University (10.5%).
2. Results may only be applicable to male and female athletes who participated in the sport of Basketball, Tennis, Soccer, Handball, Rugby, Budō, Volleyball, Baseball, American Football, Track and Field, Badminton, Cheerleading, Lacrosse and Field Hockey. It should be also noted that each of these sports were not equally represented in the sample. The participants being asked to be part of this study might not represent all former Japanese student-athletes.
3. Results may only be applied to athletes who completed their academic as well as intercollegiate competitive life.
4. Results may be limited by the truthfulness of the participants' responses to the questionnaire that was administered online through Qualtrics.
5. Results may be limited by the language barriers causing participants to misinterpret the meaning of words and questions. Even though the questionnaire was translated and compared by three different native speakers for clarity and reliability, Japanese participants might not have the same sense of language as an English speaker.
6. The results from the present study are based on a specific population (e.g., Japanese student-athletes) that might possess a unique culture and structure. Attempts to

generalize these findings to other cultures or settings would be limited.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

The Literature review section begins with the background information about previous studies that have examined athletes' career terminations and transitions. Specifically, theories that attempt to explain what happens before and during career termination are emphasized. It also provides information about the key variables or factors related to career termination such as personal and sport characteristics, emotional responses, psychosocial support, coping strategies and other variables (e.g., gender, and AI). These variables might help researchers and practitioners to understand the multidimensional nature of sports career termination among student-athletes (Taylor & Ogilve, 1994).

Theoretical Justifications of Career Termination

The Study of issues regarding sports career termination started in the 1950's in sports sociology, and by the 1980's, it expanded as a study area in sports psychology (Wylleman, et al., 1999; Takahashi, 2011; Toyoda, & Nakagomi, 2000). Several major shifts in research foci, theoretical frameworks, and attention to contextual factors characterize the evolution of the career termination focus in sport psychology (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007; Stambulova, et al., 2009; Wylleman, et al., 2004).

According to Stambulova, Alfermann, Statler and Côté (2009), the study about athletes' career termination can be divided it into four categories: (1) similar to the occupational retirement, theoretical frameworks derived from thanatology and social gerontology; (2) focusing almost exclusively on athletic career, but only the phase of life as an athlete; (3) focusing on "a whole person" lifespan perspective, viewing athletic career transitions in their relation to developmental challenges and transitions in other spheres of the athletes' lives, which is more like for coping with adult critical events, not for sports-specific events (Alfermann &

Stambulova, 2007); and (4) recently, focusing on contextual factors in career development and transitions including, athletic, psychological, psychosocial, and academic and vocational factors (Wylleman & Lavelle 2004). Pioneer studies in sport focused on athletic retirement, which was considered similar to a working career retirement. Therefore, early theoretical frameworks were derived from thanatology, which is the study of the process of dying and death (Kulbler, 1969) and social gerontology (the study of the aging process) (Hill & Lowe, 1974). Consequently, the athletes' transition to the post-career was typically recognized as a negative life event.

A second major shift in the career development and transition research did not produce sufficient work due to limited focus on athletic career. Whole athletic life stage was divided into three phases: (1) initiation; (2) development; and (3) perfection (Bloom, 1985). These types of studies covered whole athletic life well, but not individual holistic life span, which was inspired by talent development theoretical debates and research coming from the innate part of the talent concept (Alfermann et al., 2009). Then, athletic career termination started being recognized as a process rather than a distinct event (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007; Wylleman, et al., 1999; Toyoda & Nakagomi, 2000). In terms of traditional framework, the Model of Human Adaption to Transition (Schlossberg, 1981) was frequently supported. Schlossberg (1981) suggested a definition of transition as “an event or non-event [which] results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world, and thus requires a corresponding change in one’s behavior and relationships” (p. 5). This general terminology of transition was not well adopted in athletes’ related studies until recently (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007).

Afterward, a third major shift in the career development and transition topic emphasized life span perspective (See Figure 1), which corresponds with developmental challenges and transitions in other spheres of the athletes’ lives (Wylleman, & Lavallee, 2004). Finally, the

athletic career transition related to better understanding the role of contextual factors and the role of macro-social factors (e.g., the sports system and culture), yet earlier studies focused only on how coaches, parents, and peers contribute to athletes' career development and transitions (Alfermann et al., 2004; Stambulova, et al., 2009). The current trend that added macro-social factors and contextual factors would enhance the value of the present study since it focuses on Japanese context and student-athletes in Japanese universities.

Age	10	15	20	25	30	35
Athletic Level	Initiation	Development	Mastery		Discontinuation	
Psychological Level	Childhood	Adolescence	Adulthood			
Psychosocial Level	Parents Siblings Peers	Peers Coach Parents	Partner Coach		Family (Coach)	
Academic Vocational Level	Primary education	Secondary education	Higher education	Vocational training Professional occupation		

Figure 1: A developmental perspective on transitions faced by athletes at athletic, individual, and academic and vocational level (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007, p.716).

The Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology revised The Basic Act on Sports made in 1961, and established the revised version in 2011. This government initiative was developed with the objective to ensure that sports are considered as a human right that would enrich the well-being and life of all Japanese citizens. The philosophy behind these legislative changes is designed to nurture the major role sports might play for the quality and improvement of Japanese citizens' lives, including developing the physical strength of the youth. Furthermore, it contributes to recovery of the regional society such as depopulated

area, as well as, retention and promotion of health and physical strength for all and improvement of the international status of Japan. Another legislative initiative, the Sport Basic Plan was established in 2012 based on the new Basic Act on Sport. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology 2012 plan maps out basic ideas relating to sport in general society and considers the contemporary issues surrounding sport in Japan such as demanding an improvement in transparency and fairness/equity in the sport world, greater development of sport for people with disabilities, and increasing internationalization. The Sport Basic Plan states that Japan should provide the creation of a virtuous cycle in the sports world to develop athletes in sports and to expand participation in sport for all Japanese. As a part of all governmental initiatives, Japan also started an initiative to prepare elite athletes for their lives after their sports career end. This initiative is named “Dual Career” which *refers to the approach of maintaining environments necessary to support the performance and training needed for top athletes while providing them with provident education and occupational training needed for post-retirement careers* ((EU Guidelines, 2012). These initiatives show the Japanese government has been trying to foster athletic talents carefully and effectively with in-depth consideration of academic and life preparations. However, this supporting structure would mainly be for the top athletes; therefore this might not serve collegiate student-athletes since most of them might not be considered as top-athletes. Based on these legislative initiatives, it seems student-athletes will not get the attention they might need supports from the government as well as educational institutions. Thus, studies that focus on Japanese collegiate student-athletes can attract attention to this underrepresented athletic group in Japan.

Athletic Identity

Athletic Identity (AI) is the degree to which an individual thinks and feels like an athlete

(Brewer et al., 1993). AI is typically evolving when athletes are advancing to a higher level of competition. For example, collegiate athletes have a higher AI than high school's athletes (Hagiwara & Isogai, 2013) and emerging with elite-amateur and professional athletes than scholastic or collegiate athletes (Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993). This tendency may occur because of the higher athletic records and strong engagement into the sport (e.g., achieving national level competition) (Meeker, et al., 2000; Hagiwara & Isogai, 2013). Although strong AI would help athletes concentrate on and enhance sport performance (Brewer et al., 1993; Hagiwara & Isogai, 2013; Meeker, et al., 2000), studies have shown that the strong AI hinders athletes in their ability to adapt to their new life after sports career terminations (Alfermann, et al., 2004; Wylleman, et al., 1999). During their active sports involvement, athletes, who mostly identified themselves with their athletic role, reported experiencing more difficulties than those athletes who identified less with the role of an athlete. In addition, strong AI was related to more severe and frequent psychological difficulties, as well as with more difficulties in organizing their post-sports career life (Erpič, Wylleman, & Zupančič, 2004). The success of athletes' career termination is strongly or highly based on their identity of athletic performance (Paul & Ian, 2014), as well as change in AI and loss of role obligation (Brewer, Van, & Petitpas, 2000). The single-minded pursuit of excellence that accompanies elite sports participation often has potential psychological and social dangers, and this quest is rooted in the earliest experiences athletes have in their youth sports participation. The personal investment in and the pursuit of elite athletic success, though a worthy goal, may lead to a restricted development (Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993). Athletic and non-athletic aspects of life (social roles in education, the job market, family, and so on) seem to be closely connected and mutually interdependent with regard to the career termination. Stambulova and Ryba (2013) stressed young athletes need to distinguish athletic-identity and self-identity; if

the athlete's sole identity has been formulated at an early stage, it could hinder the formation of a mature identity in their lives. Murphy (1995) also agreed with this idea suggesting the importance to develop athletes' self-identity. Athletes who struggle with their career transitions have little access to active alternatives and role models outside of sport. Lack of material resources and social contacts has restricted their transition into next career (Coakley, 1993). The athletes with higher AI need to be more active in coping regardless of sports performance because of the negative impact of the AI (Alfermann, et al., 2004). Two other variables or factors, nationality (including political system and sport structure) and living in individualistic cultures, may produce a particular AI and reactions/responses during career termination and transition (Alfermann, et al., 2004; Stambulova et al., 2009).

Alfermann, Stambulova and Zemaityte (2004) studied 256 former amateur athletes from Germany ($n= 88$), Lithuania ($n= 65$), and Russia ($n= 101$) revealing that German athletes exhibited more acceptable and less unacceptable emotional responses when compared to Lithuanian and Russian athletes. Athletes also showed different coping strategies when compared to each other. While Lithuanian athletes used more denial, Russian athletes used distraction strategies after retirement. It seems that AI may help athletes focus on their athletic activities and improve their performance, yet it also provides some challenges for athletes when they move ahead to the next career.

Athletic Career Termination and Transition

Athletic career termination is widely divided into two types, voluntary or involuntary. A career in sport is much shorter than most other careers or occupations that it usually spans mid to late 20s (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993). The followings are main factors of athletic career terminations: chronological age, de-selection, injury, and free choice (Meeker, et al., 2000;

Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993). According to Coakley (1993), who changed his perspective about career termination from being only a negative one to a perspective that includes possibilities of positive and negative sides, suggested that the athletic career termination could serve as an opportunity for “social rebirth”. Retirement from competitive sport is the nature of the retirement and is a process primarily grounded in the social structural context in which it occurs. Other factors such as the existence of emotional, and material support system, and the existence of racism and sexism should be considered (Coakley, 1993).

Most athletes in athletic career termination and transition studies made the adjustment to a new focus without major difficulties; however, small but considerable numbers of athletes (about 15 % of elite athletes or more) went through transition distress and had a need for psychological assistance (Alfermann, 2000; Stambulova, et al., 2009; Wylleman, et al., 2004). In addition, a few athletes experienced drug abuse due to a lack of coping skills and/or resources during their transitions (Wylleman, et al., 1999). The duration of athletic career terminations is significantly diverse: while some athletes had not yet totally adapted to their new situation out of high-performance sports, some athletes took more than two years, others had adapted almost immediately (within 1 or 2 months) (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993). Sports career termination difficulties are characterized by the psychological, social, and occupational level during termination, such as missing the social aspects of sport (Erpič, et al., 2004; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Scott, 2008); job/school pressure; finances (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993); and missing friends (Erpič, et al., 2004). Although sports career termination and transition are critical events for athletes, the current research indicates that retirement for athletes in each of these contexts is not an inevitable source of stress, identity crises, or adjustment problems (Coakley, 1983; 1993).

Athletic career transition seems to follow normative and a predictable pattern from the beginning sport specialization to the junior to senior level, from amateur to professional level, and from athletic career end to life after sports (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). In addition, the occurrence of non-normative transitions, such as a sudden change of personal coach, an athletic injury, and unanticipated de-selection could be examined by researchers. Furthermore, the existing transitional models can be more specific (e.g., national or international level, age, sport-specific—female gymnastic V. male rowers) (Wylleman, Knop, & Reints, 2011). Conversely, voluntary retirement positively related to life satisfaction after the athletic careers (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007).

Alfermann and Stambulova (2007) also indicated the difficulties of student athletes' career termination. Typically, student athletes have ambitions to succeed in sports, but because the level of uncertainty is very high, they often become more anxious and worried, yet at the same time are more sensitive to social influences. Identifying their own values is a very important step in choosing their career (Meeker, et al., 2000). Studies imply the necessity to narrow down the research purpose towards student-athletes. Therefore, the present study expands the idea of career termination and transition to Japanese context.

Coping Skills and Resources

Coping skills and individual resources would be critical factors to adjust in a successful and satisfying way to retirement from sports. For instance, strengthening the individual resources by education, competency, training, and goal-setting for the post-athletic careers (Paul & Ian, 2014), as well as social resources such as social support from the family (Crook & Robertson, 1991; Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993; Wylleman, et al., 1999) and post-career services can help athletes make a healthy adjustment in the career transition process (Stambulova et al., 2009).

Athletes' planning skills can play an important role not only in time of their career termination, but also during transition periods by helping them to make decisions about professional education, career choice, and planning (Petitpas, 1997). Planning stages proposed by Alfermann and Stambulova (2007) provides a framework for researchers as well as practitioners to explore. Planning stages can be divided by three parts: phase 1: self-exploration, career-exploration, and career acquisition; phase 2: planning for transition; and phase 3: career action planning (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). This framework might be used to educate athletes to show them that they might need planning skills to experience a worry-free transition period.

Some researchers also explored the importance of sports-related goals of athletes as well as achieving these goals, because underachievement in sports-related goals might decrease athletes' satisfaction for their sport (Meeker, et al., 2000; Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007; Erpič, et al., 2004). In other words, athletes who adjusted to the career termination smoothly tended to retire after they achieved their sport-related general and specific goals. Some other athletes may be dissatisfied with their elite careers, especially if they perceive the costs as too high (e.g., deteriorated health, deficit in education, and a lack of close personal relationships) (Stambulova et al., 2009; Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). Such dissatisfaction would lead to termination and transition problems.

Sinclair and Orlick (1993) investigated the reasons for retirement from sport, individual coping strategies, and support networks for 199 transitional high performance athletes with international competitive experience, they found the following coping strategies to be very helpful during first few months of transitions: (1) finding another focus of interest; (2) keeping busy; (3) training/exercising; and (4) talking with someone who listens. On the other hand, not so

productive coping strategies were: (1) drinking alcohol/drugs; (2) counseling for personal difficulties; and (3) ignoring difficulties (denial) (Alfermann, et al., 2004; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998; Wylleman, et al., 1999). Since the acceptance of a stress as a reality occurs with retirement was the preferable coping reaction among former athletes (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989), individuals who were more willing to refuse to believe in retirement may need a longer duration for the transition (Alfermann, et al., 2004). The high pressure from related people, parents and coaches, might force athletes to pursue athletic performance at the highest possible level. Rigorous demands of training and competition often require competitive athletes to narrow their external activities in order to achieve optimal athletic performance (Brewer et al., 1993). Even though, the negative effects can be minimized by using some coping skills, it seems that it would be almost impossible to eliminate every negative factor of career termination for athletes. Despite the best efforts to eliminate distress that may arise due to career termination and transition, it may still occur when athletes fully recognize that their sports careers are over. This distress can manifest itself psychologically, emotionally, behaviorally, and socially (Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993). Therefore, it is important to provide a diverse social support network that can help athletes to handle the challenge and issues directly and constructively (Petitpas, 2009).

Psychosocial Support System

Psychosocial support system, coping skills and strategies strongly help the career transition of athletes after career termination (Bernes et al., 2009; Crook & Robertson, 1991). Transitioning athletes may feel isolated, ignored, and forgotten from their former social support network (Bernes et al., 2009; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993). Parents, coaches, family, friends and sport psychologists must help athletes to make decisions for the future, through increasing

athletes' awareness of forthcoming demands and the resources/strategies necessary to cope with the changes and demands of new life (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007; Paul & Ian, 2014). Because sport structures, societal norms, and cultural traditions may further influence athletes' career development, it is important for athletes to know who would help them and when intervention is needed. For example, in Russia and China, professional coaches work with all age groups and performance levels, whereas in Sweden and the United States, volunteer coaches dominate in children's/youth sports. This single factor may influence career development in that although young athletes who are trained by professional coaches can get higher quality supervision in the formation of their technical skills, they can also experience more coaching control over their life and less overall enjoyment than the athletes who are trained by volunteer coaches (Stambulova et al., 2009).

Alfermann and Stambulova (2007) explained the proper timing to support athletes when they encounter the transition crisis: (1) crisis-prevention intervention (e.g., goal setting and planning, mental skills training, organization of a psychosocial support system); (2) crisis-coping interventions (e.g., psychological crisis-coping interventions); and (3) dealing-with-negative consequence interventions (e.g., psychotherapeutic or clinical interventions). Previous studies present clues how to prevent athletes who are suffering deeply in their transition (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). Moreover, it is not productive if athletes are not aware of supporting systems and not convinced of the usefulness of the system (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993). Although psychosocial support systems play an important role for transitioning smoothly, parents, families and coaches need to be aware of their engagement with young athletes, because they can often be too forceful and value winning for their children (Stambulova et al., 2009).

The "second" career often requires entirely different skills than those learned and

perfected as an athlete and is one in which the individual rarely has the same competencies (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993). Athletes, however, gain several skills named athletic transferable skills (ATS) throughout their sports careers, including commitment and communication skills and grit power (Meeker, et al., 2000). However, athletes may not notice their skills, which are transferable across various life situations. Counselors may be effective in assisting athletes by helping them to realize these transferable skills that they have already acquired through their involvement in sports and let them realize that they might be used to be successful in other areas of their life (Bernes, et al., 2009; Wylleman, et al., 1999). Teaching transferable skills along with positive interventions upon career termination would likely enable more athletes to make the transitions quickly and smoothly (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993). Since each athlete has a unique career termination experience, multidimensional support can be essential to help them to perceive less transitional challenges and issues.

Again, because of the potential difficulty of coping with the loss of athletic status, even after switching identifications and adapting new roles (professional, social, familial), further interventions may still be needed both during and post career terminations (Wylleman, et al., 1999).

Student-athletes in their Career Transition

When one examines the age of collegiate athletic period (around 20 years old) for individuals, many reasons, athletic as well as psychological, psychosocial, and academic and vocational, make this period central for student-athletes (Wylleman, et al., 2011). The collegiate athletic period is also the important time since student-athletes are moving into late adolescence and early adulthood and are possibly exploring different occupational, ideological and life roles. Individuals at this stage get beneficial life skills, build self-esteem, and acquire a better sense of their own values (Meeker, et al., 2000; Petitpas, 2009). An athlete's educational and college

graduation status influences the adjustment after retirement (Park, et al., 2012; Blinde & Stratta, 1992). Nakagomi (1993) argued that athletic identity (AI) strongly synchronized with their early self-identity at the university stage. Although strong AI would help athletes concentrate on and perform maximally, it is also has shown that young athletes need to distinguish athletic-identity and self-identity (Stankovich & Kays, 2000). The athlete's sole identity has been formed at an early stage; it could hinder the formation of a mature identity in their lives (Stambulova & Ryba, 2013). Recently, the Japanese government is trying to organize and prioritize the athlete's life as well as citizens' life; therefore, Japan is trying to start up the new supporting system for top-athletes, named "Dual Career". Athletes will be given support in every level of their life including life after sports. This supportive system has already started in the European Union and is supported in the sports world across the continent. The reason why dual career is getting more attention recently is that some of top athletes expressed career transition difficulties or emotional disturbance, including feelings of loss, identity crisis, adjustment issues to post-sport life, and distress when they ended their sports' careers (Alfermann, et al., 2004; Alfermann, et al., 2011; Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Park et al., 2012; Petitpas, 2009).

Athletic career termination studies of student-athletes must distinguish the effects of sport involvement from other sources of growth and development. These studies must also separate the consequences of leaving sports because of the challenges related to athletics and adjustments normally associated with late adolescence, young adulthood, and middle age (Coakley, 1983). In the athletic career termination, the most successful individuals are male Division-I basketball student-athletes who (1) have balanced and well-rounded college experience and have least strongly or exclusively based their identity on athletic performance; (2) are open to exploring alternative careers; (3) have demonstrated pre-transition planning; and (4) have formed and

maintained positive supportive relationships throughout the transition (Paul & Ian, 2014). While these factors are almost identical among top athletes, student athletes' career transition is very diverse. More precisely, each athlete needs different types of treatment plans based on sports' level and/or characteristics. It means that low performance level collegiate student-athletes would need different supporting systems when compared to the student-athletes whose level is that of a national team (Bernes, et al., 2009). Paul and Ian (2014) introduced the concept of "the weakness of student-athletes" because they are rigidly controlled, overprotected, depersonalized, and tied. It implies that "supporting systems" need to be well-balanced, descriptive, wide and individualistic. As student-athletes obtain skills throughout their sport career, they need to utilize their skills out of college, not only one time but also several times throughout their entire life.

There are some other factors, which affect student athletes' career termination. For example, former athletes from lower status backgrounds may lack the material supports and social contacts that their higher status counterparts find useful in initiating careers and adjusting to life after leaving school (Coakley, 1993).

The idiosyncrasy is covered with culture--career researchers around the world have different research foci internalized from relevant socio-cultural contexts; therefore, more studies on both athletic and non-athletic transitions focusing on cultural and cross-cultural aspects are need (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). Sports characteristics are also related to reactions of athletes themselves and their traits. Golf and tennis players work as a teaching pro or administrator at private clubs or use their social contacts to enter a relatively satisfying non-sports career (Coakley, 1993). Even though previous studies have expanded and improved our understanding about athletic career and related variables, there is still need for studies to explore this concept in a new or different context (different country and sport setting) and situation.

CHAPTER III

Methods

The purpose of this study was to explore the challenges and experiences that Japanese student-athletes encounter when they terminate their athletic career. This chapter describes the method used to conduct the current study. Selection of participants and their characteristics (demographics), followed by a description of the research design, procedures, instruments and data collection, then data analysis were included.

Research Design

The present study has used quantitative methods (descriptive research and inferential statistics) to examine athletes' career termination and transition experiences. The questionnaire was the main descriptive research technique that included 6 sections: the General and Sport Biographical Data; the Reasons and Preparation for Sports Career Termination; Transitional Period (Emotional Responses; Coping Strategies; Psychosocial Support), Athletic Identity, and Sports Career Effects (Appendix C). Responses were indicated on a 5-point Likert scale, as well as a forced-choice and open-ended format.

Participants and Recruitment Procedures

This study followed the guidelines approved by the Institutional Review Board at Eastern Illinois University. The athletics department at Kansai University was contacted in order to request e-mail addresses of former student-athletes; however, because of privacy issues and regulations, this request was denied. Therefore, the principal investigator (PI) of this study used his personal relationships and networking with former student-athletes at Kansai University to recruit volunteers for this study. These personal contacts were used to recruit 61 initial participants.

It was determined that Messenger would be the most convenient social communication

tool to contact all survey participants. The initial participants were personal contacts of the PI, based on previous connections through athletics, and were asked to invite only former Japanese student-athletes who were graduated from universities in Japan to participate in the questionnaire. The invitation email also included a link leading participants to an informed consent page where they could find the study information and acknowledge their voluntary informed consent prior to their participation (Appendix A and B). All of the participants were contacted through the Messenger to further contact those who were on the PI's account due to previous connections through athletics. Participants were assigned a code/participation ID number to protect confidentiality. Of the initial group, eleven of those volunteer participants were asked to share the informed consent page and additional copies of the questionnaire with their friends. After 2 weeks, with a reminder e-mail on the Messenger, the principal investigator encouraged the former athletes to complete and return the questionnaire if they had not already done. The questionnaire remained open for three weeks.

Data Resource, Instruments, and Analysis

This study was mainly based on the research of Alfermann, et al., (2004), whose conceptual model included emotional reactions to sport career termination with a cross-national comparison. The instruments used to collect data for this study were anonymous questionnaire. The athletes were administered the questionnaire in their own language, Japanese. The principal researcher and 2 other native speakers from Japan read, made suggestions and corrections and endorsed the language of the questionnaire. In addition, a native English speaker who lives and works in Japan as a teacher read and validated the language.

The questionnaire was used to obtain biographical information (1) first to gain knowledge about personal characteristics of participant, (2) sport biographical information (e.g., main sport

specialization in college, the highest level of competition achieved during sport career, status as an athlete, etc.). The next four sections of the questionnaire included (3) the reasons and preparations for their sports career termination, (4) the former athlete's coping strategies, emotional responses, and sources of psychosocial support, (5) Athletic Identity, (6) sports career effects and benefits. The content of the questionnaire was based on a review of the career termination literature, as well as experiences of the PI as a former student-athlete. Responses were indicated on a 5-point Likert scale, as well as a forced-choice (e.g., Yes or No) and open-ended format (e.g., others_____).

The Reasons and Preparations for Sport Career Termination

Participants were asked the reasons and preparations for their athletic career terminations. The questions in this section were enquiring about retirement age, advance plans in which student-athletes prepared to retire from their sport, and whether the reasons of retirement were voluntary or involuntary (e.g., job/profession, problems with health, and financial reasons) (Alfermann et al., 2004). In order to get further understanding, participants were also asked what type of plan they prepared for the life after their sport career, whose potential choices included: Holistic Life Plan (until death), Long Life Plan (until your next career retirement), Intermediate Life Plan (until the next career stage), and Short Life Plan (until the next decision).

Emotional Responses

Participants were asked to rate their typical emotional states during the transitional period on a five-point scale range where 1=not at all, up to 5=very much. The following five items were measured with typical positive emotions: relief, happiness, joy, relaxation, freedom, and achievement. On the other hand, the following four items were measuring typical negative emotions; sadness, anxiety, uncertainty, emptiness, and aggression (Alfermann, et al., 2004).

Coping Strategies

A 12-item coping scale was derived from a coping questionnaire developed by Carver, Scheier, and Weintraub (1989). The 12 items included were the following: refusing to believe that their sports career is really finished; taking action to try to make the situation better; trying to come up with a strategy, or plan, about what to do; using alcohol or other drugs to make themselves feel better; giving up trying to deal with the situation; saying thing to let unpleasant feelings escape; spending time, or taking action to make the situation better; expressing negative feelings; trying to see the situation in a different light to make it seem more positive; doing something to think about it less – like going to the movies, watching TV, reading, daydreaming, sleeping, shopping, etc; accepting the reality of the fact that their sports career is finished; making jokes about the situation. Responses were indicated on 5-point Likert scale, range from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much).

Psychosocial Support

Participants were presented with a list of eight potential supporters including parents, significant other, teammates, friends, coach, college staff member and faculty, and psychologist and counselor and asked to rate them on a five point scale (1= did not support me at all, up to 5 = gave me very significant support) (Alfermann, et al., 2004).

Athletic Identity

The scale of Japanese Athletic Identify Measurement Scale (AIMS-J: Isogai, Brewer, Corenelius, Etnier, & Tokunaga, 2001) was employed as a measure of AI during the athlete's sports career. This scale was made by AIMS (Athletic Identity Measurement Scale), which was created by Brewer, Van, & Linder (1993). This AIMS was the most frequently employed questionnaire for the study of athletes' career terminations by researchers in order to measure AI

(Park, et al., 2012). Participants asked to rate following statements on a seven-point scale (1= not at all, up to 7= it is exactly the truth): “Sport was the most important part in my life”; “I needed to participate in sports to feel good about myself”; “Other people saw me mainly as an athlete”; “I started to feel bad about myself when I did poorly in sports”; and “I considered myself mainly as an athlete”. Participants were also asked several questions on a forced-choice (yes/no) in terms of AI, such as “Did you feel difficulty in changing your identity after your sports career ended?”

Sports Career Effects and Benefits

As a measure of sports career effects which obtained throughout sports, such as life skills, during their sports career, 10 life skills, which the World Health Organization (WHO, 1999) identified as important for improving a human’s life were used. Participants answered the questions on a five-point scale (1=not at all, up to 5=very much). The skills surveyed included the following; decision making skills, problem solving skills, self-awareness, empathy, communication skills, interpersonal relationship skills, creative thinking, critical thinking, coping with stress, and, finally, coping with emotions. Additional four items covered as the following: social ties, knowledge and skills for my current profession, health, and friends. These skills and benefits that athletes gained through sports are important to student-athletes. Also the life skills could positively impact several areas, such as: academic excellence, athletic excellence, personal development, and career development (Scot, 2008). Lastly, participants evaluated their personal perspectives about their current lives by rating statements on a five-point scale. The sample statements such as “This is the happiest time in my life” and “I still consider myself to be an athlete” were included in this last section.

Data Analysis

Before analyzing the data, it was imported to the SPSS Statistics 20 (Statistical Package

for Social Sciences). The data was analyzed by using statistical analysis available in SPSS to investigate the research questions. Descriptive statistics of participants' characteristics were examined. Group differences were explored by using an independent t-test.

Chapter IV

Results/Findings

The results of the present study are reported in two sections with multiple sub-sections. First, descriptive statistics outlining the characteristics of student-athletes during the transition phase are presented; second, the relationships influencing student-athletes' adjustment to transition are examined. These sections and sub-sections correspond to research questions posed in the introduction section. Due to missing data for some items, the number of athletes may be smaller in some statistical analyses.

Descriptive Characteristics of Participants

The personal contacts were provided information about the purpose of the study and encouraged to participate and forward the study link to any potential individuals. As a result of this, the questionnaire pool was expanded to an additional 84 people, for a grand total of 145 surveys sent.

Out of the 145 questionnaires sent, 81 were returned, making for an initial return rate about 56%. Of these, the total number of respondents returning valid results were 76 (a final return rate of 52.4%) former Japanese student-athletes. Data were accumulated electronically via Qualtrics survey software. After three years, all information will be destroyed per the institution's IRB policy.

The participants were equally divided by gender, 38 females and 38 males. Their age ranged from 22 years to 38 years ($M = 27.9$ years, $SD = 3.2$ years). Some participants recently terminated their sports careers, while others already experienced life after retirement. They began specializing in a specific sport on average at the age of 11.3 years ($SD = 3.4$). They tended to retire on average at the age of 23.5 years ($SD = 2.2$ years). Participants competed at Regional

level (42%), National level (47%), and International level (10%) events. Table 1 displays the sport representation of all participants based on their gender. The majority of the participants were Basketball athletes (n = 25), following Tennis (n = 13), Badminton (n = 10), Handball (n = 9), Baseball (n = 4), Lacrosse (n = 3); Soccer, Volleyball, Rugby, Track and Field (n=2 each); American Football, Budō, Field Hockey and Cheerleading (n = 1 each).

Table 1. *Sport Representation of Male and Female Athletes*

Sports Participation	Male	Female	Total	%
Basketball	14	11	25	32.9
Tennis	8	5	13	17.1
Badminton	4	6	10	13.2
Handball	0	9	9	11.8
Baseball	4	0	4	5.3
Lacrosse	1	2	3	3.9
Soccer	2	0	2	2.6
Volleyball	1	1	2	2.6
Rugby	2	0	2	2.6
Track and Field	1	1	2	2.6
Budō	0	1	1	1.3
Cheerleading	0	1	1	1.3
Football	1	0	1	1.3
Field Hokey	0	1	1	1.3
Total	38	38	76	100

They graduated from 25 different universities in Japan. Top 4 of their graduating universities are the following: Kansai University (n = 28), Yokohama National University (n = 10), Kansei Gakuin University (n = 8), and Ritsumeikan University (n = 6). Twenty-five participants (32.9 percent) passed the entrance examination titled The Sports-Based Recommended Admission Test, while 23 participants (30.3 percent) were admitted based upon passing the National Center Test for University Admission and/or College Entrance Administration Test. In addition, 12 participants (15.8 percent) passed the Recommendation-

Based Entrance Examination, 10 participants (13.2 percent) passed the Admissions Office Entrance Administration test, and another 6 people (7.9 %) entered their university in a variety of ways, such as an escalator-type administration, in which the high school is directly connected with a specific university.

Participants played in variety of status as an athlete in their college team. 41 athletes were starters, 13 athletes were a bench member who seldom played on the court, while in contrast, 12 athletes were a bench member who often played on the court; and 10 athletes were strictly practice squad.

The reasons for the Athlete's Retirement

Sixty-four participants (84.2 percent) made their decisions to retire from sports voluntarily. All other athletes who ended their career involuntarily mentioned that they retired because of job-related reasons, including finding good professional positions and graduation from the University. No participants answered the following reasons as their retirements: Sport-related reasons (decrease or stagnation in sport results, sense of accomplishment, and age), Relationship-related reasons (relations with coach, teammates, officials, and family members), Health-related reasons (physical or mental exhaustion, consequences of injuries, and diseases), Family-related reasons (desire to create own family, to have children, and family duties), and Financial reasons (necessity to increase your income).

Adaptation to New Life

Nearly half of the athletes, 35 athletes, representing 46.1 percent, reported that they needed to adjust anew to the life after their sports career ended. Twenty-five athletes or 71.4 percent out of the 35 succeeded in adjusting to their new life at latest within 1 year, however, the rest of 10 athletes stated that the adaptation period lasted more than 1 year. Furthermore, 6

athletes indicated that they did not adapt to their new life by choosing the response “I have not yet totally adapted to my new situation after my athletic career termination” (17.1 percent).

Satisfaction with Athletic Achievement in College

Forty athletes (52.7 percent) were completely or rather satisfied with their achievement in their sports in college; but 12 athletes (15.8 percent) answered “difficult to answer”, and 24 athletes (31.5 percent) were completely or rather dissatisfied with their sports career in college. Thirty-one athletes (40.8 percent) made plans and prepared to retire from their sports in advance. Two (6.5 percent) made a Holistic Life Plan (until death) or Long Life Plan (until your next career retirement); 7 (22.6 percent) developed an Intermediate Life Plan (until the next career stage); and 28 (64.5 percent) made a Short Life Plan (until the next decision). More than 80 percent of the athletes who had a plan for the next career transition stated that their plans worked well. Sixty-eight participants (89.4 percent) had an athletic objective, and 46 (67 percent) of the participants could not achieve their objectives.

Typical Emotional Responses toward Career Termination

Based on five-point rating scale, the most typical emotional response among student-athletes toward career termination was relaxation ($M = 3.49$, $SD = 1.371$), whereas the least occurring emotional response was aggression ($M = 1.88$, $SD = 1.177$) (Table 2).

Positive emotional responses such as feeling of freedom ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.428$), joy ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 1.233$), and sense of accomplishment ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 1.279$) toward career termination were given by the participants.

Table 2. *Emotional Responses of all Athletes*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Relaxation	3.49	1.371
Freedom	3.46	1.428
Joy	3.38	1.233
Sense of Accomplishment	3.33	1.279
Sadness	3.07	1.215
Happiness	2.99	1.227
Emptiness	2.82	1.373
Anxiety	2.61	1.377
Uncertainty	2.29	1.284
Aggression	1.88	1.177

Psychosocial Support during the Career Termination Phase

Participants reported the most supportive group for them was their friends ($M = 3.80$, $SD = 1.120$), which is a Likert score out of 5, and the least supportive group was psychologist and counsellor ($M = 1.29$, $SD = 0.813$) (Table 3).

Table 3. *Psychosocial Support by Groups*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Friends	3.80	1.120
Teammates	3.63	1.274
Parents	3.58	1.417
Significant Other	3.09	1.471
Coach	2.07	1.242
College Staff Member	1.58	0.983
Psychologist and Counselor	1.29	0.813

Typical Coping Strategies during Career Termination

Accepting career termination was the most typical coping strategy during career transition indicated by student-athletes choosing the response "I accepted the reality of the fact that my sports career is finished" ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 1.280$), on the other hand, the least coping

strategy stated as “I gave up trying to deal with the situation” ($M = 1.47$, $SD = 0.824$) (Table 4).

Table 4. *Typical Coping Strategies of all Athletes*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Accepted the reality	3.96	1.280
Spent time, and talking with people	3.74	1.226
Took an action to make the situation better	3.72	1.138
Saw the situation in a different light	3.58	1.319
Come up with a strategy	3.46	1.280
Did something different	2.61	1.550
Making jokes	2.30	1.327
Saying things to let unpleasant feelings escape	2.05	1.285
Expressed my negative feelings	1.68	0.883
Refused to believe in retirement	1.63	1.056
Used alcohol or tobacco	1.57	0.984
Gave up the situation	1.47	0.824

Cross Gender Differences

Gender differences for the dependent variables, including AI, emotional responses, coping strategies, benefits/skills they gained from their sports, and athlete’ psychosocial support were examined to assess specific relationships during the transitional phase.

Athletic Identity

The results of the *independent t*-test showed that there was no significant difference between males and females for AI ($t = -0.562$, $df = 74$, $p = 0.086$). Males and females had a similar AI perception (Table 5). Female student-athletes had an AI slightly higher than that of males.

Table 5. *Mean Athletic Identity Scores of Male and Female Student-Athletes*

	<i>Gender</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
AI ($t = -0.562$, $df = 74$, $p = 0.086$)	Male	5.556	1.317
	Female	5.699	0.850

Emotional Responses

Athletes rated the emotions that they felt during their transitional phase (Table 6). The strongest emotional responses for males were (a) sadness ($M = 3.32, SD = 1.210$), (b) relaxation ($M = 3.24, SD = 1.364$), and (c) emptiness ($M = 3.16, SD = 1.326$). In contrast, females tended to feel more (a) freedom ($M = 3.87, SD = 1.298$), (b) relaxation ($M = 3.74, SD = 1.349$), and (c) sense of accomplishment ($M = 3.74, SD = 1.309$).

The least mentioned emotional responses for males were (a) aggression ($M = 1.92, SD = 1.217$), (b) happiness ($M = 2.63, SD = 1.217$) and (c) uncertainty ($M = 2.63, SD = 1.282$). In contrast, the least exhibited emotional responses for female were (a) aggression ($M = 1.84, SD = 1.151$), (b) uncertainty ($M = 1.95, SD = 1.207$), and (c) anxiety ($M = 2.29, SD = 1.250$).

When females' responses were compared to those of the males by an independent-samples t -test, females tended to feel more relieved, happy, joyful, free, and sense of accomplishment, and less anxious, uncertain, and empty.

Table 6. *Emotional Responses by Gender*

	<i>Gender</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Relief *	Male	2.84	1.305
(t(74) = -2.266, p = 0.026)	Female	3.50	1.225
Sadness	Male	3.32	1.210
(t(74) = 1.822, p = 0.073)	Female	2.82	1.182
Happiness *	Male	2.63	1.217
(t(74) = 1.822, p = 0.011)	Female	3.34	1.146
Anxiety *	Male	2.92	1.440
(t(74) = 2.041, p = 0.045)	Female	2.29	1.250
Joy *	Male	3.08	1.194
(t(74) = -2.194, p = 0.031)	Female	3.68	1.210
Uncertainty *	Male	2.63	1.282
(t(74) = 2.395, p = 0.019)	Female	1.95	1.207
Relaxation	Male	3.24	1.364
(t(74) = -1.606, p = 0.112)	Female	3.74	1.349
Emptiness *	Male	3.16	1.326
(t(74) = 2.229, p = 0.029)	Female	2.47	1.350
Freedom *	Male	3.05	1.451
(t(74) = -2.583, p = 0.012)	Female	3.87	1.298
Aggression	Male	1.92	1.217
(t(74) = .291, p = 0.772)	Female	1.84	1.151
Sense of	Male	2.92	1.124
Accomplishment *	Female	3.74	1.309
(t(74) = -2.915, p = 0.005)			

*The level of significance was established at $p \leq .05$

Coping Strategies

An independent-samples *t*-test comparing the mean scores of male and female coping strategies found one statistically significant difference (Table 7). Females preferred to spend time talking with other people to make them feel better ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 1.110$), compared to male ($M = 3.37$, $SD = 1.239$).

Table 7. *Coping Strategies by Gender*

	<i>Gender</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Refused to believe in retirement ($t = 0.649$, $df = 74$, $p = 0.518$)	Male	1.71	1.088
	Female	1.55	1.032
Took an action to make the situation better ($t = 0.703$, $df = 74$, $p = 0.484$)	Male	3.82	1.087
	Female	3.63	1.195
Come up with a strategy ($t = 0.446$, $df = 74$, $p = 0.657$)	Male	3.53	1.268
	Female	3.39	1.306
Used alcohol or tobacco ($t = -0.348$, $df = 74$, $p = 0.729$)	Male	1.53	0.922
	Female	1.61	1.054
Gave up the situation ($t = 1.691$, $df = 74$, $p = 0.095$)	Male	1.63	0.998
	Female	1.32	0.574
Saying things to let unpleasant feelings escape ($t = 0.355$, $df = 74$, $p = 0.724$)	Male	2.11	1.226
	Female	2.00	1.356
Spent time, and talking with people * ($t = -2.730$, $df = 74$, $p = 0.008$)	Male	3.37	1.239
	Female	4.11	1.110
Expressed my negative feelings ($t = -0.517$, $df = 74$, $p = 0.606$)	Male	1.63	0.819
	Female	1.74	0.950
Saw the situation in a different light ($t = -0.693$, $df = 74$, $p = 0.490$)	Male	3.47	1.370
	Female	3.68	1.276
Did something different ($t = 0.000$, $df = 74$, $p = 1.000$)	Male	2.61	1.603
	Female	2.61	1.516
Accepted the reality ($t = 0.267$, $df = 74$, $p = 0.790$)	Male	4.00	1.208
	Female	3.92	1.363
Making jokes ($t = 0.603$, $df = 74$, $p = 0.549$)	Male	2.39	1.326
	Female	2.21	1.339

*The level of significance was established at $p \leq .05$

Benefits/Skills Athletes Gain from Their Sports

An independent samples t -test of benefits and skills athletes gained throughout sports with gender difference was conducted to assess specific relationships (Table 8). The top three benefits/ skills for males were (a) friends ($M = 4.69$, $SD = 0.786$), (b) empathy ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.787$), and (c) communication skills ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.821$). In contrast, the top benefits/skills

for females were (a) friends ($M = 4.95, SD = 0.229$), (b) interpersonal relationship skills ($M = 4.62, SD = 0.545$), and (c) empathy ($M = 4.62, SD = 0.594$).

While (a) knowledge and skills for profession ($M = 2.81, SD = 1.527$), (b) critical thinking ($M = 2.97, SD = 1.236$), (c) creative thinking ($M = 3.43, SD = 1.191$) were the least reported benefits/skills for males, females listed (a) critical thinking ($M = 3.11, SD = 1.075$), (b) creative thinking ($M = 3.57, SD = 0.987$), (c) knowledge and skills for current profession ($M = 3.57, SD = 1.303$) as their least gained benefits/skill from their sport.

When females were compared to males by an independent-samples t -test, females perceived themselves to gain benefits/skills from their sports more than men, including empathy, communication skills, interpersonal relationship skill, and knowledge and skills.

Table 8. Results Comparing Males and Females in terms of Benefits/Skills Gained

	Gender	M	SD
Decision Making Skills ($t = -1.251, df = 74, p = 0.215$)	Male	3.95	1.079
	Female	4.22	0.750
Problem Solving Skills ($t = -0.739, df = 74, p = 0.462$)	Male	4.05	0.998
	Female	4.22	0.886
Self-Awareness ($t = -0.642, df = 74, p = 0.523$)	Male	4.08	0.983
	Female	4.22	0.821
Empathy * ($t = -2.502, df = 74, p = 0.015$)	Male	4.22	0.787
	Female	4.62	0.594
Communication Skills * ($t = -2.044, df = 74, p = 0.045$)	Male	4.22	0.821
	Female	4.57	0.647
Interpersonal Relationship Skills * ($t = -2.370, df = 74, p = 0.020$)	Male	4.22	0.886
	Female	4.62	0.545
Creative Thinking ($t = -0.531, df = 74, p = 0.597$)	Male	3.43	1.191
	Female	3.57	0.987
Critical Thinking ($t = -0.502, df = 74, p = 0.617$)	Male	2.97	1.236
	Female	3.11	1.075
Coping With Stress ($t = -1.684, df = 74, p = 0.097$)	Male	3.54	1.346
	Female	4.00	0.972
Coping With Emotions ($t = -1.192, df = 74, p = 0.237$)	Male	3.62	1.233
	Female	3.95	1.104
Social Ties ($t = -0.995, df = 74, p = 0.323$)	Male	3.62	1.187
	Female	3.89	1.149
Knowledge And Skills * ($t = -2.296, df = 74, p = 0.025$)	Male	2.81	1.527
	Female	3.57	1.303
Health ($t = -1.375, df = 74, p = 0.173$)	Male	4.17	1.254
	Female	4.50	0.737
Friends ($t = -1.866, df = 74, p = 0.066$)	Male	4.69	0.786
	Female	4.95	0.229

*The level of significance was established at $p \leq 0.05$

Psychological Support

Athletes rated the support they received (e.g., emotional and job contacts) from

interpersonal and/or institutional sources during career termination in college (Table 9). The most supportive group for males were (a) friends ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 1.072$), (b) teammates ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 1.308$), and (c) parents ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 1.545$). In contrast, the most supportive group for female were (a) friends ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 1.161$), (b) parents ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 1.184$), and (c) teammates ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 1.220$).

The least supportive personnel for both male and female were (a) psychologists and counselors, (male: $M = 1.29$, $SD = 0.802$, female: $M = 1.29$, $SD = .835$), (b) college staff members (male: $M = 1.63$, $SD = 1.125$, female: $M = 1.53$, $SD = 0.830$), (c) coaches (male: $M = 1.97$, $SD = 1.213$, female: $M = 2.16$, $SD = 1.280$).

An independent-samples t -test comparing the mean scores of males and females for sources of psychological support found a statistically significant difference in parents ($t = -2.333$, $df = 74$, $p \leq .022$) (Table 9).

Table 9. *Psychosocial Support Ratings during Career Termination Phase*

	<i>Gender</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Parents *	Male	3.21	1.545
	Female	3.95	1.184
Significant Other	Male	2.95	1.451
	Female	3.24	1.497
Teammates	Male	3.42	1.308
	Female	3.84	1.220
Friends	Male	3.66	1.072
	Female	3.95	1.161
Coach	Male	1.97	1.213
	Female	2.16	1.280
College Staff Member	Male	1.63	1.125
	Female	1.53	0.830
Psychologist or Counselor	Male	1.29	0.802
	Female	1.29	0.835

*The level of significance was established at $p \leq .05$

Unique Emotions of the Participants

Life Plan and Emotional Response

An independent-samples *t*-test comparing the mean scores of athletes who had with “Life Plan” and “No Life Plan” and emotional responses found two statistically significant differences; relief ($t(74) = 2.150, p = 0.035$) and happiness ($t(74) = 2.019, p = 0.047$) (Table 10).

Table 10. *Results Comparing Having a “Life Plan” and Emotional Responses*

	<i>Planned before CT</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Relief*	Yes	31	3.55	1.150
	No	45	2.91	1.345
Sadness	Yes	31	2.77	1.175
	No	45	3.27	1.214
Happiness*	Yes	31	3.32	1.077
	No	45	2.76	1.282
Anxiety	Yes	31	2.48	1.411
	No	45	2.69	1.362
Joy	Yes	31	3.68	1.137
	No	45	3.18	1.267
Uncertainty	Yes	31	2.35	1.253
	No	45	2.24	1.317
Relaxation	Yes	31	3.61	1.308
	No	45	3.40	1.421
Emptiness	Yes	31	2.61	1.308
	No	45	2.96	1.413
Freedom	Yes	31	3.58	1.385
	No	45	3.38	1.466
Aggression	Yes	31	1.77	1.087
	No	45	1.96	1.242
Sense of Accomplishment	Yes	31	3.52	1.235
	No	45	3.20	1.307

*The level of significance was established at $p \leq .05$

CHAPTER V

Discussion

This chapter presents the findings and interpretation of the study. The researcher attempts to connect the literature from Chapter II to the findings and the context of the study. Finally, this chapter discusses the recommendations to stakeholders and practitioners and for future research. The results revealed important descriptive information as well as similarities and differences in career termination and transition experiences of former Japanese student-athletes.

The former student-athletes, who have terminated their student-athlete status, agreed on the reasons under which their careers ended. Results revealed that most of the student-athletes (64 participants) decided to end their career voluntarily while only 15.8 percent (12 participants) ended their career because of job related reasons (finding a good professional position, graduation from University). This may be related to the role of the individual in the college environment. Student-athletes know that they have a dual role, student and athlete, and they commit to these roles for a limited amount of time (e.g., 4 years) with an amateur spirit in their sports. When their time is up, student-athletes were not able to resist but end their career voluntarily. However, professional athletes would have reacted to career termination differently. Since pros know that this was their job, and invested hours of intense labor, they would have a hard time ending their career. In fact, Wippet and Wippet (2010) examined the reaction of 42 professional athletes toward their career termination. Athletes who involuntarily retired showed a stronger initial reaction, a more severe crisis, and longer transition periods than the volunteer group. Therefore, ending a career voluntarily might be favorable decision as opposed to involuntary career termination among student-athletes.

On the other hand, there was a greater disparity among responses related to their

post-career adjustment, which is also reflected in research within the field. Almost half of the participants indicated some difficulties in adapting to a new way of life following their career termination and low satisfaction with their achievement in their sports in college that could be related to pre-retirement planning. In fact, previous research indicates that retirement planning rather than unplanned retirement might contribute to a better and more positive adaptation to life after a career in sports (Taylor and Oglivie, 1998; Alfermann et al., 2004). There is also evidence in the literature that perceiving low levels of accomplishments (e.g., achieving sports objectives) might hinder a smooth transition out of sports (Wethner and Orlick, 1986). In addition, findings indicate that athletes who had a life plan in place, prior to their retirements, decreased all negative feelings (sadness, anxiety, uncertainty, emptiness, and aggression) than athletes who did not have their life plan in place (or) set. It can be anticipated that coaches, parents, and/or alumni may encourage student-athletes to set high objectives and demand high achievement without considering student-athletes' true potential and skill levels. Consequently, 46 (67 percent) athletes who were not able to achieve their athletic objectives in this study experience more career termination difficulties and would require a special intervention to cope with the emotional difficulties they are experiencing during the career transition.

Another interesting result of this study was that student-athletes' main emotional response to career termination could be described as one of a feeling of relaxation. This result might suggest that the student-athletes' life was difficult and stressful since they were trying to fulfill the obligations of roles as a student and athlete. Therefore, career termination might lead to a relaxed emotional state since these individuals do not need to deal with the stress of academics and athletics after career termination and graduation. This finding seems aligned with Coakley's (1983) ideas that athletes would experience a sense of relief and freedom. However, a number of

researchers mentioned emotional disturbance (e.g., feeling of loss, identity crisis, and distress) among professional athletes (Alfermann, Stambulova, & Zemaityte, 2002; Alfermann, Statler, & Cote, 2011; Blinde, & Stratta, 1992; Park & Tod, 2012; Petitpas, 2009). It appears that college athletes have a positive emotional response to career termination when they are compared to professional athletes. The nationality or culture of the athletes might influence the emotional responses of the athletes in this study. As Alfermann, Stambulova, and Zemaityte (2004) stated, athletes from different countries (Germany, Lithuania, and Russia) exhibited a specific emotional response to career termination (German athletes exhibited more favorable and less unfavorable emotional responses when compared to Lithuanian and Russian athletes). Consequently, researchers and practitioners as stakeholders (athletes, coaches, counselors, parents, family, etc.) should consider what level athletes participated in sports and possibly their nationality to be able to interpret some of the emotional responses they might show during career transition.

When considering the results from the standpoint of the psychosocial support for retiring student-athletes, psychologists, counselors, college staff members, and coaches were the least supportive groups in this study. There could be two possible explanations of this perception that either the staff and coaches were not supportive or the student-athlete's interaction with this group stopped or was limited since they left the student-athlete environment. This result aligned with the Brown and Potrac (2009) study that former Academy soccer players in the UK mentioned having inadequate social support once they had been released from their club. The lack of special psychosocial support by personnel like counselors and psychologists may affect career termination. These findings were supported by Wylleman, Lavallee and Alfermann (1999) who addressed that the importance of combined psychological assistance and professional training including pre-retirement programs as a means to facilitate the career transition process.

They also identified that it was potentially difficult coping with the loss of the student-athlete status even after changing identifications to another profession (teacher, coach, lawyer, engineer, etc.) and adopting new roles (professional, social, familial) during career termination. It could be suggested that further interventions by interacting with counselors/psychologists and coaches might remain necessary both during and after career termination, especially for the six participants in this study who answered “I have not yet totally adapted to my new situation after my athletic career termination”. It is also worth exploring whether or not educational institutions are offering sport psychologists and counselors for athletes in collegiate settings that might be another reason why student-athletes perceive the psychologist/counselor as the least supportive group during their career termination and transition.

Student-athletes in this study stated the acceptance of career termination as a coping strategy. Alfermann, Stambulova and Zemaityte (2004) also relate similar findings in their study that the former amateur athletes mentioned accepting retirement as their most preferred coping reaction. As it is mentioned in the literature review section, the quality of the career termination and transition can be influenced by the individual’s coping style. In fact, the acceptance of career termination could be a productive coping strategy that athletes can quickly focus on the possibilities in their transitional life (Alfermann, Stambulova, & Zemaityte, 2004; Sinclair, & Orlick, 1993; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998; Wylleman et al., 1999).

According to Park and Tod (2012), between the 1960s through the end of 2010, the number of studies using female athletes as participants is increasing. For example, 56 studies contained both genders, 38 contained male athletes only, 24 contained female athletes only, and gender was unspecified in eight studies. This study included gender as a variable, assuming that Japanese male and female student-athletes would have unique cultural responses to career

termination and transition. It is assumed that demographical characteristics such as gender and cultural and national factors would influence the perceptions and responses of student-athletes toward career termination and transition (Stambulova, 2012; Stambulova & Ryba, 2013).

Although there was no significant AI difference between male and female athletes during career termination, female athletes reported their career termination more positively than that of male athletes. When females were compared to males, they tended to feel more relieved, happy, joyful, free and a sense of accomplishment and less anxious, uncertain, and empty. This significantly different outcome by gender is partially supported by the study from Alfermann, Armbulova, and Zemaityte (2004), which examined reactions to sport career termination in a cross-national comparison of German, Lithuanian, and Russian athletes. They reported that female athletes had slightly lesser negative emotions after career termination than male athletes while the finding of the present study found that females perceived greater positive emotional responses coupled with lesser negative responses. Murphy, Petitpas, and Brewer's study (1996) explained that both AI and identity foreclosure have been found to be inversely related to career maturity among intercollegiate athletes; however, female athletes were more adaptive to career retirements, when compared to men. Murphy et al. (1996) hint at similarities to the present study that females have more positive and less negative feelings toward career termination and transition.

The result of this study revealed that male and female student-athletes had mostly similar coping strategies for dealing with career termination and transition (Alfermann et al, 2004). However, male and female athletes differ in that females preferred to spend time with others to feel better when compared to male athletes. This unique coping strategy used by female athletes might be categorized as a productive and helpful response (Alfermann, Stambulova, &

Zemaityte, 2004; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Wylleman et al., 1999).

Previous research suggests that the positive and productive coping strategies could help individual athletes to experience a quality career termination and transition. Since female athletes appear to benefit from such a coping strategy, it is possible to design intervention programs for male athletes as well that can promote social interaction with others.

In addition, females in this study perceived themselves as gaining different benefits/skills from their sport experience than men, including empathy, communication skills, interpersonal relationship skills, and knowledge and skills. These results seem to have the similarity with the study conducted by Murphy, Petitpas, and Brewer (1996) which mentioned female student-athletes had significantly higher career maturity scores. It may be indicated that positive coping strategies and life skills can help females' athletes avoid problematic career termination.

This study also disclosed that male and female student-athletes had similar psychosocial support perceptions, and yet females felt parents were a more supportive group. As a transition resource, getting social support from significant others (e.g., parents) is the most important resource mentioned by athletes at the beginning and at the end of the career which would facilitate the coping process (Stambulova, Alfermann, Statler, & Côté, 2009). In their position paper, Stambulova, et al. (2009) concluded that social support is part of the coping process which could help the career transition process and consequently might lead to the successful adoption of new roles in everyday life. Thus, it would be safe to claim that female student-athletes might have positive career termination and transition experiences because of higher family support.

Athletes who had a life plan tend to have positive emotional responses toward career termination and transition. This study found statistically significant differences between athletes who have and have not a life plan. Specifically, athletes who have a life plan perceived more

relief and happiness during career termination and transition. In addition, even though it was not statistically significant, it would be interesting to note that athletes, who had a life plan before career termination, refrained from negative feelings of sadness and showed positive feelings of joy. These findings are supported by Stambulova, Alfermann, Statler, and Côté (2009) that making plans for the future can prevent athletes' crisis during their career termination. Previous research also tied the planning before career termination to the quality of life during transition (Adler & Adler, 1991; Bailie, 1993; Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985; Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994; Wooten, 1994). Pre-retirement is also seen as a productive coping strategy by previous researchers (Alfermann, Stambulova, & Zemaityte, 2004; Sinclair, & Orlick, 1993; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998; Wylleman et al., 1999). It would be safe to suggest that future planning as an athlete would eliminate some of the negative consequences. Recently, Stambulova (2010) suggested a five-stage career planning strategy which can help athletes transition. The first four stages focus on athletes' past, present, and possible future. The last stage includes connecting the athlete's past, present and possible future to generate a goal setting program for future actions. Researchers believe that such a systematic approach about career planning might produce self-exploration, self-awareness, and informed decisions (Stambulova, 2010).

In summary, this study explored the experiences and responses of Japanese collegiate student-athletes' during career terminations. Evidence indicated some Japanese student-athletes have been struggling with athletic career termination similar to athletes in western countries (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007; Murdock, et al., 2016). Findings also suggested the similarities and differences in career termination and transition responses, based on gender, coping strategies, satisfaction with achievements in their sports, and emotional reactions.

Implications for Practitioners

There are several implications of the findings of the present study that Japanese student-athletes can be aided psychologically, psychosocially, academically and vocationally (Wylleman et al., 1999) by considering social context and support (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). Athletic career terminations are diverse based on the degree of individuals' engagement and experiences in sports; furthermore, intervention plans should be also diverse. According to Bernes et.al (2009), the competition level, and/or age of the athletes transitioning can influence the type of intervention that is most suitable for a given situation. For example, young athletes and student athletes may be better supported through career transition by their parents. On the other hand, consulting with college and national team athletes should be more individualized, and support from parents may not be the best priority (Bernes et al., 2009). It implies that each educational institution or sport organization may need to prepare resources for ending athletic careers by considering the level of athletes and individual sports characteristics. It is assumed that each institution may prepare for resources for career end; in addition, the new sports organization for student-athletes would put more attention into their career termination as well as their sports performance. Furthermore, a comprehensive intervention that includes coaches, staff members and faculty would provide better support and help to student-athletes before and after career termination and transition (Petipas, 2009; Stambulova et al., 2009). The comprehensive intervention idea requires training and information for the related people (e.g., coach, staff members, and faculty) to recognize challenges for Japanese student-athletes (Petipas, 2009; Wylleman, et al., 2004; Schlossberg, 1981).

Based on the main findings of this study, the following practical suggestions would be speculated to construct pre-and post-intervention programs for student-athletes to prepare career

termination and transition.

1. Encourage and create an environment that student-athletes end their career voluntarily. This will create better emotional responses and a smooth/shorter transition period.
2. Know that student-athletes are having difficulty to adapt to new life. Encourage them to have planning as soon as possible to reduce the negative feelings.
3. Know that a high number of athletes are not satisfied with their achievements in college, no plan for CT, and did not achieve their athletic objectives. Athletes not only need help for their athletic performance and objective achievement planning but also their future planning for life after retirement.
4. Know that student-athletes in this study felt relaxed during the transition period. This information can possibly be used to promote a positive transition among student-athletes.
5. Know that student-athletes perceived coaches, college staff members, and counselors/psychologist as the least supportive group and friends as the most supportive group. This finding might suggest that encouraging and increasing the interactions between coaches, college staff members, and counselors/psychologist and student-athletes are needed for creating a supportive environment for retirement.
6. It seems student-athletes in this study accept the reality of career termination which would be a productive coping strategy for career transition.
7. Not having a difference in A1 scores of male and female athletes implies that athletes as a group would show similar A1 characteristics.
8. Know that females respond to career termination more positively (more relieved, happy, joyful, free and sense of accomplishment) and less negatively (less anxious, uncertain, and empty).

9. Knowing females preferred to spend time with others, to feel better, can be one of the intervention strategies to promote among female athletes.
10. Females in this study perceived themselves as gaining more different benefits/skills from their sport experience than men, including empathy, communication skills, interpersonal relationship skills, and knowledge and skills.
11. Females note parents were the most supportive group.
12. Athletes who have a life plan perceived more relief and happiness during career termination and transition.

Suggestions for Future Research

In general, there is limited student-athletes' career research available in Japan, it is necessary to conduct more systematic career termination/transition research from various viewpoints (Stambulova & Ryba, 2013; Tokuyama, 2015). Stambulova (2012) also mentioned key tendencies in career studies moving from universal to culturally informed research and interventions. Thus, researchers are encouraged to replicate this study in Japanese setting to underline the cultural characteristics.

It is suggested that future research would use the descriptive characteristics of student-athletes in this study (voluntary vs. involuntary retirement, having a college sport objective or not, achieving college sport objective or not, etc.) to further group athletes to examine their experiences related to emotional responses, coping strategies, psychosocial support, and benefits/skills they gained from their sport.

Evidence suggested that female athletes handled their career termination better than male athletes. Even though the present study could speculate that social interactions and psychosocial support perceived by females might produce positive responses toward career termination, future

qualitative research with in-depth interviews and observations may be used to identify variables or factors causing gender difference. Since this significant difference between gender was unique, it would be worthy to examine and compare based on environmental and cultural contexts, including collectivist societies vs. individualist societies; traditionalism vs. neoliberalism; and heterogeneous vs. homogeneous cultures (Stambulova et al., 2009). Additionally, since each college or university and sport organization have dissimilar support systems and internal governing policies for student-athletes, examining the detail of each college's and sport's organizational role and function (e.g., kind of support system, policies, etc.) can help with understanding variables or factors causing gender difference found in this study.

Conclusion

The study focused on exploring the challenges and experience of the Japanese collegiate student-athletes encounter when they end their athletic career. Career termination and transition of student-athletes are two connected realities of athletic life that all stakeholders (athletes, coaches, parents, friends, counselors/psychologist etc.) need to know and be prepared for. However, even though most of the athletes end their career voluntarily, accept the reality of career termination and feel relaxed during the transition period, some of them have difficulty adapting to a new life, have no plan for career termination, are not satisfied with their athletic achievement and objectives, and have perceived not having enough psychosocial support (especially counselors/psychologists/coaches) from their educational institution. Furthermore, this study supported the gender-difference results that female student-athletes have more positive emotional responses to career termination, and use social interaction and family to cope with career termination feelings; and that females are more likely to gain benefits/skills from their sport experience than males. Finally, athletes who have a life plan felt more relieved and

happy during career termination and transition.

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Appendix A

Letter of Invitation

I, Junya Adachi, graduate student, from the Department of Kinesiology and Sports Studies, Eastern Illinois University.

I am conducting a research on the perceptions, reactions, and feelings of former Japanese college athletes about their athletic career termination for the partial fulfillment of the Master of Sciences degree and I would like to extend an invitation to you to participate in this research.

The purpose of this research project is to find out the challenges of Japanese-student athletes encounter when they terminate their athletic career.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete an online survey. The survey would last about 30 minutes. During this survey, you will be answering questions about how you feel about your athletic career termination. I would like to know more about the reasons for your career termination, and how you deal with it.

This survey will take approximately 30min. There are no right and wrong answers. What important is your opinions. This research should benefit you to gain a better understanding of your perceptions, reactions and feelings about your athletic career termination. Additionally, results from this study will add to the literature on athletic career termination.

Participation in this research is completely voluntary and you may choose to withdraw from the research at any time or not answer questions that you do not feel comfortable answering.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me (see below for contact information).

Thank you,

Junya Adachi
Graduate Students
Phone: 779-7034366
Email: jadachi@eiu.edu

Dr. Hasan F.Mavi
Thesis Chair
Phone: (217) 3088223
Email: hfmavi@eiu.edu

Appendix B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Thank you for expressing an interest in this project. Please read the below information carefully before deciding whether or not to participate in the project. If you choose to participate in the project we thank you. If you do not decide to participate in the project there will be no disadvantages to you of any kind and we thank you for considering our request.

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by a graduate student Mr. Junya Adachi (advised by Dr. Hasan F. Mavi) from the Kinesiology and Sports Studies Department at Eastern Illinois University.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study will investigate the relationship between student-athletes' preconceptions, reactions and feeling about the retirement from the athletics. Ultimately, the study sets out to establish whether students who feel they are well planned, and therefore prepared, and achieve greater career transition during their life after sports.

PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

1) Complete an on-line survey regarding your perceptions, reactions and feelings regarding your athletics career termination.

2) You will be required to complete this survey once.

Please note that you can also refuse to answer any particular question. The data from the survey will be anonymous and your name will not be linked to any of your answers. The data will be analyzed to explore shared themes.

CONFIDENTIALITY, RISKS, AND PROTECTION MEASURES

There are no known risks associated with participation in this study. All efforts will be made to maintain confidentiality and anonymity. Data will be stored securely and any data that results from your participation will be made anonymous.

BENEFITS

By participating in this study you will gain a better understanding of your perceptions about your athletic career termination. Additionally, results from this study will add to the literature on the relationship between student-athletes' perceptions, reactions and feelings about their athletic career termination.

PARTICIPATION AND WITDRAWAL

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, you may contact Mr. Junya Adachi at (779) 703-4366 or at jadachi@ciu.edu.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write:

Institutional Review Board
 Eastern Illinois University
 600 Lincoln Ave.
 Charleston, IL 61920
 Telephone: (217) 581-8576
 E-mail: eiuirb@www.eiu.edu

You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with EIU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time. I have been given a copy of this form.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

Appendix C

Questionnaire

Part I. General Biographical Data

Please, answer these questions about yourself:

1. Age (full years only) _____
2. Gender () Male () Female
3. What university did you graduate from _____
4. How did you pass the college entrance examination?
 National Center Test for University Admission and/or College entrance administration test
 Sports-based recommended admission test
 A.O. (Admissions Office) entrance administration test
 Recommendation-based entrance examination
 Others _____

Part II. Sport Biographical Data

Please answer these questions about your sports career:

5. What is your main sport specialization in which you participate in college?
 American football
 Basketball
 Budō (Aikido, Karate, Judo, Shōrinji-Kempō, Kendou, etc.)
 Gymnastic
 Track Field
 Handball
 Lacrosse
 Soccer
 Swimming
 Table Tennis
 Tennis
 Volleyball
 Other individual sports except for above (Please specify) _____
 Other team sports except for above (please specify) _____
6. What influenced you the most to specialize in your main sport? (the sport you chose in Q6)
 Affected by siblings and/or parents
 Affected by friends and teammates
 Affected by coaches, trainers, and a sports organization
 Affected by media (e.g., TV, Magazine, Movies, and Comics, etc.)
 Affected by high athletic achievements and prior sports' performance
 Others _____
7. At what age did you start your main sport specialization? _____
8. How many sports did you play before specializing in one at college?
 0 () 1 () 2 () 3 () 4 or more
9. What is the highest level of competition you achieved during your sports career?
 Regional () National () International

10. When did you achieve your biggest success in the sport?
 Pro- or semi- professional level after graduation
 College
 High school
 Junior high school
 Elementary school or younger
11. What was your status as an athlete in your college team? :(How often did you participate during a competitive match?)
 A starting member (Most of the match)
 A bench member but often played on the court (Half of the match)
 A bench member and seldom played on the court (Less than half match)
 Practice squad (Out of bench)
 (I participated in practices but never played in a competitive match)
 If the above options do not fit with your sports, please describe your level of participation

-
12. Did you have any serious sports injuries?
 Yes No
13. **If Yes:** Do you still feel any physical consequences from those injuries?
 Yes No
14. Are you satisfied with your achievements in your sport in college?
 Satisfied completely
 Rather satisfied
 Difficult to answer
 Rather dissatisfied
 Completely dissatisfied

Part 3. The Reasons and Preparation for Sports Career Termination

With as much detail as possible, describe how you finished your sports career:

15. How old were you when you finished your sports career? _____
16. Did you have an athletic objective while in college (such as competing in the Olympics, national competition, etc.?)
 Yes No
17. **If Yes:** Did you achieve that objective?
 Yes No
18. Did you make plans and prepare to retire from your sport in advance?
 Yes No
19. **If Yes:** What type of plan did you prepare for after your sport career?
 Holistic Life Plan (until death)
 Long Life Plan (until your next career retirement)
 Intermediate Life Plan (until the next career stage)
 Short Life Plan (until the next decision)
 Others _____
20. **If Yes with Q18:** Do you think your plan worked well?
 Yes No
21. Was your decision to retire from sports voluntary?
 Yes No

22. If No: please specify how:

- () Job-related reasons (finding good professional position, graduation from the University)
 () Sport-related reasons (decrease or stagnation in sport results, sense of accomplishment, age)
 () Relationship-related reasons (relations with coach, teammates, officials, family members)
 () Health-related reasons (physical or mental exhaustion, consequences of injuries, diseases)
 () Family-related reasons (desire to create own family, to have children, family duties)
 () Financial reasons (necessity to increase your income)
 () Others _____

Part 4. Transitional Period: Emotions: Ways of Coping: People of Support

Describe in detail the transitional period after your sports career ended:

23. Did you have an impression that you needed to adjust anew to the life after your sports career ended?

- () Yes () No

24. If Yes: How long was the time period (in months) between your sports career termination and your feeling of adjustment to life after sports?

- () Less than one month,
 () Between one month and three months
 () Between four months and six months
 () Between seven months and one year
 () Between one year and two years
 () Two year and more
 () I have not yet totally adapted to my new situation after my athletic career termination

25. Within the following list of emotions characterize the level of feeling during your transitional period. (Please use 5-point scale, where 1=not at all; 5=very much) :

1. Relief	1	2	3	4	5
2. Sadness	1	2	3	4	5
3. Happiness	1	2	3	4	5
4. Anxiety	1	2	3	4	5
5. Joy	1	2	3	4	5
6. Uncertainty	1	2	3	4	5
7. Relaxation	1	2	3	4	5
8. Emptiness	1	2	3	4	5
9. Freedom	1	2	3	4	5
10. Aggression	1	2	3	4	5
11. Sense of Accomplishment	1	2	3	4	5
12. Please, add what else	1	2	3	4	5

26. Did you experience difficulties or problems after sports career termination in the fields as follows (please use 5-point scale, where 1=not at all; 5=very much):

1. Professional career	1	2	3	4	5
2. Studies	1	2	3	4	5
3. Family	1	2	3	4	5
4. Communication (relationships, social network, friendship)	1	2	3	4	5
5. Entertainment (hobbies, leisure activities)	1	2	3	4	5
6. Financial	1	2	3	4	5
7. Overall health	1	2	3	4	5

8. Other (please specify)	1	2	3	4	5
27. What coping strategies and to what extent did you use in solving problems after your sports career ended? (Please use 5-point scale, where 1= did not use at all; 5 - used this a lot):					
1. I refused to believe that my sports career is really finished	1	2	3	4	5
2. I took action to try to make the situation better	1	2	3	4	5
3. I tried to come up with a strategy, or plan, about what to do	1	2	3	4	5
4. I used alcohol or tobacco to make myself feel better	1	2	3	4	5
5. I gave up trying to deal with the situation	1	2	3	4	5
6. I was saying things to let my unpleasant feelings escape	1	2	3	4	5
7. I spent time, or talking with other people to make me feel better	1	2	3	4	5
8. I expressed my negative feelings	1	2	3	4	5
9. I tried to see the situation in a different light, to make it seem more positive	1	2	3	4	5
10. I was doing something to think about it less - like going to movies, watching TV, reading, daydreaming, sleeping, shopping, etc.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I accepted the reality of the fact that my sports career is finished	1	2	3	4	5
12. I was making jokes about the situation I am in	1	2	3	4	5

28. Who supported you psychologically and to what extent during your transitional period after sports career ended? (Please use 5-point scale, 1= did not support me at all; 5 = gave me very significant support):

1. Parents	1	2	3	4	5
2. Significant other	1	2	3	4	5
3. Teammates	1	2	3	4	5
4. Friends	1	2	3	4	5
5. Coach	1	2	3	4	5
6. College staff member, faculty, etc.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Psychologist and counselor	1	2	3	4	5
8. Please, add who else	1	2	3	4	5

Part 5. Athletic Identity

Please answer these questions about your life in sports and after sports.

29. During the culmination stage of my sports career...

(Please use 7-point scale, where 1= not at all; 7= it is exactly the truth):

1. ...I considered myself mainly as an athlete	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. ... I had many goals related to sport	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. ... most of my friends were athletes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. ... sports was the most important part in my life	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. ... I spent more time thinking about sports than anything else	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. ... I started to feel bad about myself when I did poorly in sports	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. ... I would be very depressed if I were injured and could not compete in sports	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

30. Did you feel difficulty in changing your identity after your sports career ended?

()Yes ()No

Part 6. Sports Career Effects

Please, answer these questions about the impact of sports career upon your life career in general:

31. What benefits for life did you take from your sports career?

(Please use 5-point scale, where 1=not at all; 5=very much):

1. Decision Making Skills	1	2	3	4	5
2. Problem Solving Skills	1	2	3	4	5
3. Self-awareness	1	2	3	4	5
4. Empathy	1	2	3	4	5
5. Communication Skills	1	2	3	4	5
6. Interpersonal Relationship Skills	1	2	3	4	5
7. Creative Thinking	1	2	3	4	5
8. Critical Thinking	1	2	3	4	5
9. Coping with Stress	1	2	3	4	5
10. Coping with Emotions	1	2	3	4	5
11. Social Ties	1	2	3	4	5
12. Knowledge and Skills for My Current Profession	1	2	3	4	5
13. Health	1	2	3	4	5
14. Friends	1	2	3	4	5
15. Please, add what else	1	2	3	4	5

32. What is your personal opinion about your life now? (Please express your agreement or disagreement with every statement below, using 5-point scale, where 1= completely disagree; and 5 = absolutely agree):

1. I am satisfied with my life.	1	2	3	4	5
2. This is the happiest time in my life.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I am just as happy now as when I was participating in competitive sport.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I have gotten pretty much what I expected out of life.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I still consider myself to be an athlete.	1	2	3	4	5

Thank you for your cooperation!