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**Changing it up: Implications of mid-season coach change on basketball players'
career and professional identities**

Career and professional identities are utilised as a conceptual framework to
consider the complexities of basketball players' working lives amidst mid-season
coach change. Seven male professional basketball players, working in top
European leagues, participated in semi-structured interviews. The interviews
centred on career trajectories and incidents of mid-season coach change. Results
indicate sports workers' career success is contingent upon strategically
undertaking identity work in order to best respond to the demands of the
organisational context. Players' experiences of coach turnover, for example, may
have varied, however, the event had discernible influence on how they understood
themselves, their positional relationship and overall longevity in the sport. Of
concern is the necessity for organisations to appreciate their roles in shaping the
settings in which their employees work, and the related consequences that
contextual changes have in worker's abilities to labour and the strategies they may
need to utilise to cope with such change.

The study of work has long been of interest to social researchers. Although varied in
content, scholarship on work has variously sought ways of analysing and explaining the
consequences of global, social, political and economic forces in a variety of contexts and
labour markets. Within the sociological and psychological examinations of work
particular emphasis has been placed on identity construction, agency, industry change,
labour movements, mobilising capital, and the blurring of work and non-work spaces (e.g.
Bauman, 2000; Gabriel, Gray & Goregaokar, 2013; Sennett, 1998). More recently,
scholarship has focused on the nature of individual experiences and the multiple and

varied ways in which working lives are navigated and negotiated amid new global economic processes and social orders. Concern has been raised not only with regards to the increasing precarity of workers' lives and the cases of those facing frequent career transitions, but also the necessity for such individuals to display flexibility, adaptation, and the ability to cope with uncertainty (Johnston, Maggiori, & Rossier, 2016; Kalleberg, 2009; Rudisill, Edwards, Hershberger, Jadwin, & McKee, 2010).

Over the last few decades, researchers of work have offered theoretical frameworks and conceptual foci to help better analyse and interpret career contexts, labour forces and employment processes (e.g. Hamtiaux, Houssemand & Vrignaud, 2013; Herr, 1992; Savickas, 2013). Such scholarship has reiterated that responses to changes within the work environment are not only complex and nuanced, but are also inherently contingent upon the individual. The ability of the individual to navigate turbulent and/or uncertain terrain (what might also be referred to as self-efficacy or agency) is dependent upon the specific social context, their histories, emotional resolve, professional outlook and personal behaviours (Hamtiaux et al., 2013; Herr, 1992; Savickas, 2013). Taken in totality, this work has been significant in advocating for the role that career adaptability takes within appreciations of workers' life trajectories, and, in drawing attention to the ways in which individual must adapt, cope, negotiate and accommodate changes in their work environments and circumstances. These theoretical approaches to vocational change, work roles, and career navigations inform the ways in which we might analyse and frame the experiences of sports workers when employment condition shift (in this case, due to coach turnover), and workers' subsequent abilities to adapt and maintain an element of control and meaning within their professional lives. In an effort to address this concern, the aim of this paper is to add to understandings of professional and career identity by examining a particular cohort of workers' responses specific employment

forces; in this case, players' experiences of mid-season coach change. We commence by first examining professional sport as work and the related implications for employment related identity construction.

Professional sport as work

The contextual focus of this research is on employment within professional sport; specifically elite level basketball in Europe. Although appreciated as a significant domain of work, professional sport has been criticised for short-term contracts, transitory work, and the perceived expendability and replaceability of sports workers (Ingham, Blissmer & Davidson, 1999; Roderick, 2012). Recent studies have highlighted the precarious nature of the careers of professional football players by drawing attention to the players' responses to the insecurities (i.e. injury, ageing, performance and transfer) and feelings of uncertainty that were characteristic of their working lives (McGillivray & McIntosh, 2006; Parker, 1996, Roderick, 2006a, 2006b, 2013). While such research has been useful in exploring professional football in the UK, with regards to professional sports workers in Europe there is limited examination of such concepts and the external influences which compound feelings of work-related uncertainty. In addition, and taking basketball as our starting point, there is also the need to better understand how various employment forces, directly or indirectly, may affect individual's identity construction, social interactions and personal career outcomes within specific work environments.

Professional basketball has an established history in Europe. Throughout this history, players have experienced careers that are characterised by short-term contracts, spells of unemployment, social and geographical transitions, movement to and from lower leagues, late payments, and retirement as the result of injury. There are pre-existing employment laws within the European Union that frame and govern the labour contexts

in which these sports workers operate (Davies, 2012; Prassl, 2013). These include, for example, directives on employees' rights, general working conditions, mobility, pay, access to and equality of opportunity, and health and safety (European Commission, 2016). Notwithstanding the utility of these directives to provide a layer of legal security, the context is reliant upon players achieving statistically driven key performance indicators each season to ensure the continuation of their employment not just in a particular work setting (i.e. the club), but to ensure manoeuvrability across the upper echelons of the sport industry. Thus, player's priorities with regards to the protection and increase of their playing minutes becomes a valuable part of their strategy to remain, and move within, the profession. Here, favourable statistics enable players to have choice with regards their employment.

In some European professional clubs, contextual insecurities such as mid-season changeover of coaches are career realities. Such changes not only disrupt the daily routines of which the player are accustomed, but also threaten players' positions within the team. In an employment sense, the coach is a fundamental part of the institutional structures of sport. In professional sport, the coach is a representative of the system, and although there are other stakeholders (e.g., assistant coaches, medical personnel, support staff) that may arguably spend more time with players, the coach primarily creates, sets and enforces players' working conditions on a daily basis. Although the impact of coach/managerial successions on team performance in professional sports has been investigated (Soebbing & Washington, 2011; White et al., 2007), players' reactions to change initiatives are less understood. Further work is needed that addresses the interactions that occur between sports workers (e.g. players, coaches, agents, owners), their organisational contexts, their working conditions, and the impact these interactions

may have on their identities and career trajectories (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002; Potrac & Jones, 2009).

As of yet, however, despite the increasing popularity of basketball in Europe little is known about players' understandings of their working contexts. Initial work in this regard has been conducted by EU Athletes as evidenced by their position paper (2015), and the European Commissions' funded project on the working conditions of professional players in several European member states (Syndex, 2013). Here, interest stems from the growth of sports work in Europe and rising concerns regarding the regulation of employment in the sector. As such, stakeholders representing athletes/players are advocating that policymakers address the working conditions experienced by athletes/players (e.g., EUAthletes, 2015; Syndex, 2013). Notwithstanding the utility of these initial exploratory descriptions of workers' experiences in revealing some key preliminary issues that speak to some organisations' political agendas and interest, there remains considerable scope for more rigorous investigations that speak to the complexities, depth and 'realities' of individuals' experiences in this particular setting.

Here, we believe, the focus on professional basketball players' experiences is useful in augmenting understandings of sports work in Europe and furthering exploration of the impact of the coach as catalyst for climate change. What is of particular interest in this regard are the ways in which the coach's actions have consequences for players that may come to bear on their professional identities, and may resonate in their ability/inability to manage climate/cultural changes upon their career. Subsequently, we argue that while an element of change (and consequently player adaptation within their distinct social contexts) might be accepted as a characteristic of sport, at this level there are evidently ingrained assumptions and expectations at play that suggest players have the capacities and abilities to effectively and efficiently adjust and manage these

particular types of coach-related changes as part of their professional skill-set and regular working lives. Concomitantly, in the spirit of ensuring the performance orientated maxims of the organisation, an ethos of 'just getting on with it' seems to pervade aspects of the coach-athlete relationship and physical and/or emotional consequences that affect worker's broader thoughts about the expectations placed upon them as professionals.

Sport workers' career and professional identities

One way of understanding players' reactions to organisational change is by considering the players' identities vis-à-vis their employment, and specifically, their 'career' and 'professional' identity formation. While some scholars would argue that this could be explained by athletic identity (i.e. the extent to which a person identifies with their athlete role (Brewer et al., 1993)), our approach emphasises the broader employment contexts and conditions of players' working lives (which we believe extend beyond the microcosm of athletes' performative identities). Moreover, in this paper the intention is to conceptualise players not merely as athletes, but to situate their lives, interactions and experiences within a wider appreciation of the sports workers. In addition, considering athletes as sports workers is in harmony with wider literature which has detailed the turbulent nature of working conditions, the fragmentation of workers' lives, and drawn attention to issues of adaptability, change, transition, identity and empowerment (e.g. Savickas 2005, 2013; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). To do this, we draw upon scholarship that has attempted to better understand how individuals' working lives influence their sense of self and identity in both the immediate sense and the long term (e.g. Khapova et al., 2007; Stringer & Kerpelman, 2010). Through interrogating different organisational settings and worker types, Blustein and Noumair (1996), Meijers (1998) and Super (1990), for example, have all reiterated the strong associations between career and

identity formation. An individual's career identity, essentially, is idiosyncratically linked to social interactions within their employment settings, and their motivations and perceived competencies and abilities within their roles. 'A career identity', Meijers (1998) adds, 'is a structure of meaning in which the individual links his own motivation, interests and competencies with acceptable career roles' (p. 191). Thus, in our case, our athletes' career identities are established, first and foremost, around becoming and being professional basketball players; an occupation that, like many others, is defined in both institutional and personal terms.

Career identity, in a sense, requires understanding oneself as a particular type of worker (for example, being a professional basketball player who works for a specific club), assimilation into the cultural codes of practice associated with that work setting (e.g., following contractual obligations and adhering to the organisational philosophy and principles of the club), and investment in values, beliefs and ideals associated with the career and its potential trajectories (e.g., the sporting ethos and accepted athletic codes of conduct) (Blustein & Noumair, 1996; Meijers, 1998; Super, 1990). Career choice and career development and transition, therefore, form significant elements that structure individual's identity formation; all of which, come to bear on an individual's working life at some point or another and/or cause them to question their sense of self. Within all this, Stringer and Kerpelman (2010), along with Khapova et al. (2007), also add that career identity is also contoured by an individual's self-efficacy, or perceptions thereof; essentially, the capacity for autonomy and control over decision making. By extension, instances within an individual's employment that impact upon their decision-making capacities (e.g., coach change precipitating work turmoil, personal uncertainty, and conundrums in player's relationship with their clubs) can detrimentally affect career identity. As Stringer and Kerpelman (2010) recognise, career identity is closely linked to

individual's well-being, emotional adjustment, assumptions about job security, their overall work satisfaction and social circumstances.

Career identity is partly useful for appreciating and articulating individuals' working lives. However, there is concern that the term does not go far enough or adequately encapsulate the totality of factors, relationships and broader contexts that constitute individuals' work or fluidities of their work/life experiences (Blustein & Noumair, 1996; Ibarra, 1999; Khapova et al., 2007). Such authors argue for a greater need to consider the wider professional context and long term environmental factors in which individual's labour is plied. Guided by Ibarra (2003) and Khapova et al. (2007), we refer to a professional identity as 'sense of his or her professional role, and the message that he or she conveys about herself to others' (p. 585). While professional identity incorporates values, attributes and beliefs individuals have about their working roles (Ibarra, 1999; Khapova et al., 2007), it also entails, importantly, the ways in which these qualities are conveyed/performed within the context of their work and working relationships, and the resultant effect this may have on the individual's career progression or transition. As Blustein and Noumair (1996), suggest, relational factors/relationships in addition to wider influences upon the workplace and workers therein (e.g., economic and political pressures, labour force fluctuations, global events, institutional reshuffling) need to be accounted for as part of professional/work-orientated identity formation.

Irrespective of theoretical and empirical developments in the literature, conceptually, and practically, there is still debate over the coherence and disjuncture between career and professional identity. Treated as working interpretations then, career identity may be framed as a configuration of meanings and experiences formed out of the individual's affiliation, assimilation and bond(s) to their chosen career and its potential trajectories. The locus of control within career identity, thus, is largely operationalised

via self-efficacy and individual agency (Hamtiaux et al., 2013; Savickas, 2013). Professional identity, in contradistinction, revolves around how these career identities are performed (though also challenged, negotiated and maintained) within the broader context of the job environment and over the course of individual's working lives (Khapova et al., 2007). When considered in relation to professional sport, this employment setting may afford some athletes some privilege (in the form of social, economic and physical capital), yet the potentially lucrative contexts of their work, the often unstable nature of their positions, contractual complexities, their social relationships, and the demands and assumptions made with regards to their career are frequently fraught with issues that can compound the regular pressures of daily life.

One key aspect in this regard relates to the performance of the team and subsequent results. This imperative is, by and large, accepted as part of professional sport. Yet, this objective can be ruptured by changes to/by/around the coach and their role and relationship with players and the team. While we acknowledge literature that has analysed the correlations between team performance and change in the coach (e.g. White, Persad & Gee, 2007; Soebbing & Washington, 2011), this paper furthers examinations of forces impacting upon workers and their employment conditions; our focus being the specific consequences of mid-season coach movement as perceived by the player and the meaning of these experiences within their working lives. There is an inherent messiness of these processes, structures and relationships that are entangled and inseparable, and also crystallised by the idiosyncrasies of the distinct clubs in which these experiences and lived out. Cognisant of the need to progress discussion on athlete professional and career identity tensions, and highlight experiences within European professional sport settings, here a space is provided in which the voices of professional basketball players may be

appreciated and afforded weight within our understandings of professional sport organisation settings.

Methodology and Method

Participants

Previous work has highlighted the restrictive nature of professional and/or elite sport and the difficulties accessing such environments for the purposes of research (e.g. Purdy & Jones, 2013; Roderick, 2006a). Therefore, in this project, recruitment was undertaken via a gatekeeper who approached potential participants during their clubs' off-seasons. Part of a wider study which focused on the career experiences of professional basketball coaches and players in Europe, the data for this paper was generated from interviews with seven male professional basketball players (referred to as Jon, George, David, Luke, Martin, Max and James) from Eastern Europe who were between the ages of 24 and 38. As part of the general transnational mobilities in elite basketball, players worked in a variety of countries across Europe. In keeping with agreed ethical guidelines, specific aspects of their identity (e.g., the country of association) have been anonymised. However, for the purpose of this paper, their particular nationality and/or home nation is not relevant. Rather, our interest is in the actual employment context in which these participants work (which, in itself, transcends national boundaries and localised geographical identities). Noteworthy, however, all players were participating in European basketball leagues, including Euroleague. Combined, the players had experience in 36 clubs throughout their professional careers and had represented their respective nations' basketball teams in Olympic, World Championships/Cup and/or EuroBasket competitions. As such, it could be argued that the players interviewed had capital (i.e. physical, social, symbolic, and cultural) (Bourdieu, 1986) which granted them greater

agency in the context. In highlight issues of identity crisis, agency and employment resilience, these players provide a useful glimpse into some of the salient working conditions and forces impacting upon this corner of the sport industry. Given the study's relatively small scope, and or paradigmatic underpinnings that only ever enable us to partially describe the world under study, what is presented is not a universal truth but interpretations; a particular view (Ely et al., 1997).

Methodology

To explain and analyse the career experiences of some male professional basketball players in Europe, an intrinsic case study was utilised. Varying in type and content, case studies are essentially complex entities influenced by a number of contexts (e.g. physical, economic, ethical, aesthetic, etc.) that aim to enable readers to vicariously experience the lives of others and draw comparisons with familiar situations and contexts (Stake, 1995). For example, readers may better understand professional sport as a career context which parallels other occupational spaces. While there are ongoing debates regarding whether a case study is methodology and/or method (Miles, 2015; Thomas, 2010), in this research case study is understood as a 'particularistic, descriptive and heuristic' (Merriam, 2009, p. 46) methodology.

Interviews

Informed by an interpretive paradigm, participation in this case study (Stake, 1995) consisted of participating in a one-to-one interview with the lead author. Interviews were held during the leagues' off-season which had implications on the number of participants who were available for interviews. Given the diversity of languages and cultural idioms

and intricacies within and across the European continent and even within the research context, participation was restricted to players who were comfortable being interviewed in the English language. This decision to work within English was largely pragmatic, as many players in Europe were familiar (to varying degrees) with it. The interviews were semi-structured and ranged in duration from 45 to 120 minutes. To aid in the development of rapport, and assist in the progression of the content and discussion, the basic chronological career information provided on players' respective Wikipedia pages was used to guide the discussion. The interviews focused on career experiences; centring on the meaning, understanding and emotional nature of these experiences as constructed by the participant. The interviewer was not an 'insider' in the sport of basketball, so participants were required to explain their experiences in detail and elaborate on areas that may be 'taken for granted' by those more familiar with the sport. The interviews were recorded via Dictaphone and later transcribed verbatim. Each participant was provided with copies of his transcript to censor and/or confirm accuracy (Emerson, 2001; Stake, 1995). It should be noted that this approach could not account for potential misunderstandings of meaning that could have resulted due to the cross-cultural nature of the study.

Analysis

Data analysis involved systematic and rigorous interrogation of the interview transcripts to identify primary themes and issues consistent with the study's aims (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Data were analysed thematically. Initially, transcripts were coded in light of meaningful words, phrases and common features relating to the research topic

(Tesch, 1990). Examples included: relationship with the coach, dropping into a lower league, identifying an agent, injury. These 'meaning units' were further organised into 'core' categories which described the key concepts learning to be a professional basketball player, negotiating/securing a position, expectations of the coach, sources of support, and breaches of contract. As the wider project also involved coaches, including some who were working with the player participants, which identified complementary data, added strength to the coding of the data. Finally, following critical discussions with co-authors, these categories were grouped into wider themes which form the Results and Discussion. These include: setting up 'the play', the disruption, coping with change, and reactions to a changing climate.

Results and Discussion

Key findings of the data (discussed further below) reveal several issues with regards to sports worker's capacities for adaptation, abilities to negotiate employment changes and reorientate/reconstitute their professional identities and personal values and behaviours. Firstly, players acknowledged how the role and position of the coach was central in the conceptualisation and valuing of their workplace. Thus, any disruption to the coach had a discernible and immediate impact on the players and their appreciation of the working conditions. Relatedly, players recognised that developing knowledge of the complexities of the hierarchical nature of the workplace was fundamental in enabling the consolidation and progression of their career identities and success, or otherwise, in adapting to change or developing professional resilience. Recalling the work of Savickas (2002; 2005; 2013) and colleagues, the results also evidence particular worker's abilities to respond strategically to labour forces, foresee opportunities and possibilities, adjust values and expectations and navigate their professional lives accordingly. Echoing broader research

on the precarity of work (e.g. Kalleberg, 2009; Kirk & Wall, 2010), a primary concern emanating from the data below was the extent to which concerns over job security have invariably consequences that extend beyond the performative and into player's general emotional and physical well-being.

Setting up 'the play'

The players identified that an appreciation and acceptance of the coach's position was paramount in valuing and understanding their working context. George noted, '[The] coach makes the decisions…We are like chess pieces and he's the chess player. We have to do what he wants us to do.' This sentiment was echoed by John who stated: 'He's the coach. He is the boss.' Based on their previous experience or observations of others who disagreed with the coaches' approach, the players were aware that overtly challenging this authority would likely result in sanctions, 'You don't have a choice. If you do not do what the coach wants, you will not play' (John). These data suggest that an appreciation of the organisational structure to which they have been assimilated, and adhering to the hierarchal nature of the positions of coach and player, contributed to the players' understanding of the context in which they were operating, and consequently, aided in the development of their career identities. Here, players acknowledged the consequence of the coaches' position and power as an immediate threat to their daily working practices. These findings are consistent with work by Purdy, Jones & Cassidy (2009), Purdy & Jones (2011) who identified that within elite sporting contexts, workers acknowledge the hierarchical aspects of their employment settings, but are cogniscent that their challenges to the existing power structures can have detrimental consequences on their labour and thus necessitate negotiation. The coaches' decisions here are significant in that they

present a challenge to the established relationships, roles and work, and invariably, have the capacity to precipitate uncertainty vis-a-vis the player's career identity.

Beyond the position of the coach, players identified several coaches throughout their professional careers who they considered to be friends and parental figures. These coaches were highlighted as the players believed they were genuinely concerned about their development. As such, it appears that the magnitude of the player's reaction to the coach's mid-season contract termination is linked to their connection to the coach (for further discussion see Jowett 2005; Jowett & Pocwardowski, 2007; Yang & Jowett, 2017). This connection offers an important point of reference for the player in terms of their position within the organisation and their potential future. Here, the coach's mid-season termination may expose a vulnerability in the player's professional identity, resulting in a questioning of the viability of their relationship within the organisation to which they are a part.

The disruption

Although the intensity of the mid-season contract termination of a coach is contingent upon the player's relationship with the coach and/or their contribution to the team's results, the termination of the coach marks a disruption to the routine nature of the work environment. As George commented,

> It's a very strange feeling, when coach gets fired in the middle of the season…you don't know who's going to be the next coach, you don't know what this means, like playing a game, or in general what it's going to be like. There's a sense of emptiness.

The mid-season termination of the coach identified here changed the predictability and stability which resulted in feelings of uncertainty in how to act and how to be. The

player's reaction to the loss of the coach could also be related to an increased anxiety which stems from a change in normative social behaviour and a reduced sense of personal agency (Giddens, 1991). Consequently, the player's career identity comes into question not only in terms of 'how' to be a basketball player, but also in relation to his professional identity; in particular, how one interacts as a sports worker in relation to his colleagues. This draws attention to the possible implications to his career trajectory. Depending on the player's satisfaction with the team's performance or position within the team, the change could be viewed as a new opportunity. 'I didn't play much, so for me, the change in coach was a new chance' (John). In contrast, if things were going well (in the players' eyes this related to winning and increasing the number of minutes played per game), a change in coach could be viewed as threatening. Here, a new coach could disrupt the player's preferred conditions if they did not 'fit' the new coach's performative plans or vision and expectations for the culture of the team. One player recalled:

> He put me on the bench. I didn't play all season. So for me this was a shock and I ask him, [he'd say] 'you're going to play, you're going to play', but I didn't play all season… I would go two hours before the game and practice … and after I'd sit…. I would drink water and watch the game… I was feeling no good. In my career I'd changed a lot of coaches, played well, everybody respected me, I had everything. And after he benched me, he might give me five minutes to play, but if you want to improve something, this is killing you. So in five minutes if you miss one shot, two shots… I make one mistake, he sends me off and I never go back again…

As the player noted, his performance background (i.e. statistics) and the acclimations he had received from colleagues, fans and media contributed to his feelings of prowess in his sport, and provided affirmation of his professional identity. However, these feelings

were being challenged by the new coach who, he perceived, was not giving him the chance to play at the level to which he was accustomed. As Daniel commented, a change in coach challenged his understanding of his 'value'. Here, the onset of the new coach required the player to recalibrate the relationship against new criteria, assumptions, values and expectations. Such a process, as evidenced above, unsettled the player's understanding of his role and contribution as part/member of the organisation and reverberate further uncertainties about his career progression and employment possibilities.

In addition to the possibility of being 'benched', the change in coach and approach to the game could result in a contract termination. 'The new coach came in and he didn't want me. He wanted to bring in his own players….' (Luke). In this situation, Luke was released from his contract. Indeed, the loss of one's livelihood via a contract termination or a significant change to one's role (i.e. being benched) could be viewed as 'biographical disruptions' (Bury, 1982) which impacted impact upon a player's ability to 'keep a particular narrative going' (Giddens, 1991, p. 54). While the player's career has not ended per se, the disruption raises direct questions about his career identity (in terms of the reality of securing new contractual opportunities), his professional identity (in the sense of his playing potential) and his ability to adjust.

Coping with change

You go from one coach, you're used to his system, and you like him, and then boom, he gets cut, and somebody completely different comes in, and then it's like you have to prove everything all over again, you have to adjust to a new system, and then figure out if he likes you or doesn't like you. You know, it's very, very difficult (Daniel).

As evidenced in the player's comment, the introduction of the new coach challenges the norms or routines that the players had developed as well as elevates concerns about their immediate position on the team and potentially longer term job security. To cope with this unease, the players sought opportunities to demonstrate competencies by 'proving themselves' and their capabilities. In doing so, the players were searching for affirmation, with the coach viewing them positively as contributing to their self-esteem (Ibarra, 1999; 2003; Khapova et al., 2007). This self-esteem was important in sustaining their career identity or understanding of what it meant to be a professional basketball player and how one conveys oneself in that context. In addition, the approval of the coach regarding the player's capabilities has a positive influence on their professional identity (Stryker & Serpe, 1994).

> You are thinking about the best thing, you know? If I'm going to play the same… and what he's going to want from me –If he's going to talk to me, things like that… Every time a new coach comes into the team, I show him that I can play and how I can be - I always want to be a big part of the team… but there's always a kind of worry if I'm going to fit (George).

In addition to 'proving' his capabilities and demonstrating a commitment to the team, the player was trying to showcase his value, desire and ability to contribute to the coach's vision. By presenting himself as a competent and hardworking professional (Kelchetermans & Ballet, 2002, p. 105), he was attempting to safeguard his working conditions, which the new coach was threatening (Kelchtermans, 1996). Here, the player's increased effort in training could be viewed as a strategy to maintain or increase his playing minutes. However, accompanying the increased training intensity was a concern that he would not fit the new coach's vision for the team. The players noted that if they did not make a positive impression, their playing time could be reduced or their

contract terminated. As such, the process of introducing a new coach ignited questions relating to the player's sense of self in his working environment. In other words, coach change precipitates worry (e.g. 'does this coach think I'm not good enough?') that unsettles their relationships and sense of self within their immediate employment setting.

Although the players were concerned with their own positions within the new structure, and were in direct competition amongst team members for playing minutes on the court, in the locker room (or 'off court' context), there was an indication of solidarity. The change in coach often afforded the players a shared experience from which the group could become more cohesive ('everybody was together in these moments' (John); '[teammates] helped me to be focused when it's very hard time to be focused' (George). Players' fraternity here, and the emotional resilience developed as a consequence, evidently acted to buffer the perceived detrimental uncertainties to their employment.

Some of the players had been part of teams that had changed up to four coaches during a season. In light of this experience, they reflected that the ability to quickly adjust to the changing circumstances was key. As Martin stated:

It always takes time…They change tactics, they change the offences sometimes, there are other differences so you need to adjust. Sometimes it might be easier, because maybe it's better for you than the previous coach. But sometimes it is the opposite, so it could be tougher. It depends on the player, it depends on how you react to that, and not everybody can adjust so fast.

The player's sentiments expressed here draw attention to notions of resilience. In this case, resilience is understood as 'the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances' (Masten, Best & Gamezy, 1990, p. 425). The role of resilience is important as it provides a mechanism by which the players can better navigate the uncertainties of their employment and also fortify and

improve their ability to cope and adapt to potentially persistent(ly) changing workplace demands (Woods & Carlyle, 2002). Not unlike the player's responses to the initial disruptions, resilience helps to mitigate the effect of future changes to the working context. Essentially, if the presumption is that the coach may move, the player may feel he has the capacity to manage the consequences and affects more effectively. For the player, resilience has become entrenched within the ongoing performative processes (i.e. how he performs his identities) and management of his professional identity. The intertwining of resilience and adaptability become particularly pronounced when considered in relation to whether or not the player has the capacity to withstand the inherent volatilities (Kirk & Wall, 2010; Woods & Jeffrey, 2002) that are entrenched within high performance sport. As the player identifies, and congruent with the observations of Hamtiaux et al. (2013) regarding career adaptability in other contexts, some adapt faster and/or become more resilient than their peers. Such variance is expected between players, yet, with regards to coach change, this variability may raise questions for some individuals who are unable to adapt and show resilience at pace; part of which may entail adjusting their coach and positional relationships within the team/organisation. These experiences rehearse Savickas' (2002; 2005; 2013) arguments regarding the strategic construction of careers over the course of workers' lives, and, the ability of workers to adapt and negotiate their personal values, professional ideals and workplace change during their careers. Echoing the work of MacLure (1993), identity is not something that people have, but that individuals enact, perform and argue in relation to others in contexts they reside.

Irrespective of the players' abilities to adjust to change and demonstrate resilience, the potential for future change or turbulence remains a possibility. As such, in identity work which involves affirming the sense of self and abilities as a professional basketball

player, there must be a degree of fluidity. However, the frequent changeover of coaches within some teams initiates a concern that the coach will change again. As such, the players know that 'chaos lurks' behind the comfortable routines of daily life (Giddens, 1991). 'It's kind of tough, because you don't feel secure.… So you're always kind of, 'What's happened?' We lost. After one more loss, 'are they going to do something?' So you always have that in your mind….' (George).

Reactions to change

The demands placed upon the basketball players to adjust to coach change invariably take a physical and emotional toll that not only affects performance but also generates wider angst with regards to identity and job security. As the data below attests, coach change, or the anxieties created around coach change more specifically, add to what is already a turbulent and unpredictable working environment. As Roderick (2006b) reminds us, sports workers ply their trade against a backdrop of uncertainty and rejection. Coach change, thus, plays into (and further consolidates) the fears and insecurities that are already entrenched within the players' professional/career identities. Questions emerge regarding the consequences of these emotions on the quality of the players' work. As George noted, 'I felt exhausted emotionally. I didn't care about anything.' This was echoed by Martin who, when reflecting upon the changes in leadership throughout a season, commented,

> After this season… I was bad. Like we finished the season and I was sitting at home and I didn't know what to do. My body was dead, my mind was dead. I didn't want to do anything; just lay in my bed…One month later, I started moving a little bit, so my body was okay, but my mind was not ready, it still is not ready.

It is evident here that such turbulence has visceral/physical, social and psychological effects and, moreover, that these effects precipitate concerns with regards to their immediate work abilities and long(er) term professional/career identities. In essence, when faced with frequent coach change-related uncertainty, professional athletes may find themselves at a point of existential angst in understanding their own self and place both within and beyond their immediate working context. As such, it is unsurprising that players recognised that the frequent changes in coaches during a season would have an impact on a club's ability to recruit and/or maintain players. As John commented, 'I didn't want to stay [with that team] at all.' Similarly, David described a recent season which involved four changes of coaches:

> It's kind of like you're have tunnel vision. So there's one coach, there's another one, there's another one. You just try to adjust, you try to cope, but then at the end of the season you just sit down and say, 'Whoa! What did I just go through?' It's like, 'Oh my God, I'll never do this again'.

As irritating as the experiences evidently are for some individuals such events do not necessarily prevent some athletes from adapting effectively in new employment environments. The professional basketball players, who had the capital and willingness to do, commented on the change when moving from an instable team to one with a more 'stable' reputation:

> [In my new team] I was smiling every single day because I was playing.... The club was so professional, the city was unbelievable … the guys were friendly, the weather was really hot, the fans loved me. What's not to like?... Finally I'm in a normal spot where I don't have to worry about anything else. I can just focus on playing basketball (David).

However, relocation is not always possible. Some players do not have the means and opportunity to change their working circumstances so there are limited options but to remain in the team and submit or resign themselves to the difficulties of their present situations (either by passive acceptance, compliance, and/or measured resistance). Yet, the negative impact of such changes on players and their performances has seemed to evade the interests of some sports organisations. There is a need then to address the organisation's disregard toward the complexities that such change entails and the related implications that derive from their treatment of coaches as replaceable.

Conclusion

The lives of this cohort of professional basketball players are inseparable from their employment as sports workers plying their trade in teams across Europe. Their capabilities to operate successfully as sports workers (deemed largely by meeting both the organisation's contractual demands and the coach's performance imperatives) is contingent on their ability to manage, mitigate and negotiate their identities and respond to the performance orientated objectives of high performance sport. Although this study has focused on a small participant cohort, these data suggest that challenges and changes that occur in the coach-athlete relationship can have profound consequences for the players in terms of their career and professional identities, daily life and general employment experiences.

Coach change is an example of a structural and social force that can greatly affect an individual's career trajectory, employment security, emotional stability and sense of identity (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Wilson & Holligan, 2013; Zembylas, 2003). With respect to the professional basketball players interviewed in this project, coach change generates personal uncertainty about the day-to-day job and impacts upon individual's feelings about their career development and professional prospects. Yet, important in

terms of building career and professional identities are the ways the individual responds to these structural and social shifts and essentially stabilises their work environment and secure their career pathways through managing relationships, adaptation and developing resilience (Khapova et al., 2007). Such findings are in accord with Savickas and Porfeli's (2012) arguments regarding defining and conceptualising individual's adaptability in the workplace; particularly with respect to their concern for the future, increased autonomy over their career trajectories, reflection on their professional identity, and confidence in seeking work-related goals.

The notions of career and professional identities afforded a framework within which to articulate players' lives and the impact of significant others within their sport. This emphasis on identities, within a sociological examination of work, employment, and careers, we respect, only provides partial means of analysing the complexities of these sports workers' lives and experiences. Nonetheless, the sociological considerations of the interplay between career and professional identities amid coach change articulated with respect to a unique European context have been useful in highlighting the vulnerable and insecure nature of players' work in adverse times. The players' stories reveal that while there is an accepted or assumed degree of uncertainty, stress, inconvenience, trepidation and personal discomfort of being a professional sport worker, their abilities to effectively negotiate this terrain within their daily/working/personal lives can be further exacerbated by coach change. Reiterating Balduck, Prinzie and Buelens (2010), and Raedeke, Warren and Granzyk's (2002) assertions about the profound, yet variable, effects of coach change, there were significant consequences for the players in this regard. Amongst the expectations and obligations to 'get on with it' and do their work, coach turnover added weight to players' feelings vulnerability and uncertainty; which, invariably, had implications for their physical, social, emotional and psychological well-being.

Notwithstanding the immediate effects on workers' labour and identity, there were implications for players' long-term career plans with the team and club, and their professional outlook regarding their longevity in the sport. While a career as an athlete in this professional sport and at this level afforded some players significant opportunities, the instability in the industry writ large, personified in this case by seen or unforeseen coach change and employment conundrums, resonated deeply with the players and crystalised a sense of insecurity about themselves and their professional lives. Given the uncertainties and insecurities of the context of their labour, and in the interests of self-preservation and career protection, it makes sense that the participants develop(ed) strategies that enabled them to mitigate, or at least negotiate, not only coach-change, but also any other perturbations to their career stability with which they were confronted.

Although the data indicated that some athletes are better able to adjust to coach-change, this requires considerable energy. It appears that such change disturbs or impedes the fundamental basis of their career and professional identities that lay at the core of their being and belonging in high performance sport. Such experiences, invariably, may resonate with the work experiences, professional identity construction and employment turmoil of those in other vocational settings. While this research has focused on one part of the coach change, nonetheless, lessons about career change, adaptability and development can still be learned and better understood; for example, with respect to player turnover, work performances and career negotiation. Sports workers, and employees in other settings for whom these issues resonate, may be encouraged by this research to consider both the physical, emotional and professional consequences and toll that their actions may have on themselves, their colleagues and general working conditions and relationships. Future work could focus on the rationales for such change

and the organisation's strategies (if any) for dealing with the emotional cost and wider consequences to their employees.

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