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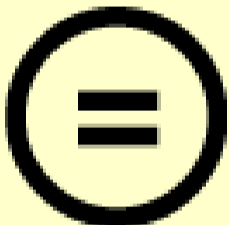
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**JUNIOR TO SENIOR TRANSITION**

**UNDERSTANDING AND FACILITATING**

**THE PROCESS**

**BY**

**ELIZABETH K.L. PUMMELL**

**A DOCTORAL THESIS**

**SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS**

**FOR THE AWARD OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY OF**

**LOUGHBOROUGH UNIVERSITY**

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to produce a substantive grounded theory of junior-to-senior transition and as a result of this work, to provide knowledge and guidance for coaches, sport psychologists and other personnel supporting young aspirant athletes. Underpinned by a social constructionist philosophy, the research programme was designed to capture and interpret the social world of the participants and to interpret the perceptions derived from their own lived experience of the transition.

The thesis consists of three studies which, in a concatenated programme of research, are predicated one upon another. In order that understanding in social research can be advanced, the development of theory requires several rounds of fieldwork, analysis and publication (Stebbins, 1992, 2006). Thus the building of theory took place over the initial two studies, the first of which involved the in-depth interviewing of nine participants from individual sports ( $M$  age = 24.5 years,  $S.D.$  = 4.3 years). As a consequence of this exercise, rich data were collected, depicting the participants' experiences of the junior-senior transition. Grounded in these data, a preliminary model of junior-to-senior transition was constructed using Strauss and Corbin's (1998) guidelines for grounded theory analysis. More specifically, the resultant model revealed a cyclical process: of learning, identity development and progress at transition. Inception of the process is characterised by immersion in the post-transition environment during the pre-transition phase, in which significant observational learning occurs via the use of more senior role models. This process leads to the identification of discrepancies between the actual (or junior) and ideal (or senior) self. This promotes a period of adjustment in which the behaviours relevant to senior status are incorporated within the self, bringing about a sense of readiness, or ability to cope with the transition. In essence, the athletes had sought to structure their pre-transition environment to represent that which they would encounter post-transition, thereby generating stability for their self-identity. The modification of identity, through the adjustment of behaviours and roles, predicted a competitive breakthrough, at which point the athletes began to think about the subsequent step at senior level, and hence the cycle of immersion, learning and adjustment continued.

The second study, designed with the limitations of the first in mind, constituted a longitudinal case study of transition, which follows one of the participants from Study One for eighteen months, as he climbed the world tennis rankings from 386 to 224. The aim of this study was to obtain a detailed insight of the transition process as it happened, over time, and to elucidate the role of the coach during the process of junior-senior transition. As such, this investigation also involved the interviewing of the athlete's coach and sport psychologist.

Prior to the analysis of these data, using the categories from Study One, a panel of independent researchers was recruited in order to provide an additional perspective on the model of junior-senior transition which emerged from the first study. Through a process of pattern matching (Bitektine, 2008; Hyde, 2000), the review panel contributed their opinion upon the correspondence between the propositions made by the Model of Junior-to-Senior Transition and the data collected in Study Two. This procedure sought to provide an assessment of the ability of the model to explain athlete experience at the junior-to-senior transition. In confirming general support for the model, the pattern matching panel also offered their recommendations upon the ways in which this could be enhanced.

When considered together, these two interlinked studies represent the interplay between deductive and inductive methods in the building of a grounded theory of transition. The results of the second study highlight the pivotal role of social factors in the development of identity and self-concept, which assume particular significance at transition due to the implicit change in the athlete's frame of reference, producing something akin to the Big Fish Little Pond Effect (Marsh, 1984).

Consistent with existing athlete development literature (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004), the support of the coach was fundamental at this stage of the athlete's career, with a quality coach-athlete relationship being one of the key determinants of success, through the

sustaining of stability, fulfillment of the athlete's psychological needs and the fostering of identity change during this period.

The final study of the thesis represents an enhancement intervention based on the Model of Junior-to-Senior Transition and the life-development framework (Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1993). Delivered to, and evaluated by seven junior tennis players ( $M$  age= 15.38 years,  $S.D.$ =1.37), this programme aimed to equip the participants with comprehensive knowledge about the forthcoming transition such that they would develop a sense of readiness and self-efficacy for the transition, which would promote a sense of equilibrium. The results revealed an increase in readiness, self-efficacy and knowledge and suggest that transition preparation programmes can be of value, not just in promoting adjustment pre-transition which generates stability in pre-and post-transition environments, but also in encouraging young athletes to consider their career path at a sufficiently early stage, before making a premature commitment to an athletic identity which has the potential to cause difficulties in the longer term (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Petitpas, 2000).

The implications of this research programme are evaluated in the light of the extant life transition, athlete development, identity, and self-concept literature. Having regard to the findings and conclusions, a range of recommendations relevant to coaches, sport psychologists and governing bodies is made, in order that the content and the delivery of the support provided to athletes preparing for the junior-to-senior transition may be optimised.

**Keywords:** Career transition, junior-to-senior transition, athlete development, athletic identity, self-concept, social comparison.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Literature addressing athletic-career development has increased in volume over the past two decades, reflecting a growing recognition of the importance of the talent development process in sport and also a sharpening in focus amongst practitioners. Psychologists acknowledge that certain factors of a psychological, social and academic nature have an important inter-relationship with development at the athletic level (e.g., Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). This awareness is increasingly extending to the community of professionals charged with nurturing young athletes.

Despite this encouraging tendency, the demands placed upon aspiring athletes trying to make their way in an increasingly complex and challenging world, are also mounting. In addition to the pressure to sustain and improve sporting performance, they face expectations to achieve academically, to cope with the everyday pressure confronting adolescents/young adults and to support themselves financially.

An athlete's career can be seen as consisting of a series of specific events. For example, exit from sport is a clearly identifiable transition (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004), and worthy of the significant research attention it has received over time. However, other career moments are also important, such as the transition from club to county level and junior to senior status. In practice, talent is often lost, especially at the transition to senior competition (Salmela, Young, & Kallio, 2000; Wylleman, De Knop, Ewing, & Cumming, 2000), and comparatively little research has been conducted into the dynamics of within-career transitions (Wylleman, Lavallee, & Alfermann, 1999).

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Models of transition borrowed from mainstream psychology have been applied to the transition out of sport. Indeed the Model for Analyzing Human Adaptation to Transition (Schlossberg, 1981, Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995; Schlossberg, 2003) aims to provide an understanding of the person's individual response to a transition and has been used within sport to analyse retirement experiences (e.g., Wheeler, Malone, VanVlack, Nelson, & Steadward, 1996).

Given the available literature, the many challenges confronting athletes as their careers unfold, of which increasingly we are cognisant, and the desire across sport to encourage prospective athletes to exploit their potential, the value of enhanced understanding in this area should prove considerable. Resultant programmes, designed around those factors deduced to be supportive of successful transition, should be of value to national governing bodies, the participants who aspire to improve their performance and those supporting them, and may help to minimise the talent loss which occurs before that potential is realised. Programmes designed to facilitate athletes' transition out of international sport have proven successful e.g., the Australian National Athlete Career and Education programme (ACE; as described by Anderson & Morris, 2000), which promotes the acquisition of life skills throughout the athlete's career, in order that they are less role-restricted upon their eventual exit from sport and therefore experience a less distressing transition out of sport. This example offers a template for more general applications of this kind.

The following review constitutes an analysis of the existing athletic career transition literature. Initially, models of transition will be discussed, followed by an overview of the documented transition research within sport, which highlights the factors that have been found to be supportive of adjustment to athletic career transition. Research derived from developmental psychology will also be reviewed, providing some insight of the difficulties an athlete may face, both within and without the athletic domain. Models of athlete development will also be explored, surfacing factors significant in this context. Overall, the implications of the presently available relevant literature will be explored,

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highlighting the gaps in coverage, thereby defining the knowledge gap and explaining the rationale for this programme of research.

## **1.2 Transition**

### **1.2.1 Theories of Transition**

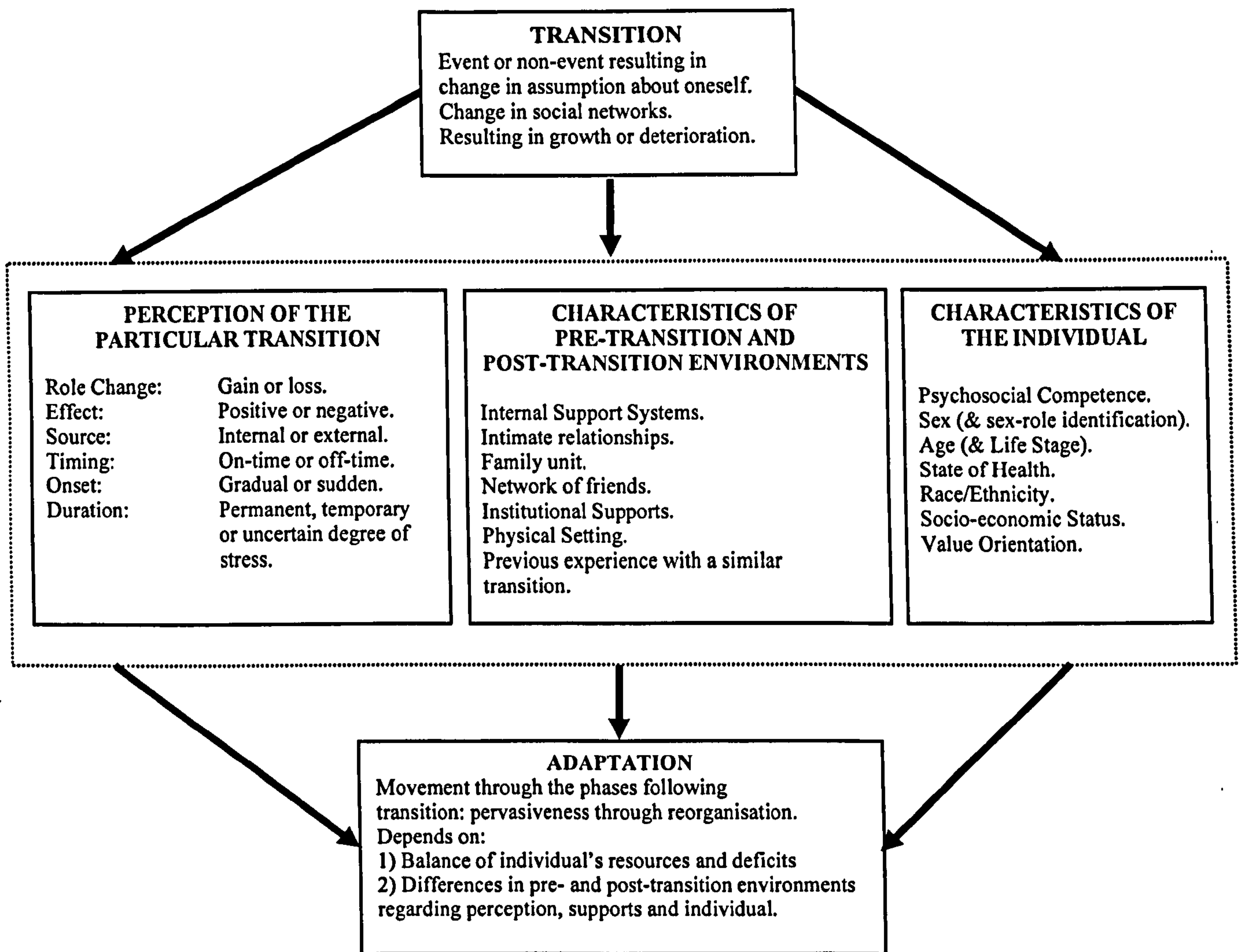
Sharf (1997) defines transition as an event that causes change which exceeds the typical changes one experiences in everyday life. It is inevitable that all individuals will experience many profound changes, or 'transitions' during their lifetimes and, according to Schlossberg (1981), each of these is likely to cause "a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and require(s) a corresponding change in one's behaviour and relationships" (p. 5). For example, the transition from adolescence to young adulthood involves the development of, or replacement of, roles and is likely to be accompanied by a re-evaluation of beliefs, which may lead to the adjustment or abandonment of such beliefs (Shulman & Ben-Artzi, 2003).

Initially, the study of transition in sport was based upon models borrowed from outside of sport psychology, such as social gerontology and thanatology, and the underlying concepts have been adapted to understand and explain the experience of athletes navigating retirement from sport. The relevance of social gerontology (i.e., the study of ageing) was adopted since it was assumed that athletic retirement and occupational retirement were similar experiences, with the implicit assumption that, typically, athletes retire from sport due to their chronological age. However, whilst some athletes may indeed retire for this reason and there may be other similarities between occupational and athletic retirement, (such as the significance of identity change), an athlete may retire prematurely for other, unique reasons such as injury, loss of competitive edge or lack of motivation (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985). Of course early retirement may be a feature of a career in any profession, but this is perhaps most likely to occur due to generally debilitating ill health. Life changing events of this kind certainly create distinctive challenges in any walk of life, but perhaps not quite those confronting the otherwise physically and mentally robust athlete, who is facing career termination whilst relatively young.

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The study of death and dying (thanatology) was also deemed appropriate for application to athletic retirement since, by analogy, the exit from sport may be deemed a form of 'social death' where the athlete experiences trauma due to a sense of isolation, of segregation from their former life and identity (Sinclair & Orlick, 1994). In practice, evidence suggests that some athletes do indeed endure trauma at retirement, whilst others will experience a relatively stress-free transition out of sport (e.g., Blinde and Greendorfer, 1985). Additionally, adaptation to retirement is dependent on various athletic and non-athletic factors (Cecić Erpič, Wylleman, & Zupančič, 2004) not explained by the theory. Therefore, although models of social gerontology and thanatology have provided a foundation for athletic retirement research, the unique characteristics of the athletic retirement experience suggest that these theories are insufficient to explain its complexities.

Unlike social gerontology and thanatology, the Model for Analyzing Human Adaptation to Transition originally proposed by Schlossberg (1981; and later developed by Schlossberg, et al., 1995; Schlossberg, 2003), encompasses a wide range of factors which influence adaptation to transition. Schlossberg and colleagues did not design the model for the athletic context; it was developed in an effort to explain inter- and intra-individual differences in the experience of transitions in everyday life. The model focuses on the evolution in assumptions about oneself and the environment that occur as a result of any transitional event requiring adaptation in relationships and behaviour (Schlossberg, 1981). The authors acknowledge how the characteristics of a particular transition interact to provide a unique experience for each individual, reflecting also the nature of the transition, its context and the subject's own perception of meaning and of the journey the process represents. In identifying and accommodating the many variables which may affect the outcome of a transition, including those articulated above, Schlossberg's model provides a valuable starting point from which to investigate adaptation to transition. The model is illustrated in Figure 1.1.



**Figure: 1.1: A Model for Analyzing Human Adaptation to Transition (adapted from Schlossberg, 1981).**

According to Schlossberg and colleagues (1995), how a transition ‘fits’ with an individual’s situation is pivotal and therefore the characteristics of the individual, of their environment and their perception of the transition experience will, in effect, determine their coping ability. As a result, the experience is unlikely to be replicated, even when an individual subsequently undertakes a similar transition. Inter-individual differences between those experiencing the same transition might therefore be expected to be even more emphatic.

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Schlossberg's model attempts to address this complexity by postulating three deterministic variables whose interaction influences adaptation to a transition as follows: a) the perception of the transition, b) the characteristics of the pre- and post-transition environments and c) the characteristics of the individual experiencing the transition. Adaptation is defined as moving to a state where changes are integrated into a new stable life-structure. The required changes in behaviour, relationships and overall life-structure are likely to lead to some degree of stress as adaptation takes place (Schlossberg, 1981). The three interacting components proposed by Schlossberg and colleagues will now be considered, with reference made to their application in the athletic domain.

#### *Factors Affecting Adaptation: Perception of the Transition*

According to Schlossberg, transitions may be defined by a common set of variables. These include role change, affect, source, timing, duration and degree of stress. Some of these variables are relevant to athletic transition in general, for example, the source and timing of the transition (whether the change was anticipated i.e., a planned and on-time progression within the athlete's control, or unplanned such as through surprise de-selection). Timing and the source of the transition was important in the adjustment of ten retired athletes described in a study by Swain (1991), which evaluated the applicability of the Schlossberg model to sport termination. This revealed that a change with an external cause may result in a low perception of control over the subject's life and thus provoke a higher degree of stress, making adaptation more difficult. In contrast, a planned transition, or one over which the athlete feels they have control will allow for pre-transition planning and preparation which may assist the transition process (Crook & Robertson, 1991; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). Equally, Swain (1991) found that a change in athletes' values relating to sport (leading them to grow tired of sport or to develop other interests) provided an internal motivation for retiring and this facilitated the transition process. Similarly, where athletes feel a degree of readiness for their retirement (and therefore control), transition is perceived as easier to cope with (Wheeler et al., 1996). Thus, athletes who perceive their transition to be an on-time, age-related and expected event report higher levels of life satisfaction than those who retire as a consequence of unplanned events such as de-selection (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). It is

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reasonable to infer a similar pattern in regard to athletes making a within-career transition, such as to higher level of competition.

*Factors Affecting Adaptation: Characteristics of the Pre- and Post-transition Environments*

Schlossberg describes the setting within which transitions generally occur as comprising the physical environment, institutional support and interpersonal support systems. The existing literature suggests that these factors may also have relevance for athletic transitions. For example Rees and Hardy identify social or interpersonal support throughout the athletic career as being conducive to success (Rees & Hardy, 2000), echoing Schlossberg's conclusions concerning successful adaptation to life-transition (Schlossberg, 1981). Institutional support, in a sporting context from the governing body and sport community, is also deemed important for athletic development, through provision of a positive culture, elite models, the fostering of physical and mental skills and a positive attitude (Gould, Dieffenbach, & Moffett, 2002). The physical infrastructure must also be conducive, and not only in terms of the physical climate as discussed by Schlossberg. Research suggests that location can influence the development of talent as it determines access to facilities, and the availability of a coach (Carlson, 1988).

*Factors Affecting Adaptation: Characteristics of the Individual*

Schlossberg suggests that the characteristics of the individual are also important for adaptation, and she highlights factors such as an internal locus of control, an active coping orientation, realistic goal setting, commitment to goals and the ability to enjoy success and suffer failure as important for adaptation. These factors are likely to be important for athletes, as detailed in the literature regarding mental toughness in sport (e.g., Jones, Hanton, & Connaughton, 2002). At transition, the athlete is likely to be faced with a variety of challenges which Schlossberg would suggest require adaptation, including the experience of setbacks and failure and thus these skills may be useful when progressing to a new level.

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### *Adaptation to Transition*

The outcome of a transition potentially can be positive or negative (Schlossberg, 1981). In a review of the research and theory related to sport transition, Sinclair and Orlick (1994) suggest that “every career transition has the potential to be a crisis, a relief, or a combination of both, depending on the individual’s perception of the situation” (p. 33). The subjective perception of a transition (its characteristics and impact) is therefore of primary importance, reflecting the individual’s view of the transition and the influences (which includes their assets and liabilities), which shape this perception and drive behaviour.

Schlossberg and colleagues contend that the variables illustrated within the three categories in Figure 1.1, may act as ‘assets’ or ‘liabilities’ during adaptation to transition, either aiding or impeding adjustment, with the ratio of assets to liabilities determining ease of adaptation. However, the impact of the balance is likely to be modulated by the individual’s perception of the value or consequence of any asset or liability. Schlossberg et al. (1995) expanded their Model for Analyzing Human Adaptation to Transition into a transition framework, which explicated inter- and intra-individual differences in adaptation to transition. They identified four major factors, the perception of which influence an individual’s ability to cope with a transition and from which resources can be drawn. These are defined as follows:

- a) **The situation**, which encompasses feelings of control over the transition and the suddenness of its onset, the desirability and duration of the role change, other concurrent stressors and previous experience with similar transitions. Positive perceptions and attributions related to the transition are likely to facilitate the adaptation process more than negative perceptions and attributions. In sport, Swain (1991) found that previous experience with similar transitions was significant in facilitating transition amongst retiring athletes, who had often experienced sudden life changes throughout their careers.
- b) **The self**, defined by Schlossberg et al. as physiological and psychological characteristics that have the potential to influence the transition process and the individual’s reaction to this. Physiological factors may include physical health during



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transition, or age-related considerations (such as heightened self-consciousness in adolescence). Psychological characteristics, which include an individual's self-esteem, attribution style, self-efficacy, optimism, active coping orientation, use of goal-setting and planning, level of autonomy (especially for adolescents developing more independence), identity development and the ability to enjoy success and cope with failure are all recognised in this model, and are all likely to influence the individual's perception of the transition and their coping style.

c) **Support**, or more specifically the social support available to buffer against stress, is likely to be a primary resource for a successful adaptation. Evidence suggests that social isolation can be detrimental to athletic performance (Rees & Hardy, 2000). Family and friends are likely to be a primary source of support during transitions (e.g., Sinclair & Orlick, 1993), and that from other sources, such as the sport organisation, where utilised by the athlete, can facilitate coping (Gould et al., 2002).

d) **Strategies**: Coping strategies may be adaptive or maladaptive. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined coping as "cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person" (p. 141). Thus, Schlossberg et al. (1995) propose that, at transition, the individual may utilise any number of strategies to manage the associated demands, some of which may be adaptive and therefore act as an asset, helping them to adapt to transition, or maladaptive, and thus a deficit, or liability.

In Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) framework, an individual's 'profile' on these 'four S's', i.e., the 'assets' or 'liabilities' which they bring to the transition, is likely to predict the level of stress experienced, or the ease of adaptation. The profile of assets and liabilities helps to explain why differences in adaptation to the same transition exist, and why the same individual may react differently on different occasions. At one time, a person's resources might outweigh the liabilities, and thus adaptation is relatively easy, whereas at another the reverse might be true and adaptation will be a difficult process.

The similarity of the pre- and post- transition environments is also thought to influence adaptation to a transition. In an examination of the retirement transition in sport, Wheeler

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et al. (1996) found, using grounded theory (and based upon Schlossberg and colleagues' transition framework), that the experiences of 18 elite disabled athletes was mediated to some extent by the degree of similarity between the pre- and post-transition environments. For example; where athletes had other interests and support outside of sport, they were able to more easily adjust to the step. This may be the result of a continuity of the self over the period of transition, brought about by these other interests.

Further research findings derived from application of the model to the experience of athletes at retirement, suggest applicability to transitions within sport more generally. For example, according to Swain (1991), the model reflects the variability in the experience of transitions, identifies potentially influential factors and provides an understanding of the context of the transition, its meaning for the individual and the changes which occur. However, Swain also contends that the model would benefit from the addition of further coping resources in order fully to explain the transition out of sport. Enhancements such as education, skills, activities and other interests, plus unexpected factors such as unanticipated help and obstacles are signposted as potentially useful (Swain, 1991).

Equally, additions to or revisions of Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) transition framework would be required to adapt the model for use in within-career transition research (Pummell, Harwood, & Lavalley, 2008). In examining the transition from club to regional level in eventing, Pummell et al. found that the transition framework does correctly predict the importance of certain factors (such as social support) in a transition of this nature. However, it is neither specific enough to within-career transition, nor indeed to transitions in a sporting context generally, to explain adequately the experiences of athletes at this transition and to provide relevant guidance to practitioners supporting athletes in transition. Nonetheless, as purported by Pummell et al., Schlossberg et al.'s model does make some relevant predictions in regard to the experience of athletes; for example that the transition was experienced as a process over time rather than as an event, that subjective perceptions of the transition were important, including those of personal control over the transition process, and that such feelings were related to the degree of stress experienced. Social support, and the evolution of the roles of those

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fulfilling this function was also recognised by Pummell et al. as an important contributor to coping strategies, as would be predicted by Schlossberg et al. (1995).

Schlossberg's transition framework has been used to investigate transition issues pertaining to: education, occupational transitions, retirement, relocation and lifestyle changes (Schlossberg 1981; Schlossberg et al., 1995), in order that suitable interventions may be constructed. It has also proven a valuable resource in counselling psychology, for obtaining a more comprehensive understanding of the transition process. However, as indicated above, whilst it has prompted some useful research into transitions in sport, it has not proved specific enough to explain career transition in the athletic domain.

## **1.2.2 Beyond the Transition Framework**

### *The Process of Transition*

Although Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) transition framework predicts that the transition process is influenced by the resources available to the individual, prior to and during the transition, it does little to explicate the process itself (Swain, 1991). In an investigation of transition experiences following the individual's involvement in an elite residential programme, Burden (2002) draws on a transition model by Bridges (1980) to analyse the process of adaptation to this transition. Bridges proposed that a transition consists of three stages; an ending phase, a neutral phase and a beginning phase. The ending involves the initiation of adaptation to the transition, with a detachment from the pre-transition identity, roles and relationships thereby enabling exploration of new roles and identities. An individual entering the neutral phase will have left behind their pre-transition life, but not yet adopted their new identity and the roles which accompany their 'new' life. The neutral phase is a period of reflection, especially if the individual has experienced difficulty detaching from their old identity. This may have relevance for retiring athletes who failed to achieve their personal goals, perhaps due to a forced-retirement through injury. In such circumstances, an individual may feel 'lost' between their old and new life structures, with a resultant lack of focus. The model suggests that strategies to cope with the changes being experienced are developed as the neutral phase unwinds, and adaptation is in prospect. The adaptation to transition is finalised in the beginning phase,

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with the individual adopting those new roles, relationships and routines which contribute to the newly emergent identity. Schlossberg et al. (1995) agree that those in transition will experience detachment from their old life structure, but also contend there will be considerable variability in the transition experience of individuals (i.e., there is no 'fixed sequence' of transitional phases). This qualitative dimension is likely to be influenced by those resources, possessed internally by or accessible to the individual, which facilitate coping. In sport, this phenomenon is exhibited at the discontinuation of an athlete's career, with some athletes facing great difficulty, whilst others experience a stress free transition out of their sport (e.g., Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985).

#### *Normative and Non-Normative Transitions*

An athlete's career is likely to be populated with numerous transitions, including those specifically related to the athletic domain as well as life-development more generally. Transitions may be normative (expected transitions which are part of a defined sequence, such as the transition from recreational to competitive sport, or from primary school to secondary school), or non-normative (transitions which do not follow a predetermined sequence, and are often unexpected, such as de-selection). Events that are expected, but do not occur (non-events) also fall within the non-normative category (Stambulova, 2000).

Normative athletic transitions may be triggered by age (such as the transition from junior to senior level), the organisational structure of the sport (such as the transition to a regional level of competition), or by ability (such as transiting from national to international competition). Athletes should expect to experience a number of normative and non-normative transitions during their careers and both will represent new challenges, expectations and pressures.

#### *Normative Developmental Transitions*

Literature in developmental psychology offers insight of the developmental demands typically placed on a maturing young athlete, encompassing career transitions within competitive sport and those other, normative developmental transitions which tend to run

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concurrently. According to Wylleman & Lavallee (2004), an individual's life is marked out by stages punctuated with transitions. Transitions, both within and without sport typically involve hurdles which the athlete has not encountered before. It is also reasonable to predict that the athletic challenges which transitions represent will have a bearing upon the success of adaptation to developmental tasks. The combination of an athletic and an age-related transition may increase the level of stress experienced by the athlete, with concurrent transitions having the potential to become a 'crisis' (Stambulova, 2000). This emphasises the importance for sport psychology researchers, when conducting research into within-career athletic transition, of acknowledging and addressing factors outside of sport. In recent years, the literature has begun to discuss these elements, as highlighted in a special issue on athletic career transitions in the *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* (2004). This review now examines more closely the literature specifically engaged with pertinent issues in sport.

### **1.2.3 Athletic Career Transition Research**

#### **Athletic Retirement**

The literature regarding athletic career transition is growing; a literature review in 2000 generated over 270 references, more than ten times that available twenty years previously (Lavallee & Wylleman, 2000). Although predominantly directed to the transition out of sport, the 1990s saw a shift in research attention to a life-span perspective that acknowledges the various transitions an athlete will encounter during their athletic career. Whilst research attention is still lacking in the area of within-career transition, the significant volume of research directed at the transition out of sport can be used as a proxy, providing some insight into athletic and non-athletic factors that may affect the navigation of, and coping with, the within-career transition. The subject of retirement is therefore an appropriate launching point for this part of the literature review.

An athlete may retire from sport for reasons which are both numerous and varied. At one extreme, the feeling that career goals have been achieved and at the other, a loss of motivation may culminate in voluntary retirement. In contrast to these motivational drivers, an athlete may be forced to retire earlier than expected due to injury. The causes

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for career termination fall broadly into two categories, retirements that are voluntary and chosen and those that are forced and involuntary, and this will influence the individual's reaction to the termination (Crook & Robertson, 1991). Such dichotomy highlights the important role of perceptions of control in the process of adjustment to transition (Schlossberg, 1981; Schlossberg et al., 1995). An athlete who interprets their state as one of having little control over the decision to retire may adjust less well than one who made a conscious decision to leave competitive sport, and therefore carries forward a perception of ownership of the process. Evidence exists to support this inference and to suggest, moreover, that planning for retirement, which provides athletes with just such a degree of readiness and an associated subjective experience of control of the changeover (e.g., Alfermann, Stambulova, & Zemaityte, 2004), is associated with less difficult transition (Stambulova, 1994). Involuntary retirement, especially when unforeseen, and therefore unplanned may lead to decreased self-esteem (Crook & Robertson, 1991), as well as other negative psychological reactions, such as anger, anxiety, and depression (Alfermann & Gross, 1997). Indeed if the transition process is gradual, this in itself may engender a greater sense of control and adaptation may be more successful (Werthner & Orlick, 1986).

Athletic identity is another factor linked to adaptation at the transition out of sport (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). As explained, an athlete is likely to be highly committed to their sport throughout their career, often to the exclusion of other activities and interests. The result of such narrow and intense focus is an individual whose sense of self is tightly related to their role as an athlete. Evidence suggests that such individuals find adaptation difficult when, as at retirement, their role change means that they no longer consider themselves to be an athlete (e.g., Brewer, Van Raalte, & Petitpas, 2000; Cecić Erpič, et al., 2004; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990; Werthner & Orlick, 1986). Retiring athletes with a strong athletic identity are more likely to employ avoidance-based coping strategies (e.g., denial, and disengagement) than problem-focused strategies (Grove, Lavalley, & Gordon, 1997), and adaptation to the transition is therefore likely to be inhibited.

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According to Taylor and Ogilvie (2001), and consistent with Schlossberg and colleagues (1995), the quality of adaptation to termination of the athletic career is correlated to the resources that the athlete has available to overcome the challenges faced. Adaptive coping strategies used by athletes undergoing the transition out of sport include, keeping busy, having other interests, finding a new focus, staying in contact with the sport and continuing to exercise or train (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993). Research has also found that retiring athletes employ coping strategies such as positive reinterpretation, acceptance, planning, active coping and the seeking of social support (Grove et al., 1997). Given evidence suggesting the general importance of social support for athletes (e.g., Rees & Hardy, 2000), it is not surprising that research also consistently demonstrates its importance in this specific context. Additionally, the social environment of an athlete undergoing a career transition is likely to change, and, as a consequence, a retiring athlete may feel isolated due to the loss of a major source of support (the sport environment) and therefore seek solace elsewhere. However, those who are deprived of this important resource during their transition out of sport report a more difficult transition (Werthner & Orlick, 1986).

Age-related life stage factors also play a role in adaptation to retirement, not least where decreased physical function impacts motivation for sport-participation (Werthner & Orlick, 1986). This is consistent with there being an inter-relationship between adaptation to the within-career athletic transition and concurrent developmental transitions. A change in life-values and priorities has also been demonstrated. For example, athletes may feel they have neglected the social-side of life and therefore wish to spend more time with friends, start a family or devote more attention to their existing family. Negative non-athletic transitions have also been shown to affect the career termination process of athletes. This is revealed in a study by Cecić Erpič, et al. (2004), which accentuates the importance, in practice, of adopting an approach which acknowledges the close interconnection between athletic and non-athletic aspects of an athlete's life.

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### *Career Transition Intervention*

As highlighted, a large body of research relating to transition within sport has been directed towards understanding the retirement transition. According to Stambulova (2000), “every sports career-related transition has the potential of becoming a crisis” (p. 591), and research into retirement from sport supports this contention (e.g., Alfermann & Gross, 1997). Comprehension of the holistic aspects of transition out of sport has led to the design of programmes aimed at preparing athletes for retirement and to support those immersed in the process. Relevant examples include the Olympic Athlete Career Centre in Canada, the United States Olympic Committee and the Australian Institute of Sport which have implemented career transition programmes for this purpose.

A review of the available career transition programmes by Anderson and Morris (2000) suggests that the Athlete Career and Education (ACE) programme in Australia was, at that time, the most comprehensive lifestyle support programme in the world. This incorporates significant support for athletes in pre-retirement planning of their post-transition career, on the premise that those who have prepared for the transition, and have a post-transition plan will adapt more readily. At an operational level, an evaluation of participants’ educational, vocational, financial and personal development status gives rise to a needs analysis and results in a bespoke package of relevant education and training. The programme is run by appropriately trained personnel and integrated within the state institutes and academies across Australia, making it a nationally recognised institution (Anderson & Morris, 2000). In providing a programme such as this, the Australian Institute of Sport is assisting athletes in balancing their sport careers, whilst also developing a career plan which extends beyond their competitive days.

The literature cited in the course of this review, supports the conclusion that a programme of this type will prove a most valuable resource for retiring athletes. Participants will be likely to feel a greater sense of ownership of their career and to leave sport with a more well-rounded identity, thereby softening the impact of loss of the athlete role. In addition, it is reasonable to deduce that similar research attention, directed at within-career transitions, would be equally beneficial for this group. They may correspondingly be at



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risk of 'crisis', since Stambulova suggests that an inability to adjust to the demands of a new athletic career level, may indeed lead to problems such as decreased self-esteem, emotional discomfort and heightened sensitivity to failure. Of the within-career transitions which have been identified (e.g., Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004), the transitions to high achievement and adult sports may be the most difficult of the athletic transitions (Stambulova, 2000) and therefore represent a heightened potential to become a crisis. Furthermore, of particular importance for young athletes and thus for those providing support (Stambulova, 2000), are the implications of age-related and developmental issues (such as the athlete's developing identity; Pummell et al., 2008) which those in support of athletes should be aware of and plan for (Stambulova, 2000).

### **Within-Career Transition**

Relatively few studies have investigated within-career transition in sport directly. Some literature has been derived from an examination of the athlete and talent development literature, which has led to a life-span focus on the transitions within the athletic career. This derivative literature will be considered first, followed by a synopsis of the (few) studies which have examined within-career transition either directly, or obliquely through an exploration of the whole life changes which co-occur alongside an athletic career transition.

#### *Talent Development*

Research examining the development of the athletic career has evolved from an initial analysis by Bloom (1985), who categorised the development of talent across various activities, as a series of stages of increasing specialisation and commitment. This work inspired sport-specific research investigating the development of talent in sport by Côté (1999) and Hellstedt (1987, 1995), but it is Bloom's research focus which is of particular interest here.

Assisted by his team at the University of Chicago, Bloom undertook a retrospective study involving 120 highly talented individuals from music, art, sport (including tennis and swimming), and science. This revealed three critical stages in the development of talent

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which played out over years of committed learning, with quality support and teaching. During the first of these, the *early years*, individuals typically are introduced to the activity concerned by their parents, who encourage enjoyment and play until the child becomes 'hooked'. The second stage, or *middle years* is distinguished by increasing dedication, specialisation and practise. The individual's identification with their activity is reinforced, as they receive recognition for their achievements from significant others. The final stage; or *later years*, manifests itself in striving for the development of 'expert' status. The later years are characterised by extreme commitment to, or 'obsession' with the activity, with much time and effort invested.

Subsequent research has further supported the validity of Bloom's hypotheses; based around stages of development (e.g., Wylleman, De Knop, Menkehorst, Theeboom, & Annerel, 1993; Wylleman et al., 1999), and asserts the importance of commitment and practise (Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Römer, 1993). Ericsson et al. found that in order to complete the hours of practise necessary to reach expert status, an individual must overcome motivational, effort and resource constraints; meaning they must be willing and able to invest much effort. Bloom's model has provided a worthwhile early contribution to the study of this aspect of athlete development.

### *Athlete Development*

Although research directly assessing the within-career athletic transition experience remains minimal, there has been a growing body of literature, since Bloom (1985), pertaining to talent development and exploring the nurturing of elite status in sport and the associated psychological development.

Côté (1999) identified three stages of development specifically relating to sport; the *sampling* stage (age 6-12), the *specialising* stage (age 13-15) and the *investment* stage (age 16+). According to Côté and colleagues (Côté, 1999; Côté, Baker, & Abernethy, 2003; Côté & Hay, 2002), young athletes' initial involvement in sport is characterised by 'deliberate play', (i.e., free play, or play without rules). Deliberate play differs from organised sport in that it allows the activities to be modified to meet the profile of the

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participants, their skill level and enjoyment. As a child develops within sport, their involvement is likely to become more directed, and less 'play-like'.

Other work in the area of athletic development has investigated the levels of deliberate play and deliberate practise that characterise the different stages of development. Soberlak and Côté (2003) charted the amount of time for which four professional ice hockey players engaged in deliberate play, deliberate practise, organised games and other sports respectively, from the age of 6 until the age of 20. Interviews with the athletes and their parents served to elucidate the nature and extent of these activities. Changes in activity involvement were similar amongst the four athletes and, although this sample was small, the existence of age-related trends and transitions in developmental activities within sport was supported. During the sampling years, little deliberate practise was undertaken, with a subsequent gradual increase in hours of deliberate practise within the specialising years. It appears that athletes need not engage in extensive deliberate practise at an early age to reach expert status. Existing literature has suggested that to reach a high (rather than novice) level, more extensive deliberate practise is required during development. It may be particularly important for young athletes to engage in high levels of deliberate play activities that are likely to stimulate more practise-orientated involvement in future, due to the intrinsically motivating nature of playful participation (Côté et al., 2003; Côté & Hay, 2002). Play may have served to foster the disciplined commitment to specialised training and practise seen in this sample, during the investment years. Implications for the promotion of athletic development can be drawn from this study, since it highlights the importance of an initial involvement, which is characterised by enjoyable, playful activity in order to foster the intrinsic desire to train, which Ericsson et al. (1993) deem necessary to overcome motivational constraints. Further, intrinsic motivation for deliberate practise in the later years of development, will be necessary if talent is to be kept within the sport and elite status reached. Although merely indicative in nature, it may be interpreted that early specialisation and early deliberate practise are not essential to the achievement of expert status. Additional research would help to substantiate these developmental findings. Work designed to

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reveal those factors which foster or hinder development in the evolution to elite athlete status would also prove valuable.

### *A Life-Span, and Holistic Perspective*

The above mentioned literature regarding athletic development has begun to surface factors that contribute to the development of talent within sport. Research supports the contention that the development of elite status in sport requires a specific context, with optimal interaction between the individual and the environment (Carlson, 1988). Athletic development is deemed dependent upon the optimisation of a complex interaction of athletic and non-athletic factors. An holistic perspective is therefore needed, with a focus beyond athletic areas. As highlighted in the developmental psychology literature, it is important to situate an athletic transition in the context of any concurrent (athletic or non-athletic) transition, if attempts to facilitate transition and progression are to be successful.

The dynamics of athlete development which have been alluded to are reflected in publications dedicated to the area of athlete career transitions and these have also begun to adopt a life-span perspective. There is a discernable shifting of focus away from the exclusive investigation of the retirement transition towards an acknowledgement of the transitions which must take place between the developmental stages which have been discussed. In this vein, Wylleman et al. (1999) identified and described the challenges presented by three within-career transitions. In their research, Wylleman et al. sourced quotes from related press regarding talented young athletes to support their hypotheses. They touch upon one of the first transitions a young athlete will face, being that into organised sport. This demands adaptation to a new social environment, comprised of the coach and team mates, with an adult-dominated structure. Parents are significant at this stage, often providing the initial introduction to the sport (Wylleman et al., 1999). Physical and psychological demands are prone to increase at this transition, with structured training sessions replacing playful practise and acclimatisation to rules, coach leadership, team dynamics and the social role of an 'athlete' all required. At this particular transition, adaptation and coping will be determined to some extent by the child's psychological readiness for this level of participation. A young athlete's level of

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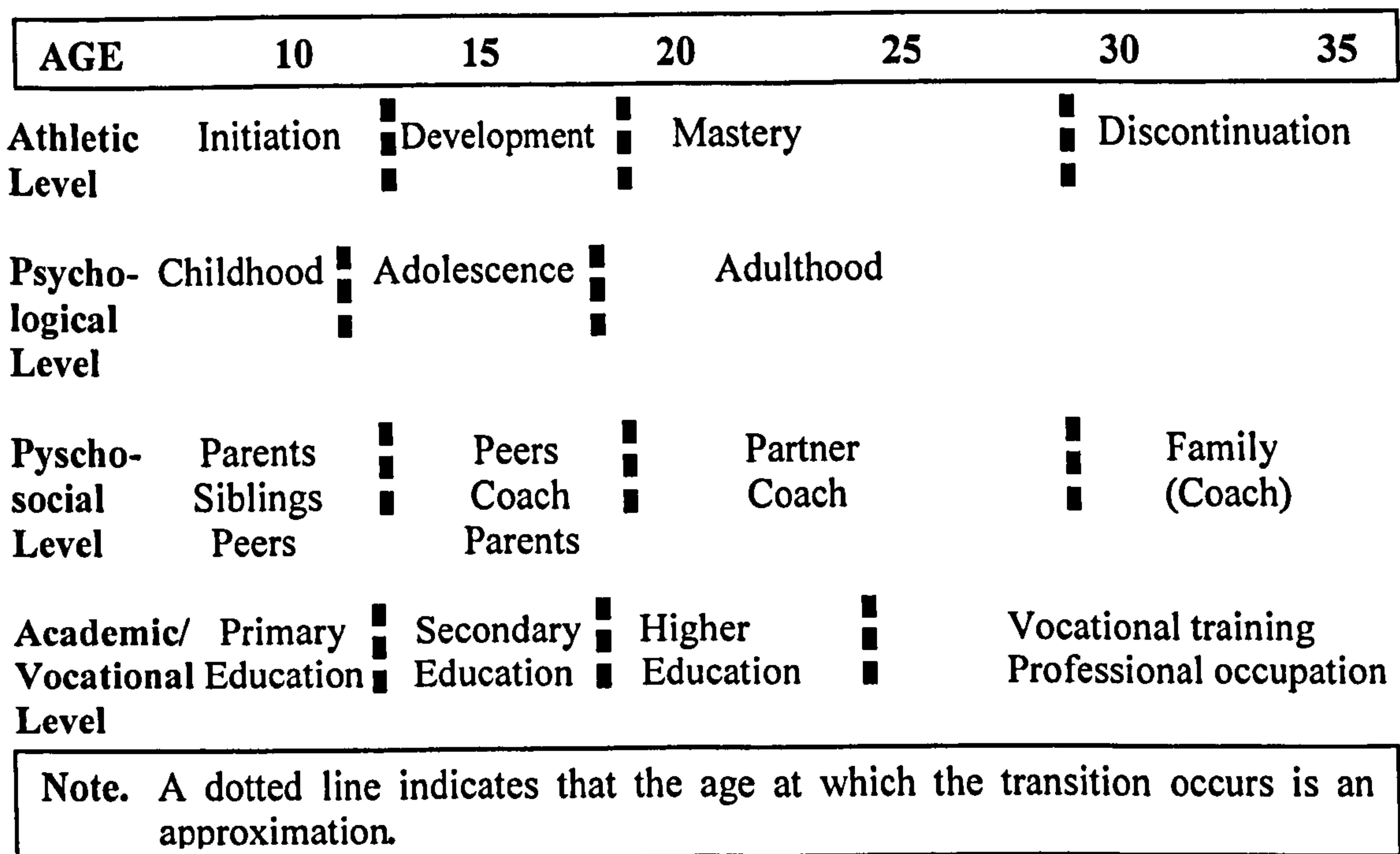
psychological maturity is predictive of their ability effectively to engage in competitive sport and to benefit from such participation (Brustad, 1993). The degree of mental preparedness is itself predicted by the child's motivation to engage in the sport, which may be driven by the desire for skill development, social reasons (i.e., friendships), competitive opportunities, and fun (Weiss, 1995). Significant others, such as parents will play an important role in the child's ability to cope with the developmental hurdles they face (Wylleman et al., 1999).

The second within-career transition described by Wylleman et al. (1999) is that into an intensive stage of participation, when the athlete's talent has been identified and a strong commitment to the sport has developed. Training and competition demands will again intensify, competitors' abilities tend to become more evenly matched and higher expectations will be placed upon athletes, both within sport and also, in parallel, in their education. The balancing of these demands requires new skill sets, including an understanding of principles for effective preparation and the handling of competition and training (Wylleman et al., 1999).

The subsequent transition to high-level competition (national and sometimes international) will require consistent performance at the uppermost level. At this stage, the athlete may elect to pursue a career in the sport, which often requires a separation from the family. Once the athlete is ineligible for junior competition, they will also have to adapt to senior level sport, in which the standard of competition may increase again, reflecting the superior experience of fellow competitors (Wylleman et al., 1999).

In identifying these transitions between developmental stages, Wylleman et al. (1999) created the foundations of a model of transition in sport from a lifespan perspective. Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) enhanced the stages of talent development advanced by Bloom (1985) and Côté (1999), through the addition of a *discontinuation* phase representing the important transition out of competitive sport. In so doing, they offered a model which encompassed the series of normative transitions that occur during the athlete's career and which represent a function of the organisational nature of the setting

(either in education, vocation or sport), the socialisation of the young athlete, and the athlete's psychological development. The model thus captures the interactive and reciprocal influence of athletic development with other areas of the athlete's life. It is argued that a young individual's athletic development will be influenced by, and have an influence on, psychological, psychosocial and academic dynamics.



**Figure 1.2: A Developmental Model of Transitions (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004).**

As illustrated in Figure 1.2, the developmental model is organised across four layers; the top layer representing stages of athletic development, and the second reflecting stages and transitions occurring at the psychological level (i.e., the stages of childhood, adolescence and adulthood, which represent different psychological tasks in development). The third layer portrays changes that occur at the social level, and identifies those individuals important to the young athlete as he/she matures. The final layer illustrates development at the academic and vocational level, representing the transition into different stages of education and into vocational training or a professional

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occupation. Research that relates to each of the levels will now be discussed, with an emphasis on the interrelationships between the athletic and other levels of development.

### *Psychological Development*

As reported, research suggests that psychological factors, such as the development of identity affect a young athlete's adjustment to their sports career, and psychological factors may determine if and when an athlete is able to progress from one athletic stage to the next (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). The developmental model of transitions (Figure 1.2) reveals the psychological development of an athlete as typically defined in terms of the stages of childhood, adolescence and adulthood, with much psychological development occurring during childhood and adolescence.

A major task for a young athlete consists in achieving readiness for participation in a structured sport, defined by certain rules and roles. Children need to generate their own 'motivational readiness' to participate, since they are likely to have been introduced to the sport by an external source (usually the parents). The ability to compare one's own ability to one's peers is also important for success in competitive sport, and this is unlikely to develop until the child is 7 or 8 years old (Passer, 1996). At this stage, peers are often a strong motivation for athletic involvement (Gould & Horn, 1984), and a child may therefore be at risk of terminating their engagement if they perceive that their ability compares unfavourably with that of their peers (Roberts, 1993). Full awareness of one's own ability does not occur until 10 to 12 years of age (Fry & Duda, 1997).

Psychological development continues in adolescence. The acquisition of a balanced identity (i.e., one which is not "unidimensional", or restricted to the athlete role) is a key developmental task for adolescents (Erikson, 1959). The exploration of possible roles and behaviours (important to prevent foreclosure through premature commitment to an identity; Marcia, Waterman, Matteson, Archer, & Orlofsky, 1993) may be curtailed, due to the substantial commitment required to reach elite status and the associated time constraints. Evidence suggests that the extent of an individual's identification with their sport does indeed have a profound effect on the development of identity and adjustment

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to career transition (Brewer, 1993; Brewer et al., 2000). An athlete with a narrow self-identity may not develop the coping strategies necessary to deal with difficult situations such as retirement (e.g., Gordon, 1995), and this may apply equally to within-career transitions. This consideration is pertinent to the adolescent years, when increasing dedication and extensive deliberate practise may result in a self-identity that is strongly and perhaps exclusively based on athletic performance.

Therefore, whilst a strong identification with the athlete role may be beneficial in terms of achieving commitment and an increasing standard of athletic performance, this has to be weighed against evidence that the development of a rounded self-identity may influence positively the progression out of sport and may also sustain successful navigation of within-career transitions (Brewer et al., 2000). It is reasonable to infer that a strong athletic-identity makes the transitional experience more stressful, due to increased self induced pressure to continue to the next level and absent coping strategies.

Psychological factors such as those illustrated, play a potentially key role in the within-career transition process, but it has been found that a range of influences and resources are involved, both internal and external to the subject. Development at the psychological level appears to be highly influenced by social factors. For example parental encouragement is associated with a child's level of perceived competence or self-efficacy, which in turn affects the child's intrinsic-motivation to participate (Brustad, 1993; Harter, 1981). A child with a high level of perceived competence is also more likely to persist in the face of failure (Bandura, 1997), and since failure is inevitable in sport, this ability is crucial for development. Additionally, parental behaviour can impact a child's level of self-esteem (Harter, 1988), which is likely to affect persistence and motivation. Parents may also have a direct influence on their child's motivational or achievement-goal orientation, through their own task- and/or ego-orientation (Ebbeck & Becker, 1994). Furthermore, Power and Woolger (1994) demonstrated that parental support is positively correlated with a child's level of enjoyment and enthusiasm for the sport, which are key predictors of participation. Conversely, parental expectations can



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have a negative effect, through the creation of unwanted pressure and stress, and in extreme cases such pressure can lead to drop-out (Scanlan, Stein, & Ravizza, 1991).

The interplay between social and psychological factors is therefore also apparent, and this in turn affects development at the athletic level. For example, a high commitment to the athlete role may result in the neglect of other activities at the time of transition out of sport (Grove et al., 1997), leading to a restricted identity. This foreclosed identity can cause difficulties (Brewer et al., 2000; Lavalley, Grove, & Gordon, 1997), since the majority of an athlete's social circle may be made up of fellow athletes, meaning the athlete feels isolated at retirement. Thus, a developing athlete's social world will be defined more and more by the athletic environment which dominates his/her life, and their identity will become increasingly sport-dependent. This narrow identity and social circle can also affect development at the athletic level, since athletes who report a lack of friends and/or time to be with friends outside of the sport are more likely to experience burnout, and sometimes ultimately drop-out from competitive sport (Gould, 1996).

Enquiry has revealed that talented youngsters spend less time just "hanging out" with friends and are more likely to share their pursuits with their peers (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993), i.e., as for athletes at the end of their careers, a young athlete's friends are most probably drawn from fellow participants in their sport. Since the majority of adolescent athletes will not make the transition to a full-time career in sport and will therefore experience career termination or career gaps due to injury at a relatively young age, they may be disposed to finding adjustment problematic, due to a lack of coping resources, the existence of few other interests and a limited social circle and support network outside of sport, to which they can turn. Consequently, strong commitment in an aspirant elite athlete may be deemed necessary but not sufficient. The absence of appropriate additional resources in support may potentially result in burn-out or, adjustment difficulties at premature retirement or injury.

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### *Social Development*

Social development will affect athletic development and success. Studies have indicated that the quality of a young athlete's relationships with their parents and coach predicts, to some extent, whether they will reach elite national level (Vanden Auweele, 1988, 1992; Wylleman, De Knop, & Sillen, 1998), and therefore interpersonal relationships are worthy of research attention.

The relationships significant in an athlete's development are likely to change over time. Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) have divided development at the social level into stages demarcated by those providing social support, on the basis of that the athlete's social network changes over the course of the athletic career. The family and peer group are thought to be important in the early stages, with the importance of the coach increasing as the athlete develops proficiency. An athlete's partner may also play a significant role during the mastery stage of development.

Social isolation can be detrimental to sporting performance. In their study with high-level sport performers, Rees and Hardy (2000) found evidence of four categories of social support; *emotional support* (comfort and care in times of stress, having someone just to 'be there'), *esteem support* (the expression of a belief in the athlete's ability), *informational support* (providing guidance and advice) and *tangible support* (such as providing resources, e.g., financial). Whilst Rees and Hardy report that various types of support are important, the relative value of these in terms of impact and timing has yet to be determined and therefore the relevance to within career, or indeed other transitions, remains unclear.

The developmental model (see Figure 1.2) predicts that the majority of social support received during an athlete's career will arise from one or more members of their "athletic-triangle" (the athlete, parents and coach; Smoll & Smith, 1989). The quality of the relationships in this triangle has a major influence on the athlete's future level of performance (Carlson, 1988). The role of these relationships within the context of the

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four levels of development highlighted in the developmental model will now be evaluated.

### *Role of the Family*

Ericsson et al identify the home environment as the most important influence on a young person's capacity to be successful (Ericsson, et al., 1993). In support of Wylleman and Lavallee (2004), research suggests that the role of the parents is especially important during the initiation stage, when, optimally, they encourage the child's interest, and in the developmental years, when typically they make greater sacrifices and life-style adjustments in order to enable the child's continued participation in the sport (Bloom, 1985; Côté, 1999; Wylleman et al., 2000). The role of the parents is thought to evolve throughout an athlete's development. A migration can be discerned from that of a leader, encouraging participation in the early years, to a supportive role as the child becomes more self-sufficient (Côté, 1999) and when the coach is increasingly adopting a more dominant role. This change represents one of the transitions at the social level.

Hellstedt (1987; 1995) described the athlete's family as the primary social environment for the development of identity, self-esteem and motivation for athletic success and as the environment where the child-athlete learns the coping mechanisms essential to meeting the demands of competitive sport. These represent key psychological developments. The 'best' parents for athletic development are what Hellstedt describes as 'moderately' involved. Such parents promote the best interest of their children, even if this means sacrificing their own interests, but crucially they do so without becoming over-involved (Hellstedt, 1987). Transitions between athletic stages are especially stressful, and are often a time when problems emerge to threaten the child's continuing sport participation (Hellstedt, 1995).

Once an elite level is reached, parents are likely to play a less immediate role in their son or daughter's athletic development, although they probably continue to provide financial and social support (Bloom, 1985). Athletic involvement will have a reciprocal effect on the athlete's interpersonal relationships, with the intense training schedule dictating, in

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some cases, that the parents constitute one of the very few non-sport relationships an athlete is able to sustain. Indeed, teenagers highly involved in an activity report more contact with their parents than their less focused peers (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993).

Whilst there are grounds for acknowledging the influence of social factors in securing the occurrence of and the adjustment to athletic transitions (e.g., Pearson & Petitpas, 1990), Würth and colleagues are amongst the few to have specifically addressed the role of parents in this process. They discovered that, in their provision of sport-related advice and emotional reinforcement during a challenging time when their offspring's self-esteem may be threatened by escalating standards, affirmative parental behaviour is vital to a successful transition to the next athletic stage. Parents of successful athletes display a special pattern of behaviour. This involves demonstrating how to improve, pushing them to train harder, exerting a certain amount of pressure but balanced by recognition and praise where efforts justify and providing general support, affection and understanding. Although such exemplary parents fulfil their child's needs for social and emotional support, Würth and colleagues hesitate before assigning any causal relationship between parental behaviour and transition until further research corroborates these findings (Würth, 2001; Würth, Lee, & Alfermann, 2004).

Enquiry has also indicated that the parents of talented teenagers create an environment conducive to the free development of expertise, with little tension between the child and his/her parents and few financial worries for the child. The resultant lifestyle is beneficial to skill development with parental support forming a 'buffer' against performance stress (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993). This is consistent with findings from Carlson (1988), which revealed that the quality of a tennis player's interpersonal relationships with the coach and parents is a major determinant of whether the athlete achieves an elite level. The parents of successful athletes were seen to offer support without too much pressure to achieve. Again this demonstrates the contribution made by external influences and the interactive nature of these on athletic development, but further study must replicate and expand upon this research.

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It seems clear that a successful young athlete is likely to be distinguished by having enjoyed a very high level of encouragement and support from the family. Research into the social environment of athletes is growing, but knowledge regarding the specific behaviours that take place within an athlete's social network (whether beneficial to transition or not) is somewhat limited (Wylleman, 2000). Our understanding of this whole area will be enhanced by investigating what types of support facilitate particular transitions throughout an athlete's career.

### *Role of the Coach*

A significant volume of research has examined the coach-athlete relationship which, like the role of the family/parents, tends to evolve as athletic stages are surmounted. In the absence of a coach, prior to the transition into organised sport, a young individual is most often engaged in play rather than deliberate-practise and therefore will not develop technical proficiency (Ericsson et al., 1993). Once in the initiation stage, the (ideal) coach will praise and reward for effort rather than result (Bloom, 1985). Later, the coach is likely to adopt a more directive style, encouraging the development of technical proficiency and may determine when transition to a more complex level is appropriate. For example, evidence suggests that the coach plays a dominant role in the child's progression from recreational involvement to more intensive participation (Baxter-Jones & Maffulli, 2003). Since deliberate practise is increasingly important in later years of athletic development (Soberlak & Côté, 2003), this lends support to Wylleman and Lavalley's contention that the role of the coach will take on greater significance across the development and mastery years.

Smith and Smoll's studies are also noteworthy in demonstrating the profound influence a coach's behaviour can have on a young athlete's motivation, persistence and enjoyment, and therefore on their psychological, social and athletic development. During the initiation stage of athletic development, the coaching style adopted affects the rate of dropout of young athletes (Smith & Smoll, 1996). Later, the athlete may decide to change coach, as the emphasis falls on skill development and as social development sensitises the athlete to the importance of a good coach-athlete relationship. Indeed, Bloom (1985)

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explained that during the middle years (or development stage) the pursuit of technical proficiency is accentuated, with coaches demanding a more disciplined work ethic as a consequence. In the mastery stage expectations increase yet again, with the coach placing considerably more responsibility, both in training and at competition, with the aspiring athlete.

More evidence of the inter-relationship and interdependencies which underpin the developmental model is found in studies which demonstrate that coach behaviour can influence successful development to the next stage and retention of talent within sport. Negative coaching behaviours such as a lack of positive feedback, instruction and empathy and coach-athlete conflict have been associated with burn-out (Vealey, Armstrong, Comar, & Greenleaf, 1998) and premature career termination (Kerr & Dacshyn, 2000), and therefore these may signpost failure to make the transition to the next athletic stage and early talent loss.

On the basis of the information currently available, it may reasonably be inferred that a strong coach-athlete relationship is highly important for athletic development. However further research is needed better to understand the underlying dynamics and to identify with more precision just which behaviours are most strongly correlated with success.

### *Role of Peers*

Some attempt has been made to discern the role of peers in the development of an athlete's career and more particularly their influence on within-career transition. However, the subject is worthy of further enquiry, because the work done to date is less than explicit. Peers may influence the development of an individual's self-identity, including identification with the athlete role (Smith, 2003). Indeed, social affiliation is often a primary motivation for youth-sport participation, and given that sporting achievements are often valued by young people, this perception is likely to have an effect on factors such as motivation to participate, self-concept, and social development (Weiss & Petlichkoff, 1989). There is also evidence that peers, like coaches and parents can

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influence psychological development, for example, peer acceptance may impact on an athlete's perceived competence (Weiss & Duncan, 1992).

To conclude this section in relation to social factors in athlete development, interpersonal relationships with parents, coaches and peers play a significant role. The nature of these relationships will vary across the different stages of development and will play an important role in the way athletic achievements are realised (Vanden Auweele, 1988, 1992). Future research should more directly assess the relationship between the athlete's psychosocial and athletic development. It is recognised that the nature and quality of the athlete's relationships evolve throughout the career, but the function of these relationships in the various within-career transitions, is less clear.

#### *Academic and Vocational Development*

Young athletes are required to exploit their potential in formal education and sport simultaneously. Consequently, there is an inevitable overlap between an athlete's academic and athletic careers (De Knop, Wylleman, Van Houcke, & Bollaert, 1999; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004); an athlete's academic life is likely to have an influence on their athletic life, and vice versa.

As illustrated in Figure 1.2, transitions which occur in academic and vocational development include those into: a) primary school, b) secondary school, c) higher education, d) vocational training or occupation and e) a postgraduate, lifelong learning phase (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Each of these is likely to overlap with transitions at the athletic, psychological and social levels and will place new demands on the developing athlete, including in terms of their social networks, roles, expected behaviours, stressors, workload, time-management and coping skills.

Athletic development can also affect academic development due to the nature of the school and sport systems which dictate that academic transitions often run concurrently with those in athletic development in the developmental model. Evidence suggests that a focus on sport can have a negative impact on an athlete's high-school performance

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(Hauser & Lueptow, 1976). Similarly, the demand for achievement in both domains (athletic and academic/vocational) can cause talent loss at within-career transitions, since research shows that academic or vocational training, or developing a professional occupation is sometimes a reason for athletes to retire from their athletic career (e.g. Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985; Wylleman, De Knop, & Theeboom, 1993).

At an earlier stage, academic transitions, such as the one from primary to secondary school result in changes in an athlete's academic life, such as an increased workload, and a new social network and support system. The nature of relationships within the family and peer group will also mature (Newman, Lohman, Newman, Myers, & Smith, 2000). A child's primary school peer group may disperse to different secondary schools, resulting in the formation of new friendships and the loss of old, and a similar pattern will emerge at the transition into higher education or occupation. The time of transition to secondary school is one when some young athletes cease their involvement in sport, because their former peer group had been a major source of motivation for participation (Van Reusel, De Knop, De Martelaer, Impens, Roedlandt, Teirlynck et al., 1992). At the psychological level, an increased independence will be expected and athletic challenges will include 'making the team' at the new school, college or university where competition may well be more intense.

Furthermore, the transition out of secondary school is likely to coincide with the resolution to pursue a professional sports career, where this is deemed a possibility. A study by Tarbotton (2001) revealed that the probability of a successful transition at this stage is very small, with only 25% of athletes who competed at national junior athletic championships in Australia going on to senior competition at any level.

For every athlete, there is a challenge balancing the academic workload and managing school attendance whilst training and competing, and this is likely to have an effect both on performance in the athletic and academic fields. During secondary school and higher education (i.e., the development and mastery stages), sport will require increased time commitment for training (Soberlak & Côté, 2003), whilst academic pressure is mounting.



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Equally, young athletes will begin to contemplate their options in terms of further education, career and indeed lifestyle as they approach the end of secondary school. As highlighted above, time constraints and a strong commitment to sport may potentially lead to a neglect of this exploration, and consequently result in delayed academic/vocational development. Additionally, with the end of an academic career (whether after secondary or higher education), comes increased pressure to gain financial security, and thus to enter the workplace (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). However, athletes may not have the benefit of the same occupational experience as their peer group, due to time constraints, and may then face a state of “occupational delay” (Naul, 1994) on entering the workplace.

Some athletes might delay their transition to senior level or the workplace with higher education. However, the task of combining a high-level sports career with higher-level education will not always be without difficulty. De Knop et al. (1999) predict that the challenge of combining academic and athletic vocations may generate various problems, such as a restricted opportunity to train and compete and to develop social skills, relationships and self-concept, and this may lead to problems at the individual level, such as low self-confidence, lack of time-management and academic skills. Tellingly, De Knop et al. report that student athletes dedicate as much time to their studies as do non-student athletes, which indicates that time pressure is the mediating factor in balancing academic and sporting priorities. Indeed young aspirant athletes acknowledge more academic related problems caused by a lack of time and physical fatigue than their non-sporting peers (Wylleman, De Knop, & Theeboom, 1993).

Immersion in sport is likely to restrict development in other areas, and this may have a reciprocal effect on athletic development. There seems to be a complex interaction of factors involved in an athlete’s development. The extent of this ‘restriction’ at the various stages or transitions, and the importance of factors such as academic/vocational development is yet to be fully examined.

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### *Within-Career Transition Research*

The developmental model proposed by Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) provides a useful overview of the transitions faced by an athlete during their development and importantly, draws attention to the interdependent nature of these transitions. The research which has been discussed in this literature review, in general, supports the sequence of the transitions at each level of development as illustrated, and also the multi-directional interrelationships between each of the levels. By situating an athlete within the model, those supporting the athlete will be able to conceptualise the athlete's status, and to consider the other developmental tasks which must be confronted. However, the model is largely descriptive, and athletes will experience additional normative and non-normative transitions within a stage. Furthermore, it provides little insight concerning the experience of within-career transition; hence sport psychology remains deficient in this subject area. The much more comprehensive literature depicting retirement, together with pertinent knowledge from mainstream psychology (such as Schlossberg, 1981) informs us that the experience of any transition is complicated.

Little published research has focused directly upon an athlete's experience of within-career transition, and much of our knowledge is derivative and untested as a consequence. Nevertheless, before concluding this literature review it is appropriate to offer a summary of the research which is currently available to shed light on the process.

Holt and Dunn (2004) examined the psychosocial competencies associated with the nurturing of success in elite youth soccer, within a group of male players under 20 years of age. Using grounded theory methodology, they found that four major psychosocial competencies were significant for progression; discipline, commitment, resilience and social support. The athletes displayed dedication to their sport and showed a willingness to make personal sacrifices in order to meet performance standards and to make progress. They had strong intrinsic and extrinsic motives for success and utilised goal setting to provide direction for their careers. A proficiency in the use of coping strategies to overcome obstacles and adversity was demonstrated in the existence of a set of resilient behaviours, such as the ability to thrive in high pressure situations. Finally, the players

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were able to make use of the emotional, informational and tangible support on offer to them, primarily from parents, who continued to play an important role in the athletic development of these late adolescents. Holt and Dunn argue that it is the interaction of the four competencies that optimises success and selection for a professional position. These results are consistent with the talent development research suggesting that characteristics such as discipline and commitment are all important (e.g., Bloom, 1985; Ericsson et al., 1993) in this context.

One analysis of drop-out from sport also sheds light on the important transition to elite level. Bennie and O'Connor (2004) conducted a study of what they termed the 'transition years' (18-24 years of age), involving elite Australian junior track and field athletes and undertaken in response to diminishing senior level participation. The results of this enquiry suggested that a multitude of factors (psychological, social, economic, educational and political) contributed to dropout amongst this group of athletes. These included: the development of other interests, a need to gain financial independence, an inability to balance the demands of sport with other areas of life, a lack of confidence to continue (sometimes due to unattainable performance standards and a large jump to those required at senior level), a perceived lack of support from the authorities and a break-up of social groups. This study is important, as the authors promulgate strategies to reduce the loss of talent at this transition and therefore to promote successful transition. Bennie and O'Connor advocate that governing bodies consider implementing competition structures which facilitate the progression to senior level. Further, that support staff, coaches, teachers and parents should be educated about the issues faced prior to the transition period and that information and support should be available regarding opportunities for continued participation, along with provision of more financial incentives and greater opportunities for participation in high level events (Bennie & O'Connor, 2004).

Within-career transition has also been indirectly studied through examination of concurrent, related, but non-athletic transitions such as relocation. In a study by Hanks and Morris, Australian-rules football players were examined in order to formulate

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strategies used to cope with adaptation to relocation occurring as a result of the transition to senior level (Hanks & Morris, 2001). Sources of stress at this transition included separation from family and friends, adjusting to new domestic routines, fitting in part-time work, an increased level of and intensity of training, and anxiety relating to adjusting to a new coach, team-mates and expectations. Players coped with these demands through the use of cognitive reframing; making use of support provided by the club and coaching staff as well as social support from significant others. This work explains that athletes making a within-career transition may experience a range of additional, related (and sometimes non-athletic) stressors that add potential barriers to successful transition. Whether such stressors are unique to athletes who are forced to relocate in order to make the transition is, at present, unclear.

In a similar study, Giacobbi, Lynn, Wetherington, Jenkins, Bodendorf and Langley (2004) also investigated the non-athletic life-transitions of athletes. Giacobbi and colleagues used focus groups and individual interviews to explore the sources of stress and coping strategies of five female student-swimmers during their transition to university. Results revealed several sources of stress associated with this transition, which overlap with the results of Hanks and Morris (2001), including performance expectations, training intensity, interpersonal relationships, relocation and academic demands. The authors highlighted the importance of social support and suggest that student-athletes, at this stage, should be encouraged to develop rich social support networks. Advice and support in the form of mentoring from older students can also be beneficial for a student athlete negotiating such a transition, who may be experiencing stress related to transitions in both their sport and studies. Further research, indicating the interaction between athletic and non-athletic transitions, comes from Cecić Erpič et al. (2004), who found that both athletic (e.g., achievement of athletic goals) and non-athletic factors (such as educational status) impact upon the athletic transition. For athletes at career termination, the experience of negative non-athletic transitions contributed to a more difficult transition. Cecić Erpič et al. therefore concluded that athletic and non-athletic aspects of life interact to affect an athlete's experience of career transition.

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Two more recent studies have focused directly on the experience of within-career transition in sport. Pummell et al. (2008) conducted an investigation of the transition from club to regional level, and identified five categories which reflected issues important to athletes before, during and after the transition: i) motivation for the transition, ii) perceptions of the transition, iii) sources of stress, iv) support for athletic development, and v) post-transition changes. Consistent with Wylleman and Lavallee (2004), parents and peers were important at this stage, often prompting the motivation to make the transition, which was facilitated by considerable social support. Also consistent with the literature discussed (e.g., Ericsson et al., 1993), the athletes reported the need to make considerable sacrifices during their adolescent years and as a consequence, development in other areas (such as academic and social) was affected. The authors suggest that athletes, at this formative stage, are at considerable risk for identity foreclosure. Citing the research at retirement which suggests that a foreclosed identity is a risk factor for adaptation problems, they propose that young athletes should be encouraged to develop a rounded identity. Pummell et al. also suggest that future research should continue to investigate within-career transition in sport in order that programmes can be designed which facilitate athlete development, mitigate negative influences and minimise talent loss.

Bruner, Munroe-Chandler and Spink (2008) conducted a qualitative analysis of the transition to elite level in ice hockey. Bruner et al. used the developmental model of transition (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004) to guide their investigation and found that transition related issues could be split into on-ice and off-ice factors, which fell within the athletic and social levels of the developmental model. On-ice issues related to performance and included readiness for the new level of competition, earning a place on the new team, and support (sometimes a lack of) from the coach. Off-ice issues were connected to relationships and personal development; with team-mates taking over from the family as the greatest sources of social support, and a developing sense of maturity prompted by living away from home and a need to adapt to the challenges of the transition to elite level. The authors provide some suggestions for coaches working with athletes at this transition, such as promoting a focus on the process of performance rather

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than the outcome, in order to facilitate coping and the maintenance of self-confidence at the new competitive level, and providing opportunities for players to get to know their new team-mates and develop a social support network. Bruner et al. also emphasise the importance of developing knowledge of within-career transition, to complement that related to retirement and with particular focus upon the entry into elite sport.

#### **1.2.4 Summary**

This literature review has revealed the quantity and quality of research which has been directed toward the transition out of sport, thereby establishing a valuable store of knowledge. However, this concentration has neglected the transitions within the athletic career which are equally worthy of study.

Literature addressing the transition out of sport informs us of the factors associated with adaptation, including: perceptions of control, degree of athletic identity or identity foreclosure, coping strategies or resources and age-related issues. Information available concerning within-career transition suggests that these considerations may also be applicable here. For example, age-related issues may affect adjustment to the transition to senior level, due to tangential pressures accompanying the transition through adolescence and in to adulthood. Similarly, evidence from research on athletic retirement indicates that athletic career transition affects patterns and levels of an individual's identity (Brewer, et al., 2000). It also seems likely that, during an athlete's formative years when identity is being developed (Erikson, 1959) and during which, potentially they will navigate many within-career transitions (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004), the impact on identity may be even greater. Those in support of young athletes should therefore be alert to and plan for, these age-related transitional issues (Stambulova, 2000).

Schlossberg's transition framework (Schlossberg, 1981; Schlossberg et al., 1995) has been applied to athletic retirement experiences, and has demonstrated some value for understanding this transition (e.g., Swain, 1991). The model predicts that adjustment to within-career transition will be influenced by the resources (or assets) and liabilities which the athlete brings to the process, in terms of the self, the situation, their coping

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strategies and support. Whilst, the model is not extensive or specific enough fully to accommodate athletic transition (Swain, 1991; Taylor & Olgivie, 2001), it provides a useful foundation on which to build. Notably, a significant addition to the infrastructure of our understanding has been made in the developmental model put forward by Wylleman and Lavallee (2004), which usefully categorises the transitions within the athlete's career. However it offers no predictions enabling the experience of within-career transition to be managed and supported.

Unsurprisingly, the increased demands at within-career transition to a higher level, such as a need to beat qualification times amplify levels of stress and pressure. It may be for this reason that dropout is prevalent during phases of transition (Bernie & O'Connor, 2004; Würth et al., 2004). The scant research which has so far examined retirement from sport amongst young athletes (i.e., those around the age at which they would enter the mastery stage), points to an array of factors that may contribute to dropout at this stage. These include social, psychological, economic, educational and political factors (Bernie & O'Connor, 2004). Further research should be employed to validate and elucidate the challenges and barriers faced by athletes, across different sports, and to develop an understanding of the factors which facilitate this process.

A transition to the mastery stage is broadly equivalent to the transition from junior to senior level, as evidenced by the developmental model of transition (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Indeed this latter transition may be one of the most challenging within the athlete's career; with significant dropout occurring at this stage (Stambulova 2000; Tarbotton, 2001). One study, with former Olympic athletes tells us that, on average, this transition occurs at 18.5 years of age (Wylleman et al., 1993), when according to the developmental model a concurrent non-athletic transition occurs. These additional related stressors, which add barriers to within-career transition, are typical (Bruner et al., 2008; Hanks & Morris, 2001), and a research perspective which allows the nature of additional inhibitors at this transition to emerge and to be understood would add value.

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Evidence from mainstream psychology also highlights the need to examine how a transition fits with the individual's situation at the time (as suggested by Schlossberg, et al., 1995), and provides insight of potential related stressors. According to Graber and Brooks-Gunn, the pre-transition environment, the timing of the transition, and the fit between the athlete's all-round development and the environment, largely will determine individual differences in transitional experiences (Graber & Brooks-Gunn, 1996). The developmental psychology literature provides clues regarding potential barriers and additional stressors, which have the potential to influence athletic transition. An adolescent's situation may reflect the many developmental tasks faced as they navigate their way through adolescence and into adulthood. These will exist at biological, psychological, educational and social levels. Coleman (1974) predicts that adolescents can cope with the transition to adulthood by focusing on one developmental issue at a time and postponing others. The consequences of this for an athlete undergoing concurrent athletic transition may be delayed development at any one of the developmental levels. Indeed, extensive athletic involvement has the potential to influence the nature, timing and sequence of the developmental issues faced by an adolescent/ young adult, with athletes having the tendency to compromise their personal development in pursuit of athletic performance (Miller & Kerr, 2002). Whilst this type of holistic focus has been encouraged via the publication of the developmental model (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004), the nature of this interaction and the consequent impact on any athletic or developmental transition, is unknown and should be investigated. Only by understanding the specific demands of particular transitions can necessary resources be made available to athletes to assist them in making each transition successfully. Knowledge of specific athletic career transitions is therefore called for (Wylleman, Alfermann, & Lavallee, 2004).

### **1.2.5 Thesis Aims**

On the basis of the above literature review, the primary aim of the current thesis is to develop an understanding of the experience of athletes navigating the within-career transition from junior-to-senior level, and to move towards a theoretical explanation of this process. Given the paucity of research relating to this and to other within-career



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transitions, no more specific aims can be generated at this stage of the research programme.

### *Concatenation of Research*

Whilst only a broad aim has been stated here, it is nevertheless possible at the inception of this research, to set out a guiding philosophy for this thesis. According to Robert Stebbins, a research programme should be designed in a continuous approach, in which each study is predicated on the results of the previous one. Only through such a series of linked, cumulative insights, can theory, the aim of social science, ultimately be generated. Stebbins argues that, too often, research studies exist in isolation, and whilst single studies may provide a valuable contribution to a body of literature, they are no more than a start to the understanding of a subject area (Stebbins, 1992, 2006). To be definitive, and to build theory, a research thread must be continued throughout a series of linked studies, where leads generated in earlier studies guide subsequent research. Such a continuous research effort is termed *concatenated exploration*, and provides the greatest contribution to research or applied contexts (Stebbins, 1992). Moreover to produce grounded theory requires more than one solitary study, but several studies in the same area (Stebbins, 2006; p. 493).

An additional benefit of concatenation is that the design of later studies can correct for weaknesses in the research procedure of earlier studies. More specifically, in the context of qualitative research, which is often criticised for being ungeneralisable, such a chain of qualitative case studies can extend the applicability and validity of the findings (Stebbins, 2006). Stebbins, citing Couch (1991), also suggests that concatenated exploration enables qualitative research to extend beyond a focus on the individual, to encompass the social processes and relationships within which those individuals live. A concatenated programme of research facilitates the integration of these supplementary elements, thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding of the facets and the complexity of a social process. It is thus appropriate in the context of this thesis, where the aim is to develop an understanding of a social process.

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# CHAPTER TWO

## STUDY ONE

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION TO STUDY ONE

The review of existing career transition literature in the previous chapter highlights the recent shift in focus away from the ubiquitous subject of career termination towards the relatively neglected area of the athletic experience at specific within-career transitions (Wylleman, Alfermann, & Lavallee, 2004). Because such little attention has been paid to those within-career transitions which occur as athletes move up, down, or horizontally in the sport system (Lavallee, Wylleman, & Sinclair, 2000), sport psychologists have little knowledge of the within-career transition experience on which to base their interventions. By developing a better understanding of the demands facing athletes at particular transitions, coaches, sport psychologists and national governing bodies can help to ensure that the necessary resources are available to athletes to support them at times of transition (Wylleman et al., 2004).

This research project was therefore devised against a backdrop of scant knowledge, as evidenced by the paucity of academic research and related literature. The associated lack of pre-existing theory has had consequences for the design of the project to address this deficit. An approach was required which allowed for the building of a theory to explain the experience of athletes through the junior to senior transition and this, in turn drove the adoption of a research methodology. When designing a study, the researcher must choose a method of data analysis which is appropriate to the research question, and the method of data collection should be chosen to generate data appropriate to the method of analysis (Willig, 2001). On this basis, grounded theory was chosen as being especially appropriate to the research question and to the context. Grounded theory is in fact, both a method of data collection and of analysis (Charmaz, 2003) and furthermore, is recognised as being suitable for the type of research question where there is a limited understanding, and where the researcher wants to develop a theoretical framework (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

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The notion of building theory in the social sciences is synonymous with a qualitative rather than quantitative approach, with the latter being more often associated with either traditional positivistic science and a regime of theory testing, or the hypothetico-deductive approach where pre-existing concepts are used to determine meaning for the participants (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1997). In grounded theory, the connections between events are sought, and the grounded theorist attempts to build a dynamic picture of the processes experienced by participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Because a career transition occurs over time, a method of data collection in which the processes could be examined, underlines the suitability of this approach. In addition, a rich understanding of the athletes' perceptions of transition was sought in order to provide the detail necessary, from which theory could begin to be built. Interviews were chosen as the most appropriate way to gather data which allowed an examination of transition; to hear the participant talk about a particular aspect of their life (Willig, 2001).

Many quantitative researchers argue that methods used by qualitative researchers lack objectivity, and are more open to bias through a lack of control than are quantitative methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). However, the focus in the present study is not one of experimental manipulation, controlling of confounding variables, and of identifying one 'truth' but of describing processes. In summary, it was concluded that a qualitative approach would allow access to participants' own worlds and experiences, thereby facilitating a deep exploration of the process of transition from junior to senior level. Given the lack of previous related research and the desire to build an understanding derived from the data, a grounded theory approach was adopted. In grounded theory, research concepts are not imposed on the data, but analysis is grounded *in* the data since categories are derived from it, rather than from preconceived ideas, hypotheses or literature. Grounded theory claims that theory will emerge from the data (i.e., theory is generated by the data; Pidgeon & Henwood, 1997). This makes the method suitable for an area such as within-career transition which has little theoretical understanding.

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### 2.1.1 Background Assumptions

Whilst the researcher contends that the design of a research study should be largely based on the appropriateness for the particular research question (as stated by Patton, 1990), it is also important to acknowledge, and for the reader to understand, the assumptions underlying the research and the methods chosen. Selecting a research method requires that the researcher conduct an evaluation of him/herself, as each researcher thinks in a different way, and has a different opinion of what can be discovered, and how it can be discovered. It is perhaps peculiar that researchers often fail to discuss the fit between their work and thinking style and the method chosen (Knafl, 1994), having regard to the time, thought and reflection required when choosing a methodology. This consideration alone is evidence that such preliminary self-analysis is fundamental to accurately reflecting what the results will represent and it therefore needs to be transparent. A brief discussion of the perspective which underpins this research, justifies the qualitative and methodological approach, and touches upon the history of grounded theory and the associated assumptions will therefore now be provided.

#### *A World View or, What can be Known?*

Research is interpretive, i.e., “it is guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 33). Such ontological and epistemological reflections upon the nature of reality, *what* can be known and therefore what constitutes knowledge and *how* this can be discovered, shape the way the researcher views the world. Such judgements are inevitably value laden i.e., are influenced by our assumptions, values, ideas and experiences, and they affect the research process at each stage (Charon, 1995). As such, it is important that a researcher reflects upon and tries to understand their own, and others’ perspectives because, as Guba explains, they form an interpretive framework, or paradigm i.e., assumptions about the social world, or a basic set of beliefs, which guide action (Guba, 1990), and which every researcher holds, sometimes subconsciously.

Various perspectives and paradigms have dominated scientific research over recent decades, and these historical moments have contributed to the development of the context

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in which research is currently seen and conducted. A full discussion of these moments will not be entered into here, and interested readers are referred to Denzin and Lincoln (2003) for a useful overview. What is important however, in detailing the paradigm governing this research is an understanding of the assumptions relevant to it in terms of:

1. Ontology: What is the form and nature of reality, and therefore what can be known about it?
2. Epistemology: What is knowledge and what is the relationship between the inquirer and what can be known?
3. Methodology: How do we know the world, or gain knowledge of it?

The assumptions behind natural science have always played a dominating role in the battle of ideas, not least in our recent history. In contradistinction to what is proposed in idealism (often associated with George Berkeley; Valentine, 1992), the positivists' claim that there is an external reality which can be objectively observed, studied, measured and understood has underpinned many traditional experiments in psychology. This view was held particularly in the era of behaviourism, where the research norm was laboratory studies under controlled conditions, used to observe, record, and quantify behaviour.

According to Charon (1995), Immanuel Kant suggested that this kind of empirical research allows access to only the *phenomenal* world – of things that can be seen and touched. This is controversial in the social sciences since there is some ambiguity about whether the human being can be wholly understood as an object in the phenomenal world. Kant argued that whilst the human being is open to the laws of nature and can somewhat be understood through traditional scientific methods, we are also part of a *noumenal* world which is not accessible to cognition and cannot be studied in this way because it is not objectively observable. Empirical observation has allowed scientists to study only the phenomenal world i.e., those aspects of being human which can be scientifically measured. Ignoring the metaphysical questions relating to consciousness e.g., dualism (the mind/body problem) which, at least in Kant's terms belong to the noumenal (accessible by reason but never comprehensible in our causally determined reality), and using only traditional scientific

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methods results in a biased perspective. This means that much of what it means to be human was, until relatively recently understudied, and that it has been assumed that there is causality in social life in the same way as it is assumed that there is causality in the phenomenal world (Charon, 1995).

There are social scientific perspectives which do not reflect the assumptions of natural positivist science, and which assume that there is more to being human than the passive, non-reflective being which is determined in nature in the way that other living organisms are inferred to be, and which goes against the idea of one objective reality which exists independently of interpretation. One such perspective is that of symbolic interactionism, in which grounded theory has its roots. Symbolic interactionism is typically attributed to George Mead (1863-1931; cited in Charon, 1995), who was a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Chicago. Mead was influenced by the writings of Charles Darwin and particularly by the school of philosophy known as pragmatism.

As described in Charon (1995), symbolic interactionism assumes that the human being is active, possessed of free will, rather than passive and determined. The social reality we inhabit, is significantly the result of inter- and intra- individual interactions, as opposed to being a reaction to our environment, physical and social, or being predetermined by the laws of causation, consigning humankind to being merely determined in nature, as suggested by a purely reductive approach. In essence, symbolic interactionism, as a philosophy of science, distinguishes itself amongst competing theories by placing the human agents in a central role in contributing to the creation of an independent and recognisable social reality which can therefore be observed.

Symbolic interactionism claims that behaviour is not pre-determined by already formed attitudes, but more importantly by the interactions within the mental states or 'inner life' of the individual and the interaction with other individuals which contributes to this. Such interactions are, more specifically, the thoughts, the definitions, the taxonomy we sustain in regard to a situation, which are made possible for us to rehearse both internally and externally through our uniquely sophisticated use of language, a facility which

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distinguishes us from other beings (Charon, 1995). Past experiences may affect the individual but only as one contributory factor within the process of interaction. In this context, to interpret human behaviour means gaining an understanding of the interaction processes which occur within and between individuals, something which empirical methods have often neglected or been unable to tap.

A further principle within symbolic interactionism which is of special relevance to grounded theory, is the focus on teleology and evolution. As detailed in Charon (1995), Mead drew upon the influence of pragmatism and Darwinian principles in arguing that the human being is always in a state of development; everything is a process; a state of change. Society, individuals, and our minds are constantly changing, as is what we take to be knowledge. Once knowledge or a paradigm is no longer useful or is subsumed by anomalies, it is adapted and a new paradigm emerges, derived from our actions and interactions within and between ourselves. Consequently our perceptions of ourselves and our worlds are constantly being redefined.

The above analysis underpins the choice of methodology selected for this research and the understanding of within-career transition, a process which occurs over time, and the translation of the findings into a theory, which in and of itself is dynamic. The research demands access to a world which is not directly observable in the sense of an objective external reality. Grounded theory, based on the assumptions of symbolic interactionism, allows for a tapping of sources beyond the phenomenal world i.e., the actions and interactions which have occurred within the individuals under investigation throughout a transition process. A strictly empirical, quantitative approach would fail to capture the complexity of these actions and interactions and thus would not allow a perspective on this inner world.

The selection of grounded theory is complicated by this having diverged into two schools of thought (Charmaz, 2003, 2006). The founding fathers: Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser developed their joint idea in differing ways. Symbolic interactionism featured in the developmental process due mainly to the influence of Anselm Strauss, who was University

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of Chicago trained where there was a strong ethnographic emphasis. However, a strongly positivistic influence on the development of the method was contributed by Barney Glaser, who had a positivist and quantitative background at Columbia University. Given this history, a brief synopsis of the development of grounded theory is therefore appropriate:

### **2.1.2 History of Grounded Theory**

The term 'grounded theory' has come to mean not only theory grounded in the data, but also to describe a method for the analysis of qualitative data (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1997). As such, grounded theory is an analytic process during which general principles are uncovered in the data. In some cases, a substantive theory is developed from this process.

The development of grounded theory as a method in the 1960s, was the result of a reaction to the then dominance of quantitative methods. This dominance led the sociologists Glaser and Strauss (Glaser & Strauss, 1965, 1967, 1968; Strauss & Glaser, 1970) to collaborate in the design of a qualitative method, which would encourage the development of theory at a time when research was often conducted for the purposes of 'theory testing' (Charmaz, 1995). Such theory-testing research rarely led to new theory construction, and it often failed to take account of how reality was viewed by the participants themselves (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1997). In contrast to then prevailing orthodoxy, Glaser and Strauss proposed that qualitative methods could produce theory, that data collection and analysis should be concurrent processes and that qualitative research could be systematic. Indeed, in developing grounded theory, Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggested that the method is compatible with positivist assumptions i.e., that the researcher can capture the social and psychological relationships which exist objectively in the world, and which can be built into theory.

As already indicated, the paradigm which guided the development of grounded theory was strongly influenced by the roots of the authors; Glaser, with a positivist and quantitative background, and Strauss with a background in field research and symbolic interactionism. Glaser and Strauss's (1967) first book, *The Discovery of Grounded*



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Theory, details the methods used in their research on dying in hospitals (see Glaser & Strauss, 1965), and was the first formal introduction to the method. Since that first explication, the two authors have produced several more books, but not as co-authors. After a clash of ideas, they each pursued the development of grounded theory independently. Anselm Strauss took a systematic approach in his later works, including the 1987 book *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists*, and in his work alongside Juliet Corbin to produce *Basics of Qualitative Research* (1990, 1998). Meanwhile, Barney Glaser continued to develop what he saw as the 'true' grounded theory (Glaser, 1978, 1992, 1998, 1999). Much has been written about the differences between the two approaches and the discrepancies between Glaserian and Straussian grounded theory. A full discussion of the historical development of these differences will not be entered into here, but interested readers are referred to Charmaz (2003). Heath and Cowley (2004) also provide a useful discussion, and highlight that Straussian methods are often favoured by novice researchers:

Glaser (1978) had extended grounded theory beyond the original text (Glaser and Strauss 1967) to explain in more detail concepts such as theoretical sampling, theoretical coding and use of theoretical memos, but it was Strauss and Corbin (1990) who focused on developing the analytic techniques and providing guidance to novice researchers (p.142).

Glaser (1998) argued that in developing technique, Strauss and Corbin (1990) had developed a different method, which he referred to as a forcing of the data and 'full conceptual description' (Glaser, 1992). As Charmaz (2003) points out, Glaser is correct that his is the 'true' grounded theory, only if original versions should set the standard, and suggests that grounded theory can be flexible and is used flexibly by different researchers, as was suggested by Glaser and Strauss in their 1967 work (Charmaz, 2006). The second edition of Strauss and Corbin's *Basics of Qualitative Research* (1998) was improved by a somewhat less rigid approach than contained in the first edition, whilst the more complicated writing style adopted by Glaser in his books has meant that Strauss and Corbin's version of grounded theory appears to be utilised in research to a greater degree (Charmaz, 2003).

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In choosing between the Glaserian and Straussian versions of grounded theory for the present study, the practical application of Strauss and Corbin (1998) appealed to this researcher, whose research training had been largely dominated by a quantitative background and a use of structured procedures. Thus, as Heath and Cowley (2004) suggest; rather than debate the relative merits of Glaser and Strauss's approaches, novice researchers should adopt the method that best suits their cognitive style, and the practical application of the method was a factor in this researcher's decision making.

In addition to the differences in the ease of application between Glaserian and Straussian grounded theory, there also exists a slight shift in epistemology which attracted the author to Straussian grounded theory and which deserves discussion. Both Glaser and Strauss's positions have their ideological roots in positivism: in their earliest publication introducing grounded theory in 1967, Glaser and Strauss implied that reality is independent of the observer and the methods used to produce it. This positivist stance has been sustained to some extent both by Glaser, and Strauss and Corbin, since the works of both are written as distanced experts, as is the norm for empirical science (Charmaz, 2003). However, Glaser's later developments of grounded theory are judged by commentators to be more closely aligned with traditional positivism (Charmaz, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). For example, Glaser suggests that grounded theorists should aim to produce theories with explanatory power i.e., generalisable theories on which predictions can be made - one of the aims of traditional positivist theory development (Charmaz, 2006), whereas whilst Strauss and Corbin (1998) talk of explaining and predicting phenomena, they also acknowledge the role of interpretation in theory development. Furthermore, Strauss and Corbin refer to reaching a balance between objectivity, to arrive at an impartial and accurate interpretation of events, and "sensitivity to perceive the subtle nuances and meanings in data and to recognise the connections between concepts" (p.42-43). They talk of objectivity as meaning a 'willingness to listen', giving a voice to the participants and representing the participants' experiences as accurately as possible, whilst acknowledging that:

[The] researchers' understandings often are based on the values, culture, training, and experiences that they bring to the research situations and that these might be

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quite different from those of their respondents. Over the years, we have wrestled with the problem of objectivity and have developed some techniques to increase our awareness and to help us control the intrusion of bias into analysis while retaining sensitivity to what is being said in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 43).

Even so, Strauss and Corbin are not promoting a significant shift away from positivism and they continue to maintain that a form of objective external reality is accessible through application of their version of grounded theory. More accurately, they lean towards a post-positivist approach (Charmaz, 2003). This, therefore, situates them within a more interpretivist style of theory development than can be said for Glaser. This divergence may be due to Strauss's Chicago School background in symbolic interactionism.

In the context of this study, it is important to re-emphasise that symbolic interactionism sees the human being as active in the construction of their own objective reality (rather than determined, as assumed in much of natural science) and consequently places emphasis on an understanding of the actions and interactions of the individual, including those that occur within the individual. Human beings thus construct their own realities through inter- and intra- person interaction (Charon, 1995). It is to these actions and interactions which Strauss and Corbin (1998) are keen to sensitise grounded theorists.

The post-positivist adaptation of grounded theory has been championed by authors such as Kathy Charmaz, who has accepted Glaser and Strauss's (1967) invitation for the researcher to use grounded theory strategies in their own way. Charmaz (2003) argues that there is a continuum between objectivist and constructivist grounded theory in terms of the researcher's approach, with Glaser at the objectivist end, and Strauss and Corbin situated towards a more constructivist approach. Accordingly, the method can be adopted whether the researcher is working from an objectivist or constructivist approach (Charmaz, 2006). Charmaz draws upon the roots of grounded theory, within the symbolic interactionist theoretical paradigm, in taking a constructivist social scientific perspective which assumes that people construct the realities in which they participate. In her own

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research, Charmaz situates herself further along the objectivist-constructivist continuum than Strauss and Corbin, in assuming the existence of multiple social realities, and that knowledge is created in the interaction between the researcher and the researched. Charmaz (2003) thus strives for an interpretive understanding of the meanings of respondents:

Researchers can use grounded theory methods to further their knowledge of subjective experience and to expand its representation while neither remaining external from it nor accepting objectivist assumptions and procedures. A constructivist grounded theory assumes that people create and maintain meaningful worlds through dialectical processes of conferring meaning on their realities and acting within them. Thus social reality does not exist independent of human action (p. 269).

Charmaz claims that the use of constructivist grounded theory enables the researcher to provide an interpretive portrayal of the world they are studying rather than a picture of one external reality or truth. The participants' views and the researcher's finished theories are constructions of reality, and theory produced from constructivist grounded theory sits very much in the interpretive tradition (Charmaz, 2006).

Glaser, according to Charmaz, (2006), despite his insistence that grounded theory not be seen as a verification method, sits clearly at the objectivist end of her continuum, treating data as wholly separate from the researcher and thus implying that data are without interpretation. Glaser suggests that the researcher will be able to take an objective view by looking at many cases. For Charmaz, this goes against the essence of the constructivist approach to grounded theory.

The author of this research project identifies with Charmaz's approach since the positivist notions assumed by natural science which have so heavily influenced social science in the last century (as highlighted by Charon, 1995) often fail to take into account the nature of human experience. It would be impossible to gain a rich understanding of the experience of athletes through transition without acknowledging this. Given the above, and in designing the present study, the current researcher aligned herself (guided by the

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notions of symbolic interactionism and the above described appropriateness of these for the study of within-career transition) with Straussian rather than Glaserian grounded theory, i.e., toward a constructivist rather than objectivist grounded theory approach. The researcher's aim was to capture and interpret the social world of the participants; to interpret the perceptions which the athletes had of their transition from junior to senior level; the perceptions which they had constructed based on their own lived experience. By taking this approach, the researcher was not assuming a unidimensional external reality which could be objectively observed, but rather attempting to study and interpret the social worlds of the participants as constructed by them (Charmaz, 2003). By using grounded theory methods in this way, the researcher could access information which quantitative research would be unable to uncover, through a systematic process.

### *Systematic Process*

The appeal of grounded theory to researchers, including those more familiar with quantitative methods, is, at least in part, that it constitutes a systematic approach. But the ability to play an active role in the research process, which this methodology encourages, is also a factor. Strauss and Corbin (1998) assert that the researcher must constantly strive to ask questions of the data, such as 'what is going on here?', 'how do the actors define their situation, what is the meaning to them?', in order to gain an understanding of the participants' worlds. The researcher must also interpret the data and make theoretical comparisons in order to explore the properties and dimensions of concepts which emerge from the data. The process begins with a research area and builds the theoretical analysis on the basis of what is discovered to be relevant, in the 'actual worlds' of the individuals being studied (Charmaz, 1995). Through these procedures there is some order (albeit not necessarily sequential) to the data analysis and theory-building process, which challenges the view of "qualitative analysis as only intuitive and impressionistic and of quantitative analysis as exclusively rigorous and systematic" (Charmaz, 1995, p. 28). Grounded theory is an iterative process through which more data are collected until concepts are saturated i.e., no further information is discovered which adds to the understanding of the properties or dimensions of concepts, or the relationships between concepts. As data collection and analysis progresses, the researcher uncovers the relationships between

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concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). These relationships are deemed important in the understanding of a process such as transition.

The above discussion has covered the perspective which underpins this research, and the appropriateness of the qualitative and methodological approach for this study of within-career transition. However, the adoption of grounded theory required several additional considerations which will now be rehearsed.

### *Reviewing of the Literature*

A debate exists amongst grounded theory methodologists about the use of literature in research (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Some texts, including Glaser and Strauss (1967), and Glaser (1978), have argued that a literature review should be suspended until near to the end of, or made subsequent to the completion of the analysis. The rationale behind this stance is that a broad literature review may taint the researcher's perceptions of the data and therefore affect the findings. However, others acknowledge that whilst it may be useful to suspend such a review, it may not always be possible. Indeed there may have been a shift in Strauss's position, since Strauss and Corbin (1998) point out that, a "background in professional and disciplinary literature" (p.48) is likely, and state that what is most important when attempting to make new discoveries and generate theory (with prior knowledge of the literature or not), is endeavouring to allow the data to generate theory without being biased by existing knowledge. Indeed, in the opinion of the researcher it is impossible, whatever one's background, to approach the data without prior knowledge and personal perspectives are, as a consequence, likely to result in individual differences in interpretations of the data. The researcher must however try to acknowledge any biases they have, and learn to challenge their own interpretations (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

A knowledge of prior literature can potentially bias, and therefore inhibit the researcher's ability to understand the world in the terms of their participants (Charmaz, 2003); an ability crucial to the study of social processes. With regard to the use of literature in grounded theory research, bias can also take the form of a failure to acknowledge

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competing researchers' ideas which might undermine the current research (Charmaz, 2006). In the current study, the researcher had prior knowledge of the career transition literature as a result of previous research in the area. However, several strategies were used by the researcher to guard against bias in the analysis as a result of this prior knowledge and these are described in detail in the method section which follows. For example, one aim of the research programme was to collect rich data (i.e., with great detail and meaning), which makes it easier for the researcher to interpret the respondents' point of view (Charmaz, 1995), and therefore to represent the respondents' world, using their language and their meanings in the analysis. Any bias could potentially reduce the transparency of this process and therefore considerable effort has been made to mitigate such an effect, so that the interpretation of each participant's conception of their world is revealed, in their own terms, as accurately as possible.

### **2.1.3 Hypotheses**

In keeping with the aforementioned precautionary approach, no specific hypotheses were identified in advance of the research, since the generation of hypotheses could have biased the researcher's approach. Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest that the use of hypotheses within grounded theory research should occur *during* the analysis, when the researcher can identify and test ideas about how concepts are related on the basis of suggestions within the data. Instead a broad research aim was formulated (as cited in Chapter One of this thesis) to guide the design of Study One, as follows: To gain an understanding of the experience of athletes at the junior-to-senior transition in sport.

## **2.2 METHODOLOGY**

### **2.2.1 Design**

As the aim of this study was to examine athletes' perceptions of the transition from junior to senior level, a qualitative approach using grounded theory methodology was deemed most appropriate. Interviews were employed, as these were considered the optimal source of rich data regarding the transition experience.

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### **2.2.2 Participants**

Of the nine participants (four male and five female), two were tennis players, four squash players and three equestrians ( $M$  age = 24.5 years,  $S.D.$  = 4.3 years). A profile of each participant is provided below (to protect the identity of participants, pseudonyms have been adopted). With the exception of participant 9 (Eddy), all participants were currently competing at senior level on the professional circuit in their respective sport and were funded by their national governing body and/or the world class national lottery system which operates in Great Britain.

**Participant 1:** Scott had a world tennis ranking of 570 at the time of interview, when he was aged 19 years and 10 months. As a junior, Scott had reached the quarter finals of a junior grand slam event, and had considerable national junior success. His senior successes at the time of interview included winning a \$10,000 tournament on the Futures tennis circuit.

**Participant 2:** Jane was 23 years, 0 months at the time of her interview. As a junior event rider, she had represented Great Britain four times, winning 2 gold, and 2 silver medals. Jane had been selected for one senior international team competition, and had competed at four-star level (the highest level in eventing).

**Participant 3:** Carolina was ranked 17 in the world squash rankings at the time of interview, and was 20 years and 9 months old. As a junior she had won the junior national title twice and was World Junior Team Champion.

**Participant 4:** A squash player ranked number nine in the senior world rankings, Nikki was 22 years and 7 months old at the time of interview. As a junior, she had won seven junior national titles, and had been European Junior Champion and World Junior Team Champion.

**Participant 5:** Hattie was ranked number four in the senior world squash rankings at the time of interview, aged 25 years and 8 months. As a junior she was World Champion.



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Participant 6: Markus was 24 years and 3 months at the time of interview, when he was 35th in the world squash rankings. As a junior, Markus won a national title, and was European Team Champion.

Participant 7: Amy, a showjumping rider, had represented Great Britain as a junior, as well as on a senior team in 2005 where she had won a team silver medal. She was aged 29 years and 8 months at the time of her interview.

Participant 8: Andy won gold and silver medals at junior European Championships in eventing, as well as two national junior titles. As a senior, he had competed at four-star level. He was 32 years and 11 months old at the time of interview. Andy was selected through theoretical sampling to further explore the long-term process of transition because he had competed as a senior for longer than the other participants.

Participant 9: Eddy had discontinued his participation on the senior tennis tour, having reached a singles ranking of 1100 and a doubles ranking of 900. He was aged 22 years and 2 months at the time of interview. As a junior, he reached the second round of a junior Grand Slam event. Eddy had recently retired from full time competition as he had not made the progress he had hoped for at senior level. Theoretical sampling led the researcher to include a participant who had not made the progress hoped for at senior level.

### **2.2.3 Data Collection Procedure**

Participants were contacted via their national governing body or via contacts with coaches which the researcher had made through applied sport psychology work. Initially the selection criteria for participants included those athletes who had made their transition to senior level within the last three years. However, subsequent theoretical sampling led to the inclusion of athletes who had made the transition more than three years previously. Participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, and signed an informed consent form prior to their participation. In addition, they provided some demographic

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information which could be used to provide context as to their history in the sport (see Appendix A [pp. 339-341], for participant information, consent form and demographic information request sheet). For the purpose of 'bounding' each participant within the time frame of their recent transition (Hindley, 1979; Moss, 1979), each participant, as part of the ensuing process, also provided information concerning their junior and senior careers and the approximate date at which they considered their transition to senior level had commenced.

### *Interview Guide*

An interview guide was developed on the basis of three unstructured interviews with coaches who had experience of the junior- to-senior transition in sport. Two of these also had direct personal experience of the transition. The interviews were conducted with a former Olympic hockey player and current coach, a former professional tennis player and current coach and a current national tennis coach. Unstructured interviews typically involve a list of topics of issues to be covered and the questioning style is usually informal (Bryman, 2001). Given the ultimate goal of research findings truly grounded in athletes' experiences, the researcher was mindful to segregate earlier research experience in this area, with the associated sensitivity to the limited existing literature, from the development of the interview guide. Therefore, the objective in these informal interviews was to form an interview guide for the main study which was based on direct experiences with the relevant transition, rather than on pre-existing literature. This literature was not returned to until preliminary findings had been made, as recommended by grounded theorists (e.g., Charmaz, 1995). The interviewees in these unstructured preliminary interviews were asked very broad questions such as: "Can you describe your transition from junior to senior level, or your experiences with those you have coached through this transition?", and "What advice would you give someone who wants to make the transition?". These questions were chosen so as not to lead the respondents with direct questions which might be biased by the researcher's previous knowledge in the area of career transition.

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From the preliminary unstructured interviews, four main areas were highlighted for the interview guide, which led the athlete in a temporal sequence through their transition. The resultant, semi-structured interview guide was influenced by the recommendations of Patton (2002), using open questions and identifying prompts and probes. A semi-structured format was deemed appropriate, to provide a broad set of questions through which to take the interviewee, and one which could not only vary in sequence according to the flow of the interview, but also allow the interviewee to highlight relevant or additional information. Such a construction equally accommodates the addition of, or upon saturation of concepts, the removal of questions as the study progresses, as is consistent with grounded theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The guide consisted of an introductory segment which began with a warm-up question designed to build rapport, and which focused on the participant's introduction to their sport. Participants were then asked about their junior career, and this led on to their junior-senior transition. The next section of the interview guide focused on factors which the participant perceived had facilitated their transition, and the challenges they had faced. The fourth and final section focused on how, based on their own experiences, the participants believed that further support could have helped them, or how talent loss at this stage could be minimised. In accordance with Strauss and Corbin (1990), questions within the interview guide became progressively more focused, and modifications were made as data collection and analysis progressed, in order to reach saturation in all areas.

### *Pilot Interview*

A pilot interview was conducted with a senior county and England cricket player. The pilot highlighted ways in which the interview guide could be improved by making minor changes to the order and wording of certain questions. In addition, the pilot interview was recorded and transcribed, and the transcription reviewed by the researcher's supervisor, who had experience in qualitative interviewing. Critical feedback was provided by the supervisor of the researcher's interview procedure and questioning. The interview guide can be found in Appendix A (pp. 342-343).

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### *Interview Procedure*

The interviews began with an introduction explaining the purpose and rationale behind the study, assurances of confidentiality, and an explanation of the interview process. Interviews were arranged at a time and location convenient to the participant and ranged in duration from 40 to 80 minutes. They were recorded using a digital Dictaphone for an accurate record.

As highlighted hitherto, in order to aid the participants' recall and to ensure accurate responses, the interviewer attempted to 'bound' (Hindley, 1979; Moss, 1979) the participant to the time frames of their individual transition, using the approximate start date provided. In addition, questions focused on rebuilding the larger context from that time also helped to anchor the interviewee within that time period, encouraging them to draw out relevant aspects of their transition experience (Hindley, 1979). Participants were informed that there were no right or wrong answers, and they were asked to take their time responding to questions and to tell the interviewer if they could not remember or did not understand the question. Alongside the semi-structured interview questions, specific probes were identified for clarification and elaboration of a specific point (Patton, 2002) in order to promote depth in responses. These specific probes were formulated for each question and encouraged participants to elaborate on their responses e.g., "What was their role?" and "How did you cope with that?"

A reflective log was completed after each interview, to transcribe noted information about the respondent and interviewer's affect and the interviewer's feelings about how the interview went. This information was recorded so as to provide greater context to the data, for use during the analysis, and also to help the researcher to monitor and evaluate her role as 'research instrument' (Patton, 2002). The same interviewer conducted all of the interviews, and a standardised procedure was used. Thus the interpretations made were consistently those of the primary researcher.

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#### 2.2.4 Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and subjected to analysis using grounded theory methods. Computer software was used to facilitate the analysis and therefore a brief introduction to such software is appropriate.

##### *Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Software Analysis (CAQDAS)*

Analysis using grounded theory principles is extremely labour intensive. Computer software can decrease this labour and also provide a means for adding transparency to the research process, by making the documenting of information easier and thus more reliable, allowing effort to be directed towards the identification and exploration of rich content. NVivo (Qualitative Research Solutions International, 2000) was chosen because it is designed for use with grounded theory methodology. It allows in-vivo coding, the making and recording of memos, and also includes a modelling tool useful in studies where theory-building is the aim.

There has been considerable debate in the qualitative literature regarding the use of CAQDAS. One criticism is that it produces qualitative research which represents a rigid and automated analysis of text with little human interpretation (e.g., Kelle, 1995). To guard against such criticism, the researcher followed the recommendations of Bringer, Johnstone and Brackenbridge (2004). Importantly, the interpreting and conceptualising of the data and the examination of relationships were merely aided by the software, for it by no means completes the analysis. To document the process, a detailed research trail was retained via the use of memo-making and the saving of dated iterations of the analysis. Such procedures record the temporal process through which the analysis travelled. In this way, it is argued that the tools available within NVivo enhanced the output by enabling the researcher more easily to organise data, keep records, revisit categories and explore relationships (Weitzman, 2000). Nevertheless, Bringer et al. (2004) argue that the value of CAQDAS ultimately is dependent upon the skills of the researcher, including how the researcher chooses to use available tools, and indeed how CAQDAS is taught. For this reason, considerable time was spent appraising the available software options and

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learning how to use the chosen software, including attendance on a relevant training course.

### *Data Analysis Process*

The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. Analysis began after the first interview was completed. However, due to practical limitations resulting from the organisation of interviews around participants' schedules, it was not always possible to complete the analysis of an interview prior to conducting the next interview. Analysis broadly consisted of: microanalysis and open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. These were employed in a loose temporal sequence, with some overlap between stages. Memo-making and modelling were used throughout the analysis to record information and to facilitate the exploration of relationships between categories. The researcher's theoretical and coding decisions were recorded in memos, along with definitions of a category, its properties, underlying assumptions, and suggested relationships. Memos were dated, so that the temporal process of the analysis was recorded. This allowed changes in the properties of a category to be tracked by those reviewing the analysis. In the latter stages, data in the form of quotes from the interview transcripts were imported into the memos, to document the various theoretical decisions and to prompt further interrogation of the data by the researcher. The process of memo-making makes the development of a grounded theory more transparent, by providing an audit trail on which the researcher's interpretations of the data can be evaluated (Bringer et al., 2004). Writing memos also served to support the researcher in clarifying categories and ideas, identifying how they fitted together and reviewing assumptions throughout.

### *Coding Procedure*

The principles used to code the data follow the grounded theory methodology as outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998) and are explained in more detail below:

### *Microanalysis and Open Coding*

The analysis began with open coding, in which names are given to objects within the data. Initially, open coding was done through microanalysis, whereby data are read,

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examined and named phrase by phrase and sometimes word by word. Names were allocated based upon the actions or events occurring or represented in the data. In this phase, the researcher must examine the data, ask themselves questions about these and eventually group data into categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Through this taxonomy the researcher remains engaged with the data (Charmaz, 1995), and must consider interpretations carefully. Such careful consideration is necessary to be sure that the labels assigned fit what is represented in the data (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1997). Therefore, open coding was crucial to ensuring that the analysis remained grounded in the data. Where concepts were applied from the researcher's discipline, questions were asked of the label and the data to ensure that the concepts truly explained what was happening (Charmaz, 1995). Such questioning of labels also highlighted factors that needed to be sampled for, either within the data or in subsequent interviews, or areas of previously coded transcripts that warranted re-analysis.

The open-coding process became more focused as the analysis progressed, with identified codes being applied to larger amounts of data. In addition, similar concepts were grouped together into categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), and either re-labelled or, in some cases, select codes were raised to category status if the code adequately described the data in that category. This process is less open-ended and more selective than the initial open coding phase.

### *Axial Coding*

The identification of properties and dimensions was an ongoing process which continued throughout the analysis process. Memos were updated throughout, to track the evolution of categories and their properties. However, during the axial coding phase, the relationships between categories were considered in more detail. These were evaluated throughout the analysis process and notes were made in the memos during the open-coding phase. Once categories were identified, it was possible to check their validity, add to, and refine them through re-examination of the data.

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During the above stages, each interview transcript was read and re-read, and towards the end of the axial coding stage, the properties and relationships of each category were thoroughly checked by reviewing the data coded in that particular category. These processes ensured that the analysis was firmly grounded in the data. Importantly, each concept in grounded theory methodology must earn its way into the theory (for example by repeated exploration through further questions and the search for relationships), in order that researcher bias can be minimised (i.e., that the researcher is not seeing something that is not in the data or interpreting it based on their own biases). At the end of the axial coding phase, the researcher's supervisor checked that the analysis was grounded in the data by reviewing the categories, along with the interview transcripts and considering the proposed properties and relationships. In all cases, the aim was to reach a stage at which no new properties, dimensions or relationships were seen in the data. This phase, according to Strauss and Corbin (1998) should result in saturation of categories, i.e., when no further properties or core categories are identified or questions left unanswered. Charmaz (2006) emphasises that "grounded theory saturation is not the same as witnessing repetition of the same events or stories" (p.113). Charmaz also cites Dey (1999, p.257) who proposed that an alternative term; of reaching '*theoretical sufficiency*' is preferable to saturation. This means that there comes a point at which the researcher must deem that the data which have been collected and coded (and the properties and relationships identified) are sufficient for the aim of the research, and this was the approach taken here.

### *Selective Coding*

Once all the data were analysed, all remaining questions answered, the properties of each category defined and relationships between categories explored, the final stage of the analysis, selective coding, was reached. Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest that this process involves the identification of central categories which provide the 'core' of the developing theory, around which the other categories are organised. Charmaz (2006) agrees with Strauss and Corbin that certain categories should be raised to represent key concepts, because of their "theoretical reach, incisiveness, generic power, and relation to other categories" (p.139) and this involves detailing their relationships to other



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categories. However, whereas Charmaz asserts that for Strauss and Corbin these concepts hold explanatory and predictive power, she argues that in a constructivist approach, they are interpretive frames whose purpose is to offer an understanding of relationships. The researcher was careful to consider the core themes within the data analysis and to not be drawn into producing an objectivist grounded theory whose aims are generalisation and prediction. Memos were reviewed and any key concepts were identified, by asking questions of the analysis such as ‘what is going on here?’, ‘what is being described through these categories and their relationships?’, and ‘is there a core category, or categories, which represent what is happening here?’

### *Modelling*

Throughout the analysis process, categories were illustrated using NVivo’s modelling tool. This allowed ideas regarding the relationships between concepts and categories to be explored, and was utilised most during the axial coding phase. The final analysis involved the modelling of each category within the wider study, to more clearly identify the relationships between categories.

### *Theoretical Sampling*

As explained by Strauss and Corbin (1998), grounded theory methodology involves selective sampling and collection of data to suit the emerging needs of the study. Theoretical sampling, involves sampling for specific information or cases in order to answer as yet unanswered questions. Various methods can be used for this purpose. For example, as the study progressed, the interview guide was adapted through the addition of or removal of questions. The aim of this theoretical sampling was to complete the understanding of each category’s properties and relationships. In addition, at early stages in the analysis, events within the data were searched for, as questions arose regarding properties and dimensions. As the study progressed to selective coding, individuals or data were selected to maximise or minimise differences. This allowed the researcher to make comparisons between the experiences of different individuals. For this purpose, theoretical sampling led to the recruitment of a tennis player (Eddy) who perceived himself to be unsuccessful in making the transition to senior level (to explore differences

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in the experiences of athletes), and also an event rider (Andy), was recruited who could provide further insight of the continuing process of making progress post-transition, was enlisted due to his greater experience as a senior.

### *Theoretical Comparisons*

The making of theoretical comparisons, used throughout the analysis, is related to theoretical sampling. This involved the comparison of a category in the data with incidents which were very different or very similar, in order to examine the properties and dimensions of a category. Individual cases were juxtaposed, with other cases in the data, or with a source external to the data, which was either related or unrelated to the data. Such a process prompts the researcher to ask questions of the data which may not otherwise have emerged. It also encourages more abstract thinking and forces the researcher to challenge their own assumptions and interpretations (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

### **2.2.5 Evaluation, Trustworthiness and Verification**

The scientific merit of qualitative work remains the subject of debate and it is often difficult for a reviewer to assess its credibility, i.e., how the researcher has reached their conclusions, and the value of those conclusions. Qualitative studies are often evaluated by quantitatively-oriented readers, many of whom will judge the research with the terms of reference used to judge quantitative research. However, many qualitative researchers agree that whilst criteria such as generalisability, reproducibility and verification which are used to judge good quality research apply to both quantitative and qualitative research, some modification is required appropriately to evaluate qualitative research (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

In quantitative research, the credibility of the results depends on instrument construction, whereas in qualitative research, the instrument is the researcher (Patton, 2002). Therefore, judgements regarding the quality and trustworthiness of a grounded theory study should, at least partly, be determined by the process which the researcher undertook in order to reach their result (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). With this consideration in mind,

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the analysis process at the centre of this study has been described in detail, including reference to the strategies used by the researcher to minimise bias and to maximise trustworthiness of the results. Reference has been made to these strategies throughout the detailed description of the analysis process. They include procedures such as: the making of theoretical comparisons, the checking of interpretations and the constant revisions of the analysis. That the whole process was recorded through memo-making adds to the trustworthiness of the results since it adds transparency to the research methodology as well as providing the means by which the researcher could record and continually check (along with the supervisor) interpretations and assumptions, questions asked and the observations and conclusions made (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

Copies of the data analysis were saved at various points in a temporal sequence, and this provided an additional means to check the processes and decisions made. Peer review provides evidence for the credibility of the findings, since engaging in discussions with other researchers helps to guard against bias and often leads to new insights (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Whilst with social phenomena investigated through qualitative research, it may prove difficult to reproduce findings, the fact that an additional researcher should agree with the interpretation of the phenomenon under investigation, suggests that given the same conditions, subsequent research should produce similar results. The researcher's interpretations were checked at three time points (after each coding phase) by the researcher's supervisor - a researcher with experience of qualitative methods. These checks served to ensure that the results remained grounded in the data and offered the opportunity to discuss discrepant findings.

In addition to the above, and further to validate the grounding of the analysis in the data, all participants in the current study were sent a transcribed copy of their interview and asked to verify the accuracy of their transcript. A summary of the data analysis was also sent to the participants, who were asked to comment on the researcher's interpretations as to the extent which they reflected their own experience. An example of the letter sent to participants can be found in Appendix A (p.344).

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### 2.2.6 Generalisability and Reproducibility

The aim of this research was not to create a very broad, general theory, but a substantive one (i.e., for one small area of investigation and from one specific population). In research within a social constructionist paradigm, the theory produced is proposed to generalise to situations where similar conditions apply, whereas in positivist theory development, the aim is for *explanation* and *prediction* based on one objective reality (Charmaz, 2006). Theory development within an interpretive paradigm is not designed to produce broad and general predictions, and indeed this would not be possible because it is assumed there are multiple social realities. The results of this study form only one interpretation, but through careful application of grounded theory methodology, within a social constructionist perspective, the researcher has aimed to identify the complexity of the participants' experiences through the collection of rich data. Furthermore, this has enabled the identification of general patterns and the drawing of broad conclusions, which have relevance for athletes undergoing transition in a similar social world with a similar perspective. In utilising any theory, practitioners and researchers must consider the extent to which the theory applies and where caution must be used in applying it to new situations (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

#### *Reproducibility*

Where social phenomena are under investigation, it is difficult, if not impossible to find two situations where exactly the same conditions exist. Therefore, unlike in the laboratory, it is not possible to reproduce an 'experiment'. However, as already stated, given the same general rules for data collection and analysis, similar conditions, and a researcher with a similar perspective, another researcher should be able to arrive at the same general conclusion (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The thorough description of the procedures adopted should facilitate such reproduction.

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## 2.3 RESULTS

### 2.3.1 Individual Differences

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using grounded theory methodology. The resultant categories reflected a temporal process that spanned the transition period. Variations in the length of the transition period were evident, both within and between sports. For example, Scott, a tennis player, left home at the age of 13 to attend a training academy with the intention of pursuing a career in tennis. He remained at this academy whilst finishing his education, and at 16, he discontinued his schooling to pursue full-time training. Despite beginning his life as a full-time tennis player at this stage, he played mainly on the junior circuit for the following 18 months, beginning senior tournaments at the age of 17. A tennis player is no longer eligible to compete in junior tournaments after the year in which their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday falls, and thus at the end of this year Scott focused entirely on senior tournaments. In contrast, Nikki, a squash player, stayed in education until the age of 18 whilst competing in junior events, and at 18 began her full-time squash career.

In eventing, Andy and Jane terminated their formal education at 16 to pursue a career in their sport. Both riders had represented Great Britain in the Young Rider European Championships for 18-21 year olds, whilst at the same time competing in senior competitions. The structure of eventing dictates that riders of any age, junior or senior may compete in senior eventing competitions, but post age 21, riders are no longer eligible for young-rider events. Although some competitions are restricted to those under 25, in the main, riders over 21 must compete in open competitions.

Whilst the point of transition from junior to senior level in sport may most clearly be represented by the time at which the athlete can no-longer compete in junior competition (and this varies between sports), the point at which the transition was perceived to occur was not as tightly delineated as this definition suggests. Indeed the experience varied amongst athletes, even within the same sport. For different athletes, depending on their individual career paths, the transition point was identified as the moment at which they undertook the lifestyle of a senior athlete and invested themselves in their goal. This

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typically coincided with the discontinuation of their education, or the time at which they no longer participated in junior competition. However, consciously, adaptation to the transition began when the athletes perceived that a senior career was a realistic prospect, which was months before the transition point in some cases. Equally, adaptation continued for a significant time afterwards, reflecting a rather long-term process.

In the results which follow, the key changes experienced by the athletes over the transition period will be explained, thereby demonstrating the process of transition as it occurred, over time. Whilst each athlete's experience was unique to them and their context, several common factors emerged from the data analysis. The process of transition can be represented as the development of an athlete's identity throughout their transition, whilst several additional themes related to the development of the self-identity serve to elucidate the transition process.

### **2.3.2 Identity Development**

The process of transition navigated by the athletes involved a continual development of identity, as a result of their perceptions of various triggers in the environment. In this way, the situation within which the athletes found themselves influenced their identity. The self-perceptions held by the athletes, evolved in accordance with the stage of their transition, their progress and performance, perceptions of themselves relative to other athletes, a feeling of belonging in their environment and their perception of how they were viewed by others. These changes from pre- to post-transition are detailed below, in the time-related manner in which they occurred and this serves to illustrate the building of the participants' senior athletic identity.

#### *Pre-Transition Identity*

As juniors, the athletes were highly committed to their sport, often organising other activities and schoolwork around training and competition. Amy, a showjumping rider, explained that during her junior career, her typical weekly routine outside of school hours was dictated wholly by her sport, and to the detriment of other social activities:

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Whilst I was at school, I used to be getting changed in the car home, to get to, you know, to ride before it got dark, and then, I had to do my homework straight after, I wasn't allowed to have any homework left just to do at the weekend because you know these kids that just leave it all to do at the weekend, but I was at competitions at the weekend, so I wasn't allowed out in the week so I didn't have that social thing that everyone else had.

Eddy also reflected on his commitment to the sport as a junior: "My commitment has been, well I would say quite outstanding really when I was young". Whilst parents and coaches encouraged the junior athletes' motivation, much of it was self-determined. Quotes such as these demonstrate that at a young age, the identities of the athletes were, in large part, consumed by their role in their chosen sport.

A further milestone in the pre-transition identities of these athletes was demonstrated in their early commitment to a career in the sport, and therefore the role of 'athlete'. Markus, for example, explained that he never considered any other path: "I always in my head thought I was going to be a squash player, it was never really...I never really considered...even considered anything else". Similarly, Scott made a commitment to tennis at a very young age without considering alternative roles:

I never actually thought of doing anything else other than play tennis, because I took an interest in it so young, I didn't have time, I wasn't aware to be thinking about what I would do after school, or anything like that, I just thought 'oh, I'm going to play tennis, I'm going to play tennis', even before I moved here at 13 years old, before I did that, I knew I wanted to do that, probably a year before.

### *Decision Making: Triggers*

At a young age, the athletes aspired to a life in their chosen sport which, to a significant extent, came to define their identity. A further defining event in the development of the athletes' identities occurred when they made a firm decision to pursue a career in the sport. Until that point, the idea of being a professional athlete was a dream, but triggers for this decision made the dream seem a possible reality. For some of the athletes this decision was made on the basis of significant junior success. Additional triggers included,

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the offer of funding from the respective national governing body, and the role of the coach through their perception of and representation of, the athlete's potential to succeed at senior level. For Jane, an event rider, it was junior success that triggered the change in perception:

I was always like 'yeah I want to be an event rider' but then after doing the Europeans [Junior European Championships] you know, they're such an eye opener and an amazing experience, so if I did have any doubts, I didn't have any more, you know, I wanted to leave school, I didn't want to do any exams, I just wanted to ride and you know, get a proper kind of career started and get my name out there.

This kind of junior success, therefore, changed the way the athletes viewed themselves, with the consequent perception being that a career as a senior athlete was now within reach. The role of others in developing the commitment to and shaping of this identity was noteworthy; after winning the World Junior Championships, Hattie 'wanted more', and motivated by advice from her coach and the offer of funding from her governing body, she made the decision to pursue squash as a career:

One of the main things was, the winning the world juniors and the great...how great that felt and obviously knowing that I was the best junior in the world at the time. And also the coaches; with the coaches telling me that I was good enough to do it, and obviously, and then the, the money [lottery funding] was going to help me be able to do it. So it was really mainly just that and I enjoyed obviously playing and that buzz I got from the Worlds was so great that it just, I wanted more.

This point at which the career decision was finalised, occurred towards the end of the athletes' junior careers and represented a second defining moment in the athletes' perception of themselves and their roles. It represented a firm commitment to an athletic identity. Often triggered by external factors such as success and somewhat driven by those in their support structure, it was experienced by the athletes firstly as the culmination of the pre-transition phase and secondly as the initial stage of the transition itself, at which the preparation for the transition was seen to begin.



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### *Developing a Senior Identity*

The journey through transition manifested itself as a process of development of the self. Once the commitment to the role of senior athlete had been made, the development of the associated identity began. At inception, the athletes' perception of the self was influenced through comparison with those in their new peer group. The consequent 'small fish in a big pond' perception that symbolised their emergent identity reflected the contrast with the junior identity and recognition of the distance between who they were and the level they were at, and who and where they now wanted to be. This perception of difference was most marked when athletes were no longer eligible to compete at junior level, and was mitigated where a gradual integration of senior competitions with junior events occurred during the pre-transition phase. Over time, the changes associated with competing on the senior tour became more familiar and, helped by some success at that level, the athletes felt more comfortable in their new environment; there was a sense of belonging there. Carolina, a squash player, found the initial prospect of competing against athletes whom she had idolised as a junior, quite daunting:

At first it's a bit scary going on to court...all these players that you've sort of looked up to, the top players and its like 'Oh I could actually be playing them [laughs], like one day' erm, but you get used to it obviously.

Similarly, Amy suggested that leaving junior competition was a shock: "You find, out of your little fishpond, you know, 'people are a lot better than me', you know, and that can be not as nice". However, over time, the participants' perception of themselves in relation to their new peer group evolved, encompassing a degree of role reversal; the athletes perceived competitors in a different way, as Eddy articulates:

When I was young, I was looking up to these guys when they were in the position I am now, at my age, thinking, 'Jesus, they're old aren't they, look at them, you know, I'm playing against an older guy today, you know, he's gonna be good', whereas now, the roles are reversed and its kind of like 'oh god, who am I playing, I haven't got a clue' and then you go out and lose and you think 'who are you?, you know, to come and beat me', so from that point of view it's bizarre.

In addition to the realignment associated with attaining the status of a senior and recognising oneself as such, the athletes were also sensitive to their role changes, such as

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that from school-pupil and junior athlete to an individual whose sport was their job and their career. Accompanying this change came pressure, as Nikki highlighted:

People are a lot more professional in the senior game, as you would imagine, erm whereas juniors its a bit, bit like - a bit, it's a bit more fun, because you've still got your school, it's not, it's not actually your job, erm but as a senior, like that is how it is, you know, that's how you make your living so there's a lot more pressure on - you feel the pressure a lot more as a senior I think.

When the athletes felt that they had established themselves at senior level, and they were a key part of their new environment, their identity shifted to reflect that status. This occurred, for example when athletes began competing at the same level as their former idols. However, as Jane explained, this identity was still subject to change in the aftermath of the transition. A setback, such as an injury, which took her out of high-level senior competition, meant that the way she viewed herself changed again. She felt 'little', a 'small fish' again, and not until she returned to top level competition could that identity be rebuilt:

When my top horse was out, and I wasn't doing the big three days and doing the kind of more, you know, big events, you kind of, you did feel a bit like yeah, I'm getting slightly forgotten now, whereas when you're in young riders, sort of everything goes on, you're always there in people's faces and you don't get forgotten....But then, you know, this spring the horse came back and was second in his first event and all of a sudden you're like, yeah, we're back and they're like 'oh where are you going?' and you say, oh you know, 'aiming for Badminton again' and you're kind of, you're not such a small fish anymore, if that makes sense, just once you've got your kind of top horse back there, I don't know, this year I didn't feel quite so kind of little if that makes sense.

Setbacks such as this were common in the athletes' careers, and this dictated that transition progress was rarely linear. Consequently, the identity of the athletes was not stable and continued to be redefined as a result of these, and other, events and in response to athlete's perceptions of their own situation and of how they were viewed by those around them. A constantly developing identity, therefore defines the transition for these athletes.

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The events and changes inherent in the transition which also triggered the evolving of identity are elaborated in the following sections.

### **2.3.3 Preparing for Transition: Becoming Immersed**

Developing a senior identity pre-transition involved an intense learning period, during which the athletes immersed themselves in their new environments and began to assimilate and develop coping skills for the changes that they faced. Furthermore, the interlude between their resolving to pursue a senior career and making a firm commitment to the senior ranks, was identified by participants as a preparation phase for transition, although learning and adjustment nevertheless continued after the point of transition. Those who engaged in this learning process in *advance* developed a sense of readiness and perceived an easier transition. For those who undertook little or no preparation pre-transition, their readiness for transition was lower. These athletes had to learn about, develop coping skills for, and adjust to the demands of the transition whilst competing and training at senior level, and this inhibited transition progress and senior achievements.

Becoming immersed in their new environment meant gathering information, and observing and modelling senior behaviour, on and off the competitive ground. Older senior athletes and also coaches played an important role in transition preparation and adjustment, being key sources of knowledge. Those who enjoyed significant junior success were often exposed to low-level senior tournaments before their transition, and this provided an ideal opportunity to gather information and learn about their prospective environment. Opportunities were sought where immersion in the new environment was possible, and where questions could be asked, observations made, and modelling of senior performers could take place. Nikki succinctly highlighted the importance of using the final phase of her junior career for this purpose: "Play as many [senior] tournaments as you can and then in the tournaments like 'suck in' as much, kind of, from the players around you".

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With the advantage of such a rehearsal for what is to come, athletes could more quickly acclimatise to the new environment, allowing them more easily to focus on maximising their performances. In gathering preliminary information, athletes developed awareness about the lifestyle and performance demands of their new circumstances. Andy, an event rider, made every effort in the final years of his junior career to gather information about his new environment, perceiving that this had facilitated his progress at transition:

It was so easy for me, as it was compared to a lot of people that want to get into the sport and do it professionally, I just happened to, like I said, I thought the best way was to learn all about it was from being a groom, find out what went on, the training of the horses, you know, the whole, the whole thing, and then my train of thought at that point [was] 'if I go and do that, then maybe I can gain enough experience'...Basically listen to anybody that's got any idea of what's going on and what, all the ups and downs and be big enough and brave enough to go and ask their advice and also listen to what they have to say, I think that's, I can't sort of say enough that if you can take on board what other people have experienced, and listen to good advice then I think that gets you a long way.

Hattie also pro-actively sought information from all sources she found available, to learn about her prospective environment:

I made sure [that] I spoke to a lot of, a lot of the older players and went out of my way to go and sit and chat with them and I asked, I spoke to the coaches a lot about it and I made sure that if there was a question, that I asked as many questions as I could so I knew - so I knew exactly what they thought about the circuit and things like that. So, that did help....I just asked them about how they get to the tournaments and things that I wasn't too sure about and where they stayed and how, how you enter the tournaments, I asked everything I could think of to some of them, and I, that did, that gave me a great deal, a lot of information, which was helpful so I went into it knowing that I had sort of got a few - answers.

Whereas senior athletes and coaches provided the junior athletes with information about their new lifestyle, as well as tangible advice, such as how to enter tournaments and how to prepare for competitions and guidance regarding technical performance, coaches also encouraged athletes to raise their performance to a senior standard. In some cases this

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lifting of performance standards was a gradual progression over many junior years, culminating in participation at low level senior tournaments as a junior, in order for the athlete to get a taste for senior sport and prepare themselves for the higher performance demands. Some coaches also encouraged their athletes to train with existing senior athletes, which in turn provided opportunities for information gathering.

With the support of their coaches and, sometimes training with more senior athletes, the athletes practised at a higher level, with the goal of senior competition in mind. On reflection, Carolina recalled how her coach had been preparing her, without her realising it at the time: "I probably wasn't aware of it at the time, that he [my coach] was actually sort of developing me as a senior player".

Hattie recalled the benefits that arose from playing low-level senior tournaments as a junior. The experience enabled her to absorb the senior culture, whilst learning about the senior game and the lifestyle, thereby enhancing her preparation and helping her to begin to feel a part of her new in-group and of the general environment at senior level:

I think [playing senior tournaments] helped - it helped me with the, with the travelling and the getting to know, yeah, getting to know people, cos there were a few girls there that were top 10, top 5 in the world that I ended up playing and I learnt a lot from, from playing them and chatting to them in the changing room after, and they sort of, asking them about the tour and what goes on, and, and getting a good insight into it, and obviously I had to get to Germany on my own which isn't very far but at least - I, that was a bit of a journey that I did and you sort of think, oh I can, I can do that, I can go anywhere now [laughs]. So [it] makes, it did make it easier.

Carolina was encouraged by her coach to seek opportunities to play against older senior athletes in order to gain an idea of the performance pressures at senior level:

I've been with him [my coach] since I was 12 and even at a junior age he used to get me on court with them [senior players], people who were like, if I was 15 they would be like 24, so that would be quite scary. I was like 'oh my god I'm playing this lady who's like number 5 in the world', so that used to be quite scary but that

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was good I think, just to see what these players are like and how they play which is a really good help.

Coaches thus played a role in training for the transition and giving advice, especially for the first senior competitions, as Carolina revealed when reflecting on her preparation for her first senior tournaments:

Obviously the main help was my coach. I'd go and see him like three times a week or so and, and training with him, everything's like attention to detail, preparing, practising properly so when you go away you're doing what you practised on court so its not just about knocking around, which is probably what we did in junior, at junior level.

In addition to gathering information from their senior peers and coaches, junior athletes and neophyte senior athletes observed and modelled senior athletes. Being around these athletes provided an opportunity for this modelling to take place. Conversely, Markus, who failed to engage in pre-transition preparation, found that observation and modelling of his senior peers was a useful strategy through which to learn what he *should* be doing, after initially modelling the behaviour of less professional athletes:

When you first start, you're playing like the really small tournaments erm and generally the people who are in those tournaments are the people, like yourself who have just started on the circuit or guys that really don't take it that seriously erm so its, err, so its - quite an unprofessional atmosphere there as well. It was more when you err, when I started to get into bigger tournaments and suddenly you notice, these guys aren't going out all the time, you know they're not doing all that sort of, they're actually sort of they're, erm, looking after themselves, and that was when I sort of realised that well if I want to do that I've got to, I'm going to have to start being a bit more professional.

Later, Markus began modelling the behaviour of his more professional peers. This modelling of other players' behaviour was vitally important in his transition but, for benefit, role models must be modelling the right behaviours:

If you're going to tournaments you're looking to see what everyone else is doing and you're sort of - you're copying what they do because obviously you're new and you don't really know sort of how it all works and obviously they're going

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out [and] not really taking it that seriously, erm, so I think you just need to get away from that as soon as possible.

In addition to providing a behavioural template, the senior progress of a role model was used as a guide to the setting of goals. Such skills served as a way to evaluate and manage the aspiring athlete's progress, in comparison with peers:

I have a sheet of Tim Henman's rankings, that I got hold of about a year ago, it was where he was today, dated back to his first year out of juniors, it had all his rankings at the end of the year...at the end of his last year of juniors he was like - 730 or something, so that, that was the ranking I set myself as a target, I beat it, so - and then his ranking at the end of his first year out of juniors was 430, so, which is a pretty big jump in one year, so I've set myself the target at the end of this year to be inside the top 450. If I do that I'll be in good shape, so I just think that that keeps me moving forward.

### **Developing Readiness**

Preparation for transition fostered a feeling of readiness for the challenge. The well prepared athletes felt more comfortable in a new environment which they had strived to understand, and in anticipation of which they had developed relevant skills and behaviours. Through such a process of immersion and the development of transition-related behaviours such as independence, responsibility and professionalism, the role of senior athlete was adopted.

This strategy drew on a dynamic, two-way process, in that being in close proximity to senior athletes meant that preparation to follow their example, could take place through immersion in the environment. Equally, senior athletes were perceived to accept the new athlete as member of their cohort, albeit junior. Amy recalled the time when she felt accepted as a senior: "Doing it day-in day-out, they just get to know you and then, you know, you're just accepted".

The participants' readiness for transition was also demonstrated in their ability to cope with and adjust to the performance and lifestyle demands of their new context. Through

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being comfortable and feeling accepted in the new environment, the athletes were more able to cope with the adjustments required of them. For example, lifestyle changes included travelling to and preparing for competitions alone. Organisational responsibilities had previously fallen to accompanying parents and coaches. At senior level, such tangible support decreased as the athletes were expected to take more responsibility for their careers and to become more independent:

Obviously the travelling is a big thing because when you're a junior you, you travel with a team. The only time I ever really went away - apart from a couple of tournaments, I was either with my parents or with coaches and the team, whereas, then you, [in seniors] obviously, you start travelling on your own...flying off to different places on your own (Hattie).

The athletes realised (often prior to and in anticipation of their transition), the requirement to adjust their lifestyle and attitude to match that of their senior peers i.e., to behave more 'professionally'. As previously mentioned, the observing and modelling of senior athletes pre-transition allowed insight of the demands of the senior environment and therefore encouraged a sense of readiness for the transition by nurturing the skills to cope with these demands:

In juniors you're surrounded by people who are beginning as a senior. I noticed how a lot more professional the girls were as you go on, a lot of the girls actually did their own thing, they still had mates but when it came to the match they knew what they were doing. Like they'd have their set routine and things like that (Nikki).

Athletes who failed to develop the skills which facilitated readiness at this early stage, due, for example, to lack of pre-transition contact with senior athletes, perceived that their transition progress was delayed. Markus, who was injured during the final stages of his junior career, was not able to immerse himself in the senior environment pre-transition. His time away from the sport led him to engage with his non-athlete peer group in activities such as drinking and socialising:

Towards the end of my juniors I had a lot of err hamstring problems, so my last, I guess my last year, year or so in juniors I wasn't really, I wasn't really able to train that much anyway which I guess is probably why I started, I started going



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out sort of drinking and getting into that a bit more cos I couldn't, I couldn't do that much training.

At the time of Markus's transition his preparation and current lifestyle were not helpful to his progression:

When I started [in seniors] I just thought you could kind of do it all really, that you could go out, have your fun, and play your tournaments and do, basically do everything. Whereas, you know, you can't really - you've got to be really focused....In some ways I do think maybe I went on to the circuit maybe a bit too early cos I just went straight into it after finishing school, erm, and I think its important to get away from the small tournaments as soon as possible really, start getting into the...basically surround yourself with the more professional sort of players. If I'd waited 6 or 9 months, erm done some training, sort of got myself really ready for it then err, I probably would have gone and won the tournaments and then sort of, if you get a better start like that then I think that - that helps.

Markus's identity, as an athlete, had faded during his involuntary absence from the sport, and he had adopted roles more suited to his non-elite athlete peers. On returning to the circuit, he found the perception of others made it difficult to separate himself from this identity, as he came to recognise it, and this undermined his readiness to progress on the senior tour:

For me it was hard as well because once you get, once everyone kind of knows that oh 'he likes to go out', as soon as everyone starts going out, there are always people that are going to go out at tournaments, straight away they're like, 'oh do you want to come out?' and they're trying to get you to come out with them cos they know that you're one of the guys who will always go out and its quite hard to suddenly go 'no - I'm not doing that anymore'.

The synchronisation of the timing of an athlete's transition with their state of readiness i.e., their ability to cope with the performance standards and adopt the appropriate lifestyle and identity, was important. Where an athlete embarked on a senior career prematurely, the effect was detrimental. For Markus, the injury driven delay in the opportunity to model and learn professional behaviour, in turn deferred his breaking out of low level senior tournaments. As a consequence, he remained amongst players with

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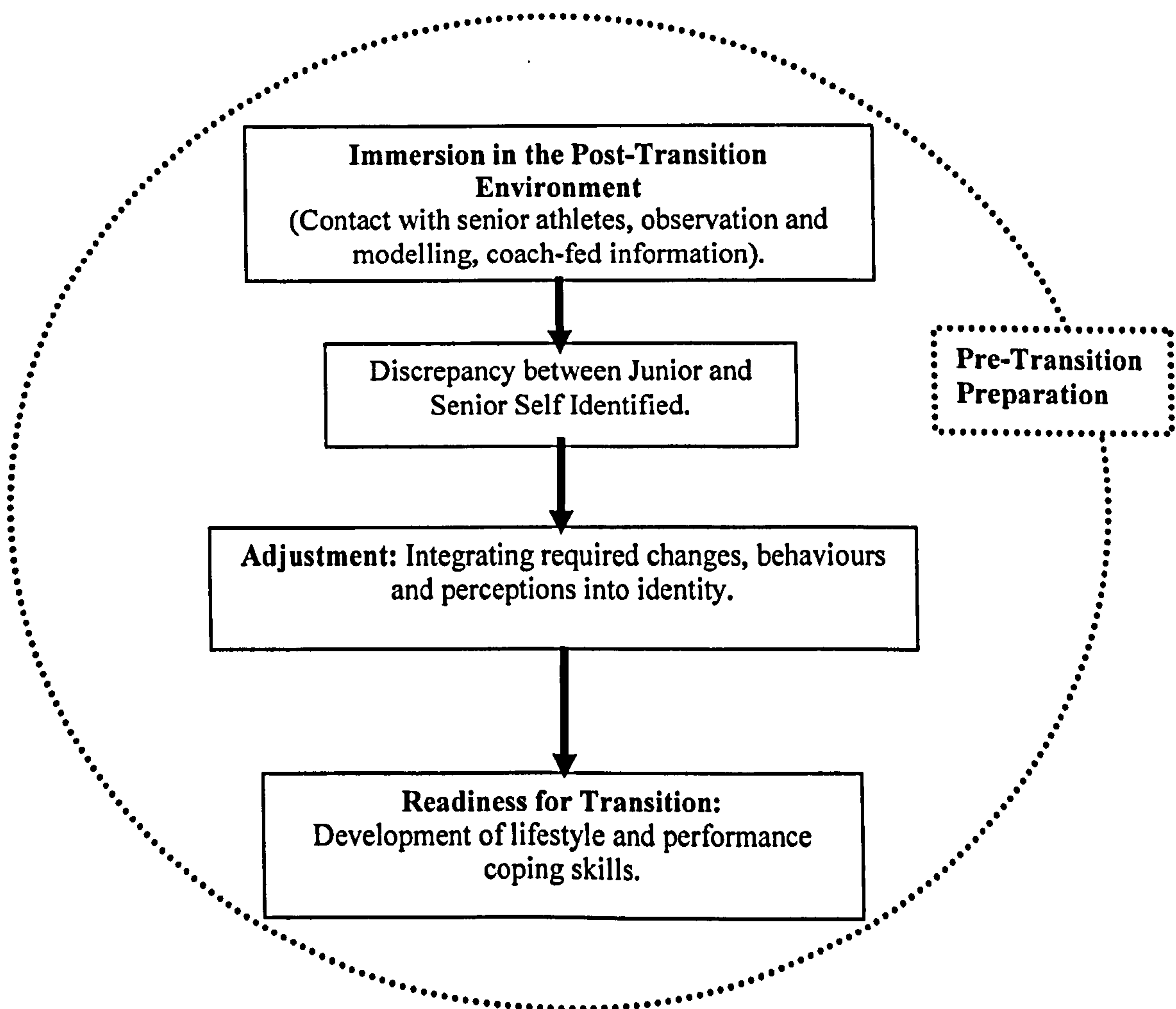
apparently more modest ambitions, who were less professional and therefore less appropriate role models. Markus later realised that this behaviour was not conducive to senior progress but then found it difficult to break out of this cycle. In a similar vein, Eddy began senior competition without developing sufficient readiness, owing to what he considered inadequate professional guidance. As a result, he subsequently returned to England from his training base abroad in order to play junior events, having lost confidence in his ability:

I think sometimes I might have been a bit early in playing some of the tournaments because obviously out there I got hammered all of the time, whereas if I'd have maybe left it for another year or so and gone on and played some junior events - because I didn't really touch the international junior events at all until the last year [on returning to England], whereas these days, you get, you know 15, 14 year olds going to play these events just to gain experience so they can go into the senior game earlier, erm, I probably would have left it, if I could look back that would probably be one of the things I would change, just, you know, maybe going even 6 months or something like that, just a bit later than what I did. I was getting hammered first round, I was almost kind of, looking to my coach as if to say, 'why am I not winning matches anymore?', so - it was all quite daunting.

This commentary emphasises the importance of preparedness for the challenge ahead, not just in personal coping skills, but also in the ability to handle the performance demands at a higher level. Good coaching played an important role in supporting the athletes' needs, including to develop readiness for the new context, however where this was not a feature of the pre-transition regime then the outcome may be sub-optimal

I kind of got left alone by the coaches - so I just kind of, I got the money in my bank every month and it was like 'off you go, that's it' sort of it sort a thing - I found that I just tended to sort of, you know, just get up in the morning and think 'Oh what shall I do today, oh I'll go and do that' and there was no real structure to it so that sort of, you just kind of drift along, erm and it was only when I started getting a, a structured plan that I sort of really started to make big, big improvements (Markus).

A lack of readiness was therefore apparent where the role of senior athlete was not clear, or not adopted by the athlete early enough in the transition process to allow them to cope with the demands of senior level. Their ability to do this was determined by the match between coach direction, and their readiness to take responsibility for their own career. Preparation before the transition and a period in which the athlete could experience the senior tour whilst still supported by their strong junior-identity was ideal for maximising this readiness for transition. The role of preparation in developing readiness is illustrated in Figure 2.1.



**Figure 2.1: Preparation for Transition.**

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#### 2.3.4 Stability within Change

Assisted by their coaches, the athletes searched for, and generated stability within a period marked by profound change. Achieving this state was dependent, in large part, upon the athlete's motivation to acclimatise to their new environment, before becoming a fully fledged participant at the higher level. In learning about and becoming part of their new environment before severing ties to their junior worlds, they engendered in themselves the desired sense of equilibrium. Having, simultaneously, a foot in both junior and senior environments was a key coping skill through which the athletes, as juniors, prepared for the junior-senior transition. In this way, the athlete's identity remained tied to junior participation whilst they learnt about and developed the capacity to deal with the imminent changes. This pre-transition contact with current senior athletes, allowed the athletes to minimise turbulence and related stress by immersing themselves in their new environment before completing the transition and becoming fully integrated.

Coherence in an athlete's environment over the transition period was also facilitative of adaptation. A recognisable similarity in the organisational structure of the sport at junior and senior level was perceived to ease the transition because it mitigated one of the change factors.

They [the junior programmes] have given me a really good grounding for the seniors, I mean - I think [that] if I hadn't had the young rider training sessions you know, when teams were being selected we had like training camps together, erm, you know that was a good grounding for the other day because I think I'd have been very kind of, much more kind of all in awe of it all and it'd all have been quite a big deal whereas I just thought 'oh well, it's another one of these', so it wasn't such a big deal (Jane).

A further source of stability was found to be the coach-athlete relationship. Having a coach with whom the athlete had a long-standing relationship was important, and where that association spanned the transition period this was seen as beneficial. The depth of a long term relationship made it possible for the coach, not only to inspire the sense of readiness, through imparting knowledge about senior level life, but also by being a continuous source of support and providing stability in an otherwise changing world.

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In contrast, negative circumstances such as injury, as affected Markus and which deprived this junior athlete of opportunities to experience the new environment pre-transition, delayed progression. For Markus, this was due to the development of a different identity altogether, that of a non-athlete, and one which he found difficult to discard and delayed his progress as a senior.

### **2.3.5 Adjustment to Transition**

The demands intrinsic to the transition, and to which the athletes had to adjust, fell into two broad categories; lifestyle and performance. The athletes developed knowledge of the demands through their pre-transition preparation, where this occurred, and in some cases acquired the coping skills associated with readiness for transition. However, pre-transition preparation, whilst invaluable and therefore necessary, was not sufficient. Adjustment was an on-going process which spanned the entire transition period. Indeed, the athletes faced a number of micro-transitions within their overall transition from junior to senior level, and at each step they encountered further demands.

#### **Adjusting of Lifestyle: The Professional Athlete-Role**

One lifestyle adjustment which the athletes had to make at this transition was to the role of athlete as a professional. This migration brought pressures to generate income, to retain and increase sponsorship and also to fulfil the expectations of a professional athlete in terms of performance and behaviour. This necessitated a transformation in the way the athletes perceived themselves, from being a junior competitor participating mainly for enjoyment, to a senior professional whose job it was to deliver results on many levels

You're doing it as your job really. Before like, the juniors and stuff, it's a bit of fun - its more than fun but - you don't really think too much about it, but going into full time its like if you don't perform well at a tournament you're not gonna get the money in (Carolina).

This career stage provoked the realisation that the commitment to the role of an athlete equated to being a professional and must therefore be taken more seriously, as Markus realised: "You just start getting older and you just realise 'well this is my job, and if I'm

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going to do it I've got to do it properly, there's no point just drifting along'." Interestingly, at inception of their senior careers, many athletes felt able, more wholeheartedly to concentrate on their chosen sport, having finished their full time education. This more productive life-balance, at least from the perspective of career enhancement, allowed them to make a full commitment to their role as an athlete:

It was good because you didn't have any other worries about your A-levels, exams or schoolwork; you just totally focus on your squash and not have to worry about anything else so you tend to improve a lot as well after you've left school (Nikki).

The life-stage of the athletes, i.e., devoid of familial and financial responsibilities, meant that it was feasible to explore one's career prospects at senior level without the inhibitions which maturity might bring. Such responsibilities were recognised as impediments later on, thus illustrating an emerging age-related problem in lifestyle balance as the athletes progressed through transition:

The first few years when you're coming through you can relax and you sort of play without fear so you can just go on and you've got, like I had no pressure of - no mortgage or no-one at home that was sort of stopping me (Hattie).

### *Developing Independence*

For the participating athletes in squash and tennis, tournaments frequently took place around the world, requiring significant travelling and long periods away from home, living in hotels. This was quite a contrast to the junior lifestyle, where the majority of time was spent at home, training. Such a change forced the athletes to be independent and to look after themselves, and this self-sufficient role required adaptation:

Obviously the travelling is quite difficult, to go [on a ] 12 hour flight - you have to get used to that, jet lag and everything and eating and sleeping in different places is quite hard. You have to be aware of what the country is and what to eat in certain countries really....The first few tournaments you go to, and you're going by yourself or there's just two of you, it's like 'Oh my god, I'm going half-way across the world', which is quite scary at first but I don't know, you just get used

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to it really, and now it just seems like normal to go across the world and play the tournaments (Carolina).

Where an athlete's level of independence did not match the demands of the new lifestyle, there was a sharp learning curve to navigate. For Eddy, this took the form of relocation to find the best possible training environment. He moved to a tennis academy abroad, which forced him to become more responsible and independent and required a dramatic change in lifestyle for which he was not prepared:

That made me grow up - it kind of made me tough, you know, I left my family at 16, I was on my own basically, and I can't speak the language, you know, just, throwing me in there, and that's what it was like really - it almost shook me up a little bit because when you get there, you're - it's so daunting, you've got, you know, a big city, I mean I was in - a big city, and there's you, and you've got to do everything for yourself, you know, so from that side of view, it was like "whoa", it just kind of hit me.

A growing independence was also *expected* at this transition; there was a reduction in support from coaches and the governing body. Those around the athletes were perceived to assume that the athletes had the ability to cope with the demands of the environment, and this forced a readjustment in behaviour. For example, Markus reported that on beginning participation in senior competitions, he noticed the impact of reduced coaching support at tournaments:

At juniors and stuff like that, normally you'd have your coach with you at a tournament and something like that and so you, you get extra advice and stuff like that on like, on your matches and things like that but obviously when you're on your own you've got to figure out what you're doing wrong all by yourself, which is, err, which doesn't always work [laughs]....sometimes you can come off the court and go, 'oh yeah, I should have done that' [but] its too late then.

In addition to the reduction in personal support, the structure intrinsic to the junior athletes' world changed profoundly. Whereas previously the structure had been provided by the training base, or by the dominant role of the coaches in planning the athletes' schedules, there was now a need for the athletes to take on the role of 'manager'. This involved managing themselves and their own organisation, and also that of those around

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them in playing, for example, a more dominant role in the coach-athlete relationship. Jane, an event rider, noted this phenomenon upon making the transition:

[In juniors] you'd go through it individually with your, the team trainer about where you were planning to run, so they'd kind of structure your whole kind of season - and then I felt that when you left the young rider kind of system, you didn't have quite so much kind of structure, you know because you were one of kind of hundreds, whereas young riders, you're one of kind of no more than 50, there wouldn't be kind of any more than kind of 50 who started at the beginning of the season really, erm, so you have a lot more kind of intense kind of help if you want it, whereas when you go into seniors, you're kind of a little fish in a big pond and erm you know there's help there if you go and find it but people aren't kind of, saying 'look Jane what are you going to do with this horse, how are you going to get there?' Erm, you didn't have that kind of, that kind of structure.

In contrast to the other athletes, Scott was able to employ a travelling coach from the very beginning of his senior days, thus maintaining the level of support he had enjoyed at junior level. He considered this to have enhanced his progression, but there was nevertheless an expectation that Scott would develop independence and become his own manager, and his coach encouraged him in this respect.

### *Achieving a Life-Balance*

The multiplicity of changes confronting the athletes and their growing independence stimulated an adjustment in the balance between sport and other life-roles. A restricted social life was the norm for the participants at junior level, but the social sacrifices necessary increased as a senior, and there came a realisation that to participate at senior level required an even more focused identity. With the exception of Eddy, the athletes adopted this restricted life-role throughout the transition, in pursuit of success. For Eddy however, the social sacrifices made as a junior left him feeling the need to play 'catch up' with his age-group peers. He felt that during his junior phase, his social development had been deferred. As a result, he was unwilling to forego further activities as a new senior athlete, particularly when his age presented more opportunities and the responsibility to maintain a one-dimensional identity fell more significantly on his own shoulders:



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When I was younger, because of the lifestyle it is [in tennis], you don't, you know you don't get to do what a normal teenager does, when everyone else is out on a Friday night, you know, nightclubs, down the bar, down the pub, whatever, you're in bed preparing for a match the next morning, and you know, they're the sacrifices you have to make otherwise there's no chance of you progressing at all, so you know, that's, that what I did really, I mean, I didn't do anything for god knows how long, and then as I was getting a bit older...you see all of your friends doing them and you think, 'well, I want to do that as well', and you know, even if it means, right, I'm going to take the morning off to go and do that...then you know, now, you do it, whereas when you're younger, you don't get the opportunity to do it, so, in a way you're kind of playing catch up a little bit on what other people have already done [because now] you've got a lot more open to you at your disposal.

Managing the adjustments upon transition required the development of particular skills: athletes learnt to cope with their extra independence, to be more responsible and to balance their performance and lifestyle demands. As a junior, compulsory education and parental discipline dictated a school-sport-social balance for the athletes, but upon ending their academic education and beginning a career as an athlete, the participants were challenged to re-engineer their own life-balance. In contrast to Eddy at this time, Hattie felt that it was easy to maintain a restricted identity given her lack of other responsibilities:

I didn't have like a boyfriend or anything like that, that, that I know that quite a lot of people at that age that stops them from doing it because they don't want to leave them, but I had no, no responsibility and no reason, I mean I just totally didn't let anyone else get into my life really.

The search for the correct life-balance was ongoing throughout the transition, requiring frequent adjustment in order to achieve optimum sport performance, despite ever changing demands. For one participant in eventing, there was a point in his transition where additional income was needed on top of the governing body sponsorship. The resultant shift in life-balance had a negative effect on performance:

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I had 6 or 7 horses in and erm I was probably out teaching every afternoon erm, and I knew that I had to have those horses ridden by say 12 o'clock before I had to go and do a 2 hour journey to go and teach someone, erm, and then I bust my foot [and] while I was in hospital I thought 'well hang on, I need to reassess what's going on here', and I decided that maybe I needed to give up some of my teaching to actually really focus on riding my horses for the length of time that they need to be ridden, so that changed my whole sort of financial income, because obviously the teaching sort of erm - you know, it is good money teaching, so yeah it's finding the balance - and like I say I then worked out, 'okay, less teaching, ride my horses more - try and get better results' (Andy).

### **Performance Adjustments**

Moving from junior to senior level meant confronting a greater depth and quality of senior competition, more pressure to succeed, and required greater attention to detail. As discussed hitherto, the enhancement needed in terms of performance, changed the way the athletes viewed themselves, as noted by Scott in his first season on the 'Futures' tennis circuit (the first rung of the senior international tour):

The actual level is - well it's definitely higher - when I first started I would have said, erm, that - in the ITF [juniors events] I did win quite a lot of reasonably important matches, you know, quarter-finals, semi-finals of group one tournaments, by just being consistent and pretty solid, just [by] making a lot of balls the other person would break down. That doesn't happen really on the, in the Futures [tournaments], you have to actually do, you have to - in quarter-finals, semi-finals and to win the tournaments you have to *win* them, the other person is not - doesn't lose them because, they've too much experience, [there is] too much at stake, they've been playing - well - for any length of time really.

Whilst junior competition is typically grouped by age, at senior level athletes must learn to compete against any athlete, of any age and any experience, as opposed to competing only against one's peers. The athletes had to accept their new status 'at the bottom of the pile' as Markus explained:

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I guess it's going from the top of the pole straight down to the bottom really, that's sort of one of the harder things - going from you know, playing the tournament and being one of the top seeds, sort of expecting to get to semis, finals, stuff like that and suddenly going into the qualifying tournament, you know, and you're coming up against, obviously guys that you know, you've never seen before and don't know anything about, erm and obviously you're just some kid that's turned up for a tournament.

The transformation in the demands of the sport in moving between junior and senior levels, which contributed to the athletes' identity shift, varied with the sport. For example, in squash, Hattie identified that: "The pace of the game is just a step up, like the speed at which the girls play is like a different - total - a different level", whereas in eventing, a sport where juniors will compete in junior and senior classes throughout their junior careers, Jane perceived less of a difference. For Jane, the change was more progressive than abrupt. This reflected her previous experience at junior level, competing against senior riders, and the stability she had attained in junior-senior environments. Nevertheless, for all of the athletes there was an increased training and competition schedule, and this was one of the markers of the new identity as a full-time senior athlete. There was also more at stake and greater pressure to succeed, not present to such a degree in juniors, generated by the targets set by the national governing body as well as the necessity of earning a living from the sport, or to retain funding:

It is more stressful, it's more pressurised, every match is important, every rally is important....If you don't get through a round then you're not going to get your ranking points, you're not gonna get up the rankings, you're not gonna - less money and everything really. It's just like one of those factors when you're a junior you just like go on court and you're not really - well you obviously you want to win but it's not as important as it is now (Carolina).

Whereas, during their junior careers, the athletes would for example: "Just go on court, you wouldn't even know who you're playing, you'd just go on court and hit, just start playing them" (Carolina), in seniors, much more significant planning and preparation occurred prior to competition. This necessitated adjustments in lifestyle as well as in

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training and performance. As Nikki explained, moving up to the senior game where more is at stake, meant paying considerable attention to detail:

When I was younger I would just rock up and play sort of thing, but now there's a lot more money involved, people - like you're one of the top players [and] they want you to do well, you just take things a lot more seriously and do the right thing - things like stretching before you go on court and eating the right things, warming down, warming up, like actually thinking about your matches, like having a game plan so you can't just turn up on court and hope its gonna go well - just paying a lot more attention to things like that - you can't just go through the motions in your training - you have to think about what, what you're doing - you've just got to do what you can to give yourself that extra chance and if you want to do it quickly you have to pay great attention to detail.

### **2.3.6 Beyond Transition: A Continual Discovery**

Adaptation to the changing lifestyle and performance demands at transition was an ongoing process. Once the athletes had begun to compete at senior level tournaments, they reported that their subsequent participation could be delineated by a series of further stages that related to the sport structure, peaks and troughs in performance, and expectations.

#### *Breaking-Through*

The structure of the athletes' respective sports dictated that, at certain points in their senior careers, it was necessary to break through to the next level of competition in order to continue making progress. These later 'sub-transitions' were experienced as part of a broad transition from junior to senior level, where the goal-posts were moved upon each subsequent level attained. As each new level was approached, there dawned the realisation of a discrepancy between first of all, the athlete's current position in the field and where they wanted to be and second of all, who they were and who they needed to be. Once again, there was an opportunity to model more professional athletes and thus develop coping skills for the even greater performance and lifestyle demands which they confronted. For Markus, breaking out of the first level of tournaments was fundamental

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to the development of those skills: "The top guys it's a whole different mentality as well so I think it's important - if you spend too long in those [lower level] tournaments I don't think its good for you".

In the same way, Eddy perceived that achieving success at each level, sustaining momentum, was vitally important. Breaking through meant belonging at the higher level and was as much a psychological advance as a performance achievement: "It's all about that break-through, if you can get a break through, and all it takes is three or four matches in a tournament, and you know, once you get there then nothing's stopping you". Another tennis player; Scott, also talked about breaking out of each tournament circuit in order to climb the rankings and make progress:

To break out of this level [Futures tournaments], I mean it is difficult but you have to, you actually have to *win* the tournaments. Because of the way the points system is, you can't get enough from, from just sort of going and making a quarter-final every week, you get a reasonably high [world] ranking, about 500, 400 maybe, but that doesn't get you out of those tournaments, you actually have to have something about you which is gonna be different from everybody else.

For each break-through there was an adaptation and learning process, just as there was in starting out at senior level. The realisation that more senior peers displayed greater professionalism was a recurrent theme, as was the aspirant athletes developing a feeling of 'belonging' in the higher level environment. Failing to make an expected break-through also affected the athletes. After being long-listed for an Olympic team place early in his senior career, a senior international team place had eluded Andy:

For the last 4 or 5 years, I've been trying to sort of, I'm just so desperate to get a good result at four star level, erm, and/or get on a [senior] British team, that then it sort of becomes more disheartening when you know, the time factor just keeps getting a little bit further, a little bit longer.

The delay Andy experienced whilst trying to reach the next level in his sport, followed what he perceived as an easy start to his senior career, with much success. This hold-up in post-transition progress was in contrast to the experience of squash player Hattie. She perceived that her transition was relatively easy, having successfully progressed through

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lower level tournaments without having to struggle to make a break through and therefore sustaining no delay in her progress. The speed at which the athletes made a break through to senior level, or to the next stage within their sport, was a determinant of how easy or difficult they perceived the transition to be. This perception was constantly being re-evaluated, as reported by Andy (above) when he recalled stalling in his attempt to compete at the very highest level.

The recurrent discovery of the requirements and the roles necessary to succeed at the next, higher level symbolises this phase in the athletes' progression. Each time, breaking through meant that performance demands increased, the required lifestyle was more strictly professional and identity more tightly defined by the athlete role. Nevertheless, some lifestyle demands were softened due to the collection of prize money and/or increased governing body support in the form of funding:

I avoided that horrible stage that people [who are ranked] 30, 40, 50 in the world - where they, where its hard work, its just, money is just a nightmare and they're losing in qualifying and then they're getting their - cos you don't get your hotel paid for if you don't qualify, so I haven't really had to deal with that too much.

The benefits which accompanied breaking through therefore made it easier for the athletes to manage the increased demands of their lifestyle. Eddy perceived that, had he made a break-through, his progress through the transition would have become easier. In the early days of his career in tennis, he felt that his progress was hampered by the physical demands of having to qualify for every tournament:

The hardest thing to do, is, when you're setting out, is to keep qualifying every week. I mean, its good to be in qualifying sometimes, because you get matches, and you know, its good for your confidence if you're playing well, but, its...for you to keep coming through, and almost, if, you know, you're not getting any help, if you're not getting any wildcards, you know, if you're not getting recognised for doing, for qualifying and doing what you're doing, then obviously, its quite difficult. When you get to the main draw [after playing qualifying], yeah you're groomed, yeah, you're playing well, but you win a couple of matches in main draw, and you've already played 5, 6 matches before, you know, the

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‘proper’ tournament starts - whereas the other guys have played you know, one or two matches, and are fresh, and obviously you’re obviously gonna get fatigued from playing all those matches, even though you might be playing really well, but you know the body can only take so much per week really can’t it.

A further challenge for athletes in squash and tennis, competing at senior level and attempting to break through to the next level, was to become established at the current level and to maintain a ranking that permitted direct entry into tournaments, without the formality of qualifying. Progressing higher in the world rankings also led to better coaching (which was available due to greater financial resources), as well as better officiating and more professional role models.

### *Setbacks: A Disrupted Balance*

Whilst breaking through to the next level of competition bolstered the participants’ perception of themselves as a successful senior athlete, set-backs were also numerous along the non-linear path to senior success. Post-transition progress was defined by peaks and troughs in performance, with the troughs often the result of injury. Andy recalled that after achieving great success as a junior and continuing this success at senior level for a couple of years, his performance dipped. Coming back from a dip in performance was difficult:

Young riders; I did it for two years, had three golds and a silver [in the European Championships], couldn’t do anything wrong, carried on from there, erm, straight into the seniors, [of] course you’re still in the press, everyone knows who you are, horses are all going really well, and like yeah, probably two, three years after young riders, still just flying, erm and then just when things start to sort of take a dip, mentally, its difficult to try and work out ‘okay well why has that happened?’ - to then try and make your way back up again. But because you’ve sort of slightly lost your name over those three years where it’s been quiet, people start to think ‘well that’s it, Andy is done and dusted’ and it’s hard.

Returning from a trough in performance required a process of rebuilding the identity of a successful senior athlete, very similar to that appropriate at inception of the senior career. This involved immersing oneself in the environment in order to develop a sense of

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belonging. Even at the very top of the sport the learning curve remained a feature. Upon achieving elite status there was still adaptation to be made: having reached the top of the world rankings in squash, Hattie felt that her success brought a new pressure and a position at which there were no role-models and where everything looked so different from her new vantage point: “There were no real worries until you get to the top and then it’s, and then obviously you’ve got to just try and defend it!”

A preliminary model of junior-to-senior transition is presented in Figure 2.2. Grounded in the results presented above, the findings which constitute this model will now be discussed in reference to the existing literature, in the following section.



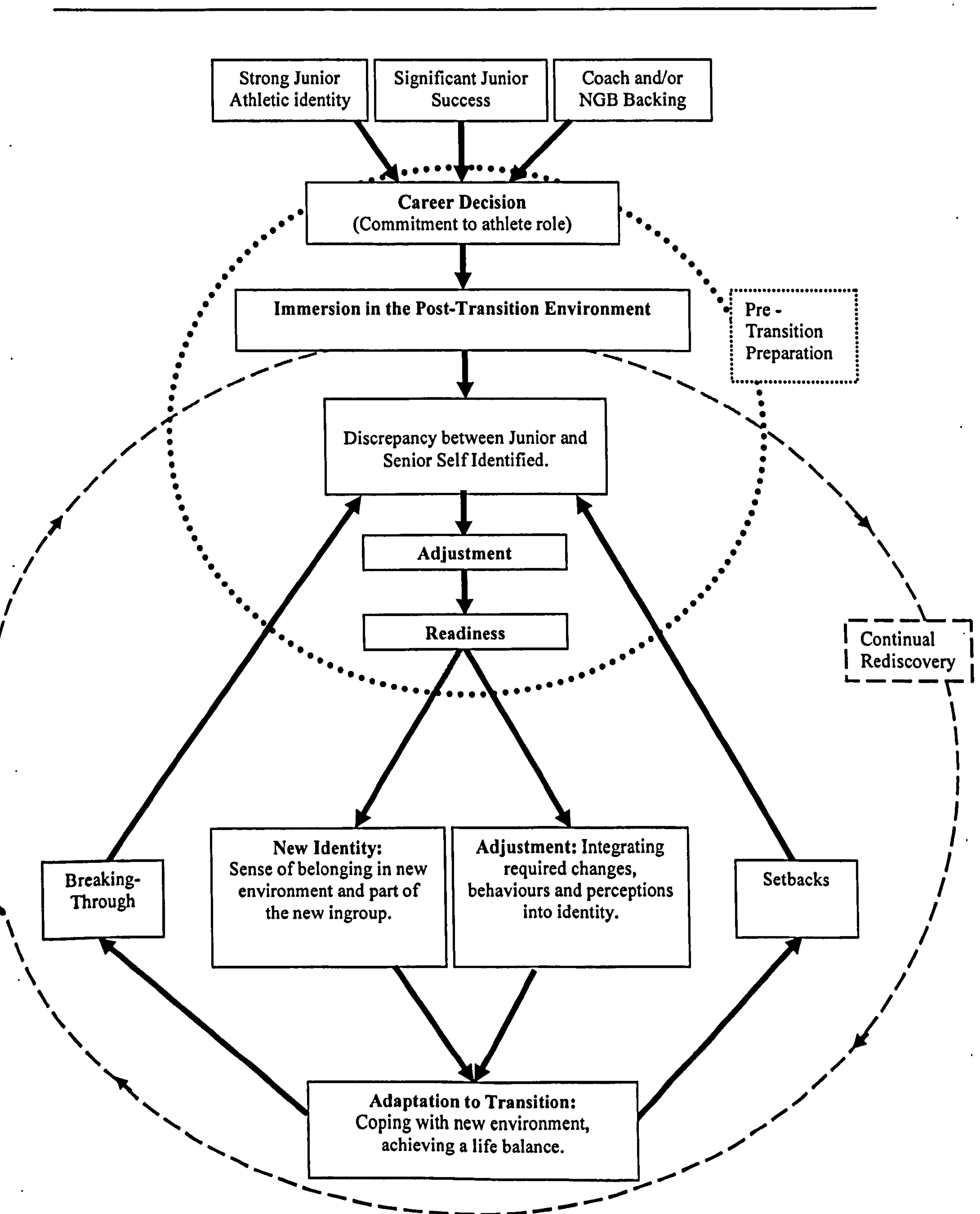


Figure 2.2: A Preliminary Model of Junior-to-Senior Transition.

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## 2.4 DISCUSSION

The results of this study represent a first step in addressing the current deficit in research concerning within-career transition in sport (Wylleman et al., 2004). The data collected have been generated by a grounded theory approach, providing an in-depth qualitative analysis of athletes' experience at the junior-to-senior transition. The insight afforded is consistent with research conducted within a social constructionist paradigm, the basis of which is explained in suitable detail in the method section above.

### *The Transition*

Whilst life-transitions are often considered to be discrete events, in reality they are processes which occur over considerable time (Schlossberg, 1981); commencing prior to the event which formally recognises the transition and continuing until well after this has occurred (Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1993). The results of the current study endorse this construction, with preparation for the transition beginning long before the point of transition from junior to senior level. Similarly, adaptation will continue after this change, which therefore encompasses a significant phase of identity development. Consistent with the literature, the identity and self-concept of an athlete will not remain stable, but will continue to develop and change over time, as a result of situational factors which occur in the transition period (Burke, 2006). Indeed, there is a considerable fit between the extant theory relating to the development of the self and identity, and the results of the current study in reflecting the experiences of the participants at their transition from junior to senior level in sport. However, the definitions of identity and self-concept first require some discussion before linking the literature to the results of the current study.

#### 2.4.1 Identity Development

All of these identities are me, yet none are me, and they are not *all* of me. What I mean is these are some of the ways people see me. These are some of the ways I see myself or present myself to you and to myself. At times some of these identities or elements of these identities ring true, and other times not at all. Not

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all of my identities are portrayed here either, so you get a partial, selective view of who I am (Tsang, 2000, p. 54).

In the above quote, Tsang draws upon her own experience in high performance sport and, tellingly, acknowledges the fluctuating nature of her self-image which has evolved throughout the course of her participation. She also alludes to the contribution of others in the way she constructed her viewpoint and the dynamic which this introduced. The current study also surfaces the evolution in athletes' perceptions of themselves over the course of the transition from junior to senior level, revealing the impact of their increasing engagement with the sport. This commitment to the athlete role has been termed 'athletic identity' (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Petitpas, 2000). The fluctuating self-perceptions which are evident at this transition also reflect changes in the athletes' self-description, or self-concept (Fox, 1997). Whilst there remains some controversy concerning the independence of these two psychological concepts (see below), in terms of this analysis, the results of this study suggest that the formation and development of both identity and self-concept are influenced by social factors. In regard to the latter, the perceptions which make up the self-concept are formed through our experiences in and our interpretation of our environment. Within this context, they are also influenced by the evaluations of significant others, and reinforcements and attributions for one's behaviour, both positive and negative (Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976). Turning to the identity, there is significant literature relating to the impact of social factors in identity formation (e.g., Ryan & Deci, 2003). For example, reflected appraisals from others give weight to whether and to what extent we judge our identity to be consistent with our behaviour. Where a discrepancy exists, we are motivated to change the behaviour, or, if this is not possible, the identity (Burke, 2006; Higgins, 1987).

Much literature exists regarding the development of both identity and self-concept. Despite this, some uncertainty remains concerning the precise nature of the two concepts. It is recognised that their contents are closely intertwined, but there has been little attempt to integrate relevant theories of identity with self-concept (Brettschneider & Heim, 1997). Indeed, Fox (1997) concludes that both self-concept and identity address the question of "Who am I?", and the literature since Brettschneider and Heim's observations continues

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to demonstrate that the definitions of, and the relationships between these concepts remain elusive (Bailey, 2003).

In attempting to make sense of the terminology, Brettschneider and Heim (1997) argue that: “identity refers to having a clearly delineated self-definition, a self-definition comprised of those goals, values, and beliefs which the person finds personally expressive, and to which he or she is unequivocally committed” (Waterman, cited in Brettschneider and Heim, 1997, p.207). This complex self-definition allows the individual to see him/herself as unique, which they claim is key to holding a personal identity. The identity also contains a social element however, which is influenced by the image that we create of ourselves through our interaction with others.

Self-concept, on the other hand, whilst also incorporating the influence of others as identified by Shavelson et al. (1976), is defined as the knowledge one has of one’s abilities, characteristics, and personal ways of acting and this impression is ratified, or modified, on the basis of our interactions with our environment. Brettschneider and Heim (1997) conclude that:

The connection between self-concept and identity models can be expressed pragmatically. Self-concept is composed of the differentiated knowledge of a person about different relevant areas of his/her everyday life and aspects of personality. Identity, on the other hand, represents the complete integration of different self-perceptions and values and their reflexive processing. This self-knowledge is required for biographical continuity and allows the formation, within the social context, of a structured totality of cognitions (p. 207).

In identity theory, identity is seen as synonymous with the roles which an individual holds, and a person’s identities reflect the roles that they hold within society (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Perhaps offering the most coherent explanation, this model suggests that accompanying each role are certain social expectations, e.g., behaviours and interactions, and an individual’s self-concept is said to be constructed from the meanings which are attached to the roles adopted by that individual in society (Ng & Feldman, 2007). Therefore, if an individual holds the identity of an athlete and accepts that role and the

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concomitant expected behaviours, that person will also maintain various self-perceptions associated with it, about their abilities, characteristics and personal ways of behaving in that function (i.e., their self-concept). Ng and Feldman also point out, consistent with identity theory, that individuals have multiple identities, with some more salient than others. For elite athletes, the athletic identity is often the most salient (Brewer et al., 2000).

Marsh and colleagues (e.g., Marsh & Hattie, 1996; Marsh & Perry, 2005) further delineate self-concept in sport by emphasising the multidimensional aspect (i.e., self-concept, in terms of the constituents, its hierarchical nature, with global self-perceptions at the top and increasing specificity relevant to particular domains as one descends). Self-concept incorporates self-perceptions of competency and self-confidence (although self-concept with reference to competency, should not be confused with self-efficacy<sup>1</sup>), and whilst it can be purely descriptive, it typically contains evaluative statements (Kernis & Goldman, 2003).

The results of the current study show that a developing self-concept (related to self-perceptions of abilities, characteristics and behaviours) is fundamentally related to the development of the athletic identity during the junior-senior transition. Thus, as the role of and behaviours associated with a senior athletic identity are adopted, the athlete also develops various self-perceptions associated with their ability to perform the role (Ng & Feldman, 2007).

According to Brewer et al., (2000), the degree to which an individual identifies with the role of athlete affects adjustment to transition, and is influenced by the individual's experience of the transition i.e., there is a reciprocal relationship. The research also contends that athletic identity is influenced by situational factors. For example, Grove,

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<sup>1</sup> Marsh and Perry (2005, p.72) provide a useful example of the distinction between self-concept and self-efficacy with reference to competency information: "Whereas self-concept represents one's general perceptions of the self in given domains of functioning, self-efficacy represents individuals' *expectations* and convictions of what they can accomplish in given situations. For example, the expectation that one can high-jump 6 feet in a particular situation is an efficacy judgment, not a judgment of whether one is competent in high-jump in general or whether succeeding at this event is a worthwhile accomplishment".

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Fish and Eklund (2004) found that the identity of elite athletes experiencing a deselection transition decreased, whereas the identity of those selected for the squad concerned remained the same. The results of this study also indicate that situational demands of the transition from junior to senior level likewise have an influence on athletic identity.

### *Pre-Transition Development in Identity*

The existing literature with reference to identity asserts that individuals are capable of holding multiple identities relating to different roles, which develop over time due to their interactions with the social groups and organisations to which they are exposed (Ryan & Deci, 2003). The current study shows that in the years before the junior to senior transition, an athlete's life will, to a large extent, already be defined by a self-determined participation in organised sport. According to Ryan and Deci, the process of identity acquisition is complex, and there are different routes through which personal identities can be internalised. These may be assimilated in response to the social roles expected in the pervading culture, or through an interaction of personal interests with social pressures, constraints and reward systems in the environment. Finally, and as is likely in regard to the current results, a strong intrinsic interest in an activity can result in the development of an identity related to that role. Intrinsic motivation (i.e., engaging in an activity for the reward of enjoyment or satisfaction) drives self-determined activity, and an intrinsically driven interest (according to the authors of self-determination theory; SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985, Ryan & Deci, 2000), can result in the formation of a long-term identity such as that of an athlete (Ryan & Deci, 2003). Thus it may be concluded that early self-determined and intrinsic motivation is fundamental to the initial development of athletic identity prior to the junior-senior transition, and to the increasing salience of this identity.

### *A Firm Commitment*

The results show that making a firm commitment to a career in sport is a key defining moment in the development of an athlete's identity through this transition. It marks the beginning of a shift of emphasis in roles and therefore identity salience, for example from that of school-pupil to full-time athlete. Through the junior-to-senior transition, an

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athlete's identity will continue to develop. Indeed, in the same way as a transition is a process over time, identity also develops and changes over time (Burke, 2006). Identity at this transition, the results suggest, evolves in accordance with the athlete's progress through the transition, reflecting their perceptions of their environment and their relative feeling of belonging at the new level of competition. Perceptions (of ability, competence and behaviours) are integrated within the self-concept, as alluded to above, and a sense of belonging; of feeling comfortable and accepted by others at each new level of competition, also plays a key role in the formation of the self. Ryan and Deci (2003, p. 254) therefore contend that identity formation fulfils our basic psychological needs. In the case of belonging, the need for relatedness is fulfilled:

In acquiring identities, people find a way to fit into a social context, adopting roles, beliefs, and practices that are recognized and appreciated by others. In short, the principal function of identity formation is fostering the experience of secure belongingness, or *relatedness*.

The development of the athletic identity and self-concept at the junior-to-senior transition involves, in part, assimilating appropriate observed behaviours, in preparation for the step from junior to senior level, and integrating these within the self. Through doing this, the athlete fits into the social context. Similarly, the self-concept will adapt as the athlete internalises new behaviours and responsibilities into the identity and develops associated perceptions of competence. Because the transition involves a number of smaller sub-transitions, or phases, to which the athletes must adjust, this type of psychological development is on-going throughout transition. This model, where identities are selected and reformed in order to fulfil our psychological needs, explains that the development and maintenance of identity is a dynamic process (Ryan & Deci, 2003), and the current transition is no exception. Over the course of a transition and the concomitant sub-transitions, the requirements of an athlete are likely to differ, for example the need for contact with senior athletes or for guidance from a coach may fluctuate. Similarly, the demand for success (competence) at senior level, and for autonomy within their transition and relationships is likely to vary with the stage of the transition, as seen in the current results and in line with developmental maturity (Eccles, 1999). It is these psychological needs (autonomy, competence and relatedness), which Ryan and Deci propose are linked

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to identity formation. Those identities which are developed through self-determined (i.e., intrinsically motivated) behaviour, are the most likely to meet an athlete's psychological needs.

### *Variability in Identity*

Much of the research on the malleability of identity comes from a sociological approach which, like self-determination theory, adopts the premise that identity is shaped by the social environment. Since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, psychologists and sociologists have recognised the role of social processes in the development of the human self-concept i.e., that the self is built on reflected appraisals of what others think (Tice & Wallace, 2003). Tsang's (2000) description (above) of the changes in her own identity over the course of her career in elite sport, details how an athlete's identity can shift and change through interaction with others, with certain identities becoming more or less dominant at different times. It is now widely accepted that the self-concept is built through the integration of our assumptions of the way we are viewed by others, into the self. This is representative of the 'looking glass self', as introduced by, Charles Cooley (1970; cited in Charon, 1995), a symbolic interactionist who was one of the first to recognise that the self is constructed by reflecting the views that others hold of us. However, given that our ability accurately to interpret what others think of us is poor, it is our *inferences* of what others think which are important for the construction of our self-concept, rather than what others *actually* think (Tice & Wallace, 2003). This qualification is consistent with the current study, which reveals that at the junior-to-senior transition, an athlete's perception of the self is influenced significantly by what they infer others think of them, and whether they believe that others have accepted their status as a senior athlete.

One of the most dominant theories in this domain, which attempts to explain the variability in identity, is the framework proposed by Stryker (1968, 1980). Stryker suggests that the multiple identities an individual sustains are organised into an identity salience hierarchy. Those at the top of the hierarchy are more likely to be invoked in any given situation and hence, are more self-defining than those nearer the bottom of the hierarchy. Modification in an identity is thought to occur when there is an alteration in



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the social circumstances which relate to that identity, which leads to a change in relevant relationships (Cassidy & Trew, 2004; Wells & Stryker, 1988). This framework would therefore suggest that the salience of an identity will likely shift at the junior-senior transition, since a transition involves a transformation not only in assumptions about the self, but also in relationships and behaviour (Schlossberg, 1981). Indeed, certain apparent changes in relationships at the transition, revealed in the current study, are largely consistent with the effects of transition to an elite, or mastery level as described in Wylleman and Lavallee's (2004) developmental model; with the coach playing a more influential role than the parents. However, whilst the coach remained a key source of support over the transition period (albeit that they pushed responsibility onto the athletes to develop their roles as professionals who can independently manage their own participation), in this study, the role of the peer group (i.e., other senior athletes, and especially older senior athletes) was also increasingly significant. The results also show that modifications in behaviour are manifold, as the athlete adjusts to the requirements implicit in the role of a senior athlete, such as independence and a professional attitude.

It has been found that the athletic identity of an athlete will indeed vary in salience during the junior-to-senior transition process; generally growing stronger as the transition unfolds, but also varying in salience as a result; of fluctuations in performance, setbacks (which influence perceptions of competence), lifestyle demands, feelings of control, and relatedness. The correlation of a burgeoning athletic identity with increasing participation is to be expected. This because the associated intensification of commitment, reflected in a growing identification with the athlete role, will be internalised and the resultant self-perception consequently absorbed within the aspiring athlete's identity (Turner, 1982). In the case of those athletes contributing to this study, it is likely that this identity profile is somewhat due to the participants' increasing conformity with those in their new social environment at each sub-transition within the overall journey from junior to senior level, due for example to more time spent training with coaches and at competitions with other athletes and role-models. Thus the identity matures with increasing exposure to the senior tour and the accompanying higher perceptions of competence and relatedness. However, identification with the athlete role may not increase in a linear fashion and is not

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necessarily stable. The results show that setbacks and delayed progress can give rise to a discrepancy between the ideal and the perceived self, which may be associated with a reduction in the saliency of the athletic identity. This perhaps, is a protective mechanism, on the basis of a negative emotional reaction to the discrepancy (Higgins, 1987). In particular, a setback caused by injury, may encourage unfavourable comparison with contemporaries and a perception that others see the athlete in a different light. The self-concept thus modifies to reflect these perceptions and, if such circumstances persist, the salience of the athletic identity is likely to shift, only being re-established upon (it is hoped), a return from injury.

The results corroborate the conclusion that when enduring a setback in transition, an athlete will alter their self-perception, primarily on the basis of the inference that they have been downgraded in the eyes of relevant others along with a reduced feeling of relatedness at the level concerned. Identity theory predicts that the salience of a particular identity within the identity hierarchy, will be sustained throughout a transition when it is possible for the individual successfully to restructure their new social environment in ways which resemble the old environment (Serpe & Stryker, 1987). Therefore, to sum up this point; at the time of a setback, the salience of an identity is likely to shift if a) there is a change in inferred other-perceptions and/or b) if there is a change in the group and relationships to which the athlete feels they belong, and c) if there is a discrepancy between the actual and ideal self.

### *Stability of Identity*

The identity theory perspective can also help to explain why the participants sought stability throughout their junior-senior transition and either endeavoured to structure their new environment and relationships to reflect the old, or appreciated the continuity represented by a similar governing body structure at junior and senior level. Serpe and Stryker (1987) found that at the transition from college to university, students will endeavour to maintain their salient identities by seeking out new relationships in which they can behave in ways consistent with these identities. Whilst identity does evolve, albeit gradually, individuals will tend to resist significant change (Burke, 2006). The

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participants in the current study who demonstrated a tendency to maintain stability in their identity, typically enjoyed a similar environment pre- and post-transition, and consequently found that adaptation was facilitated. Whilst this phenomenon can be explained by identity theory, it also is supported by Schlossberg's transition framework (Schlossberg, 1981, 2003; Schlossberg Waters, & Goodman, 1995), which dictates that adaptation to transition will be, in part predicted by the degree of difference between pre- and post-transition environments, with less difference resulting in less stress and easier adjustment. Previous research directed at retirement from sport also supports this contention, with those athletes who achieve stability in their pre- and post- transition environments, by maintaining other interests and garnering support outside of sport, experiencing an easier transition (Wheeler, Malone, VanVlack, Nelson, & Steadward, 1996). At retirement, this is likely to be due to maintaining equilibrium in the self through the possession of additional prominent identities (other than that of athlete). For those athletes whose sport requires an unstable lifestyle, as evidenced in the current study, the desire for identity stability may be even greater, since they cannot enjoy the everyday routines which typically provide stability for the self (Brettschneider & Heim, 1997).

#### **2.4.2 Self-Concept**

In addition to the results highlighting a change in the participants' athletic identity; becoming, in general, more salient and precisely delineated at this stage in their transition, certain self-perceptions were also found to be in flux. Reflections upon ability related to performance, to characteristics and skills both on and off the field of competition, were also shown to fluctuate continually, thereby demonstrating changes in self concept during transition. According to Kernis and Goldman (2003), self-concept is variable, with two factors typically promoting such variability: social comparison (i.e., our own comparison with those around us), and our behaviour, which can make aspects of our self-concept more or less salient. However, they note that once the self-concept is formed, in order to sustain this, individuals will use a variety of cognitive and behavioural strategies. Indeed, this is as predicted by self-verification theory (Swann, 1990) in that persons favour constancy in the core aspects of their self-concept and as a

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consequence, they behave or process information in a manner consistent with the prevailing perception of the self and which serves to maintain that perception.

### *Social Comparisons*

Despite the impulsion towards stability in the self-concept, the results also show that the transition threshold represents an inflexion point in terms of self-perception. At the move to senior level, athletes appear to be especially triggered to make comparisons with their peers, and therefore social comparison was key to fluctuations in their self-concept, as asserted by Kernis and Goldman (2003). Moving from junior to senior level prompts a change in the way an athlete perceives the self, from being a successful competitor at junior level to constituting one of many participants, vying for success on the senior circuit. The term 'small fish in a big pond', used by one of the athletes in this study reflects this change in the way an athlete conceptualises their status, relative to a new cohort of competitors.

In developing social comparison theory, Festinger (1954) recognised that a person's self-evaluation can rarely occur on the basis of objective criteria and therefore, this will be heavily influenced by comparison of the self with others. This employment of social factors in the construction of the self-concept has been acknowledged in much of the literature, and social comparison of this kind is thought to play an important role in the construction of a person's self-perceptions, and may be particularly meaningful at times of transition. Individuals contrast their performance and perceived ability with those around them and the information derived from this social comparison can influence the self-concept. As a result, one of a pair of equally able individuals can suffer a relatively inhibited self-concept if they compare themselves to more able individuals. Conversely, a relatively more affirmative self-concept emerges, when their frame-of-reference is a comparatively less-able individual or group. This effect, known as the Big Fish Little Pond Effect (BFLPE; Marsh, 1984; Marsh & Craven, 2002; Marsh & Parker, 1984), has been examined at transitions within an educational setting (e.g., Seaton, Marsh, Dumas, Haguet, Monteil, Régner et al., 2008), where the moving of a capable student to an academically selective school can have an adverse effect on the student's academic self-

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concept. This, it is argued, is because the “student, is no longer a big fish in a little pond (top of the class), but is in a large pond full of even larger fish (other students who are even brighter), so that this student is average or below average in relation to the achievement levels in this new, academically selective school” (Seaton et al., p.75). Thus, the BFLPE is judged to be brought about through negative comparison with contemporaries, and particularly is due to forced social comparisons with those of perceived higher ability, as explained in Festinger’s (1954) social comparison theory. In the current results, the athletes’ perceiving that they were now a ‘small fish in a big pond’ is akin to the BFLPE, as their junior-to-senior transition represents moving into a larger pond full of larger fish, consequently making them feel ‘small’.

Whilst evidence for the BFLPE in the academic context is strong (e.g., Marsh & Hau, 2003), research has now indicated the model’s applicability in the world of sport and exercise. Chanal, Marsh, Sarrazin and Bois (2005) demonstrated that the effect applies in relation to self-concept amongst gymnasts. In this study of 430 French high school students over a ten-week training programme, Chanal et al. used multilevel modelling to determine the degree of variance in self-concept explained by gymnastics skills versus class average gymnastics skills. The results showed that the self-concept of the students, for gymnastics, was positively predicted by their own gymnastic skills, but negatively predicted by the class-average of skills, and hence, the authors suggested, comparison to others was related to a lower self-concept.

The BFLPE can explain the results of the current study, in so far as moving to senior level is similar to the transition to an academically selective school. An athlete making the transition to senior level is likely to have been highly competent at junior level, but will discover on moving to senior level that, compared to their new peer group, their perceived competence is (currently) not so high relative to others, and therefore the self-concept can be negatively affected.

This effect is important in the sporting context since there is evidence that those who perceive themselves to be more effective, confident and able to accomplish, are more

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likely to pursue and achieve positive outcomes in that domain than those with a less positive self concept. Marsh and Perry (2005) found such a relationship between self-concept and the performances of elite swimmers. Their results showed that self-concept affected subsequent performance above and beyond what was explained by the previous personal performances of the swimmers. Marsh and Perry did not extend their analysis in order to determine the mediating variables for the effect of self-concept on performance. However, one possible mechanism is that perceiving oneself to be skilled and competent in a performance situation can facilitate the experience of flow during that performance (and thus facilitate a good performance), as found in a study of 236 athletes in various sports from club through to international level, by Jackson, Thomas, Marsh and Smethurst (2001). It is not sufficiently clear from the current study to conclude whether transition progress is facilitated by a more positive self-concept, although the available research gives cause to believe that performance at transition would probably benefit (e.g., Marsh & Perry, 2005; Marsh, Chanal & Sarrazin, 2006).

According to Festinger (1954), social comparison is both more probable and intense when individuals perceive a small distance between themselves and their frame of reference (i.e., the subjects of the comparison), than when this reveals a large performance discrepancy. Thus, comparison targets may specifically be chosen so as to protect, or even to enhance the self-concept (Seaton et al., 2008). In Seaton et al.'s study of school children, opting to compare with someone performing at a higher level than oneself was not always negative for self-evaluation and was sometimes positive. This, they proposed, may be due to the student deliberately identifying with a comparison target who represented a role model, or a possible future self, and a comparison target who posed no threat to self-evaluation.

However, it is not safe to extrapolate this finding to accommodate all potential circumstances. Being forced to compare with an individual (or a whole group of individuals) on a consistent basis, where the performance or average performance exceeds one's own is likely to have a negative effect on the self-concept. This has been demonstrated in the plethora of BFLPE studies which have been conducted (e.g., Marsh,

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1994; Marsh, Chessor, Craven, & Roche, 1995). Seaton et al. (2008) note that detailed research in the area of forced comparisons is lacking. Nevertheless, given the background material which is available, it seems likely that where the comparison target is specifically *chosen*, then this is *less* likely to trigger the BFLPE syndrome. As indicated, it is when comparison is *forced* on the individual by the environment that susceptibility arises and it appears that the junior-senior transition can create precisely those circumstances which potentially negatively affect self-evaluation. In addition, the effect of social comparison (and the BFLPE) may be greater where personal identity is salient as opposed to group identity (Margas, Fontayne, & Brunel, 2006; Schmitt, Branscombe, Silvia, Garcia, & Spears, 2006). In individual sports such as those under study here, personal identity is likely to be salient, and therefore this is a possible additional risk factor for the BFLPE. The results of this study also suggest that athletes are more likely to experience a BFLPE where they lack readiness for the step they are making, for example, if they are pushed to compete in senior events by a coach before they are ready and/or without suitable preparation. Hence there is perhaps an interaction between readiness and the effect of the junior-senior transition on self-concept.

The comparisons employed in the current study were most often with other athletes competing at the same level. Consequently, and having regard to the current state of research knowledge, such an exercise could threaten self-concept were comparison to be made to the new peer group, upon initiation at senior level. However, athletes of a much higher level (e.g., in tennis and squash, those at the top of the world rankings), who are therefore significantly more successful than the participating athlete at that point in their career, were adopted as role models. The effect of these associations (and potential comparisons) may be reduced due to their lack of closeness (Festinger, 1954), i.e., because of their elevated status, the 'role models' may not yet be regarded as real competition, and, therefore not be used as frames of reference for comparison until later in the transition, and/or were considered significantly different from the athlete so as not to pose a threat (Mussweiler, Gabriel, & Bodenhausen; 2000). Or it may be that the athletes deliberately selected role models who were recognisably similar to themselves in other aspects of their lives, and could therefore be seen as possible future selves (Seaton

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et al., 2008), and were therefore fulfilling a motivational or inspirational role rather than a threatening one.

### **2.4.3 Transition Preparation**

The results of this study emphasise that optimal preparation for the junior-senior transition involves not only training (physically and mentally) for the rigours of senior participation, but also a significant amount of information gathering from both coaches and older athletes. The knowledge thereby gained, is useful prior to senior participation since it facilitates development of those skills and behaviours necessary in the role of senior athlete, such as independence, responsibility, professionalism, and an understanding of the demands of the transition/next level. The results also show that such preparation engenders a perception of control over the transition and, through contact with current senior athletes, a sense of belonging in the new environment. These results are consistent with previous research, demonstrating the importance of preparation for retirement in generating a feeling of control over the career termination transition (e.g., Crook & Robertson 1991; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990) and also that which has identified the benefit which the acquisition by athletes of relevant knowledge can deliver. In their study of Olympic champions, Jackson, Mayocchi and Dover (1998) found that successful athletes place significant value on knowing the intricacies of the sport, citing it as vital to their progress at elite level. In particular, the current study shows that gaining insight of the demands inherent in the next step of the transition enables an athlete to assess and compare their own skills and behaviour relative to role models at the next level, and to identify the areas in which improvement is needed for future success. This is akin to identifying a discrepancy between the actual and ideal (or ought) self (i.e., who the individual wants to be, or feels they should be; as detailed in self-discrepancy theory; Higgins, 1987). Discrepancy theory, and more recent work, such as Burke's (2006) identity control theory, suggests that an incongruence of this nature causes distress, which may actually prove cathartic. It may motivate an athlete to reconcile the perception gap, between where they feel themselves to be in terms of performance and their aspirations in this respect. This can then be addressed on the basis of their personally meaningful identities and through modifying their behaviour, or adapting their identity. The results of



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the current study support this hypothesis at the transition to a higher level of competition, since athletes who are successful in progressing to senior level tend to adapt their behaviour to match the demands of the transition in order to progress, identifying the discrepancy between the junior (current) and senior (ideal) self.

In addition to the contribution of social comparison in the development of self-concept and identity, the results of this study highlight roles played by significant others in an athlete's development at this transition. Most noteworthy, is the selection and use of role models, which typically involves learning from more senior athletes, and is a fundamental part of the transition preparation and adaptation process. Traditional research regarding social support in sport focuses upon the different categories of assistance which athletes typically enjoy (i.e., emotional, esteem, tangible and informational support; Rees, 2007; Rees & Hardy, 2000). Although the most significant input provided by role models at this juncture falls within the 'informational' segment of this multi-dimensional model of support, only modest research attention has been directed at the use of role models as mentors in sport, beyond their use in life-skill intervention programmes (e.g., Danish et al., 1993). Outside of sport, the extant research suggests that mentoring relationships can be hugely beneficial, facilitating both personal and career development (e.g., Kram, 1988; cited in Perna, Zaichkowsky, & Bocknek, 1996). The current study suggests that the modelling which takes place in mentoring relationships is important in an athletic career, and particularly at career transition. This observational learning of, and receipt of information and guidance from, more senior athletes and, to a lesser extent from coaches, was critical to the athletes' progress through the transition, and particularly in the preparatory phase.

Role models are particularly influential during childhood and adolescence, when they provide young people with a guide to their environment and roles (Biskup & Pfister, 1999), and hence potentially to their identity as a senior athlete. According to Bandura (1965; Rosenthal & Bandura, 1978) the act of modelling (vicarious learning or observational learning) of either live or symbolic models is a powerful tool, through which there can be a learning of new behaviours and coping strategies and a development

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of self-efficacy for the behaviour. Consistent with this, the results show that there is observation and modelling of the behaviours and attitudes of fellow competitors at each stage of the transition. This allowed the athletes to identify those behaviours which were the norm at each level of competition. Thus, during the transition from junior-to-senior level, there is likely to be an observation and modelling phase at each sub-transition in order to establish the behaviours associated with the role which is now required. The results also demonstrated, however, that the choice of model may not always be appropriate, and that consequently the learning of unhelpful behaviours can be a feature. This effect has been evidenced in adolescents in relation to, for example, the consumption of alcohol (Jessor, 1986). When this deviation occurs, it is likely to be detrimental for the development of a functional senior athletic identity, because public demonstrations of behaviour constitute a mechanism via which behaviours are internalised and integrated within an individual's identity (Tice & Wallace, 2003). However, according to Rosenthal and Bandura (1978), the learner typically also attends to the consequences of the observed behaviour, and therefore, athletes who value the outcomes associated with appropriate conduct should find themselves motivated to learn and model the most appropriate of behaviours, consistent with their priorities (Bandura, 1965). Even so, the results of this study reveal that certain role model figures were recognised as having engaged in less than wholly professional behaviour and nevertheless achieved some success at the lower reaches of the senior circuit. Whilst these somewhat diminished exemplars were (eventually) perceived to be unsuccessful beyond this level, they nevertheless retain the capacity to provide potential hazards for a neophyte senior at transition.

The mentoring of athletes in sport has been examined at transition. Consistent with the results of the current study, unpublished research by Cockerill and Edge (1998; cited in Lavalley, Nesti, Borkoles, Cockerill, & Edge, 2000) has highlighted the potential psychological benefits for athletes of receiving mentorship during the transition out of sport. The value of these relationships may lie not just in observational learning, but also in maintaining equilibrium over a period of change. People typically dislike change as it disrupts routines and relationships (Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1993, 1995), and therefore

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the self, and as such they try to avoid it. However, consistent with other life transitions, there is a change in an athlete's environment at the junior-senior transition from pre- to post- transition, with concomitant changes in support structures and relationships (Schlossberg, 1981) which cannot be denied or deferred. Since Schlossberg and colleagues propose that the greater the difference between these environments, the greater the adaptation required and vice versa, the maintenance of a coach-athlete relationship over transition, and the building of relationships with senior athletes pre-transition, is one way in which athletes can attempt to minimise the degree of and mitigate the impact of change, and therefore make adjustment more straightforward. Sourcing and engaging in contact with current senior athletes in the prelude to the transition therefore, appears to facilitate the early comprehension of the role of senior athlete, and the athletes can begin to adapt their athlete-role identity accordingly. This type of experience of the new environment and the generation of stability in a period of change, leads a junior athlete to develop readiness - a key coping strategy for transition and one which can minimise stress.

### *Readiness*

The current study has demonstrated that preparation for the junior-to-senior transition encompassing exposure to and modelling of older senior athletes, becoming familiar with the demands of the senior environment, a gradual assimilation through playing a mixture of junior and senior tournaments and beginning to adapt one's personal identity to reflect the role changes, culminates in 'readiness'. The concept of readiness for transition has already been identified in a study by Wheeler et al. (1996), who examined the retirement experiences of 18 athletes in disability sport. The transition was associated with difficulties, where the retirement was involuntary and there had been a lack of readiness. Those athletes who coped better with the transition were higher in readiness, which Wheeler et al. defined as related to the right time for the transition. In a similar way, the athletes in the current study who perceived a readiness in themselves for the junior-senior transition, reported an easier migration than those where this was lacking. In some cases, those who felt themselves short of readiness at the point of transition then perceived a delay to their progress in terms of performance at senior level. This can be diagnosed as

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being due to a lack of 'fit' between the timing of the transition and readiness factors such as developmental maturity and independence, level of preparation, and current lifestyle. Such an interpretation is consistent with the developmental literature, where Graber and Brooks-Gunn (1996) note that in the pre-transition environment, the timing of the transition and the fit between an individual's all-round development and the environment will determine individual qualitative differences in transitional experiences. Thus, those athletes who were still committed to the identity of junior athlete and who therefore behaved accordingly, were less able to adapt to the transition than those who had already begun to adopt the roles associated with a senior athletic identity. Similarly, where the athlete experienced little control over the timing of the transition (e.g., due to a peremptory coach decision to participate in senior tournaments), there was a detrimental effect on performance, due to a lack of readiness and of opportunity to prepare for the new level. The synchronisation of an athlete's transition with their state of readiness is therefore very important, and coaches have a role to play in the assessment of their athlete's standing in this respect and the timing of the transition in the light of this risk factor.

The question of the timing of a transition has previously been considered, but largely focused on whether a life transition occurs at a time when social norms lead the person concerned to expect such a turning point (Neugarten, 1968). However, there is also the linked issue of preparation which can serve to enhance the feeling of control over the process, which in turn is thought to influence adjustment. If an event is expected, it can be planned for, coping-skills can be developed and the individual is likely to have the support of those around them (Danish et al., 1993). In corroboration, Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) transition framework suggests that there must be a fit between the timing of the transition and an individual's situation for optimum adjustment. In the current study, the results show that not only did appropriate timing reduce stress at the point of transition and facilitate progress, but the process of developing readiness through preparation and adaptation of roles engendered a sense of self-efficacy for navigating the transition. These efficacy beliefs are likely to have further benefited transition progress due to their association with success (Maddux & Gosselin, 2003) and the motivating of approach

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rather than avoidance behaviour, and persistence in the face of obstacles (Bandura, 1986, 1997).

#### **2.4.4 Conclusion**

In conclusion, although theory development in this study is at a relatively early stage, there appears to be sufficient pre-existing evidence to support the propositions underpinning the preliminary model of junior-to-senior transition described in Figure 2.2. More specifically, the discussion of the findings has established a clear link to existing research literature (such as identity theory [e.g., Burke, 2006] and social comparison theory [Festinger, 1954]), which tends to corroborate the processes involved in transition as identified through the interpretation of the participants' experiences.

#### *Strengths and Limitations*

Certain key strengths of this study derive from the targeted execution of a relevant method of data collection and analysis. Against a backdrop of little available knowledge with specific reference to athletic within-career transition, as evidenced by the paucity of academic research and the related literature, a grounded theory approach was deemed appropriate to the research question. Grounded theory, being both a method of data collection and of analysis (Charmaz, 2003) is suitable for a research question where understanding is limited, and where the researcher wants to develop a theoretical framework (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This study has not only provided an in-depth analysis of a little understood transition, but has also delivered the first step towards a model of junior-senior transition. The results of the study highlight the relationships between categories which has been made possible by the chosen methodology. Grounded theory has allowed the temporal sequence, which is so important to transition, to be portrayed. The methods adopted in this study have therefore been appropriate; significant rapport was built with participants through a carefully structured interview guide and this fostered the gathering of rich data.

Understanding the process of athletic development at different levels, from early childhood to adulthood, is important for developing informed practices (Côté, Ericsson,

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& Law, 2005) and to facilitate athletic career transition at various stages (Wylleman et al., 2004). To date, there exists one model proposed by Stambulova (2005) designed for counselling athletes during a within-career transition. However, this model was designed for athletes in crisis transition (i.e., a transition in which the athlete feels unable to cope independently; Stambulova, 2000), and the current research suggests that this situation is unlikely to apply in all cases. Research-to-practice evidence on which sport psychologists can base their conventional work with athletes, to prepare them pre-transition as well to support them during transition, has hitherto been lacking.

### *Concatenation*

Typically in concatenated research, studies proximate to the beginning of a research chain, are exploratory in nature, as in the current study of this thesis. Thereafter, and as the process evolves, so the research becomes more focused, guided by the findings earlier in the chain (Stebbins, 2006). This may involve a mix of deductive and inductive processes, and often qualitative research precedes quantitative (Stebbins, 2006). Stebbins contends that researchers *should* aim to produce theory, in pursuit of which they should “stay with a research subject through several rounds of fieldwork, analysis, and publication” (p. 485) in order that scientific understanding in social research truly is advanced. The overall goal of this type of continuous research is to grow a grounded theory, both detailed and of breadth. Over a period of time, a substantive grounded theory may become broad enough to warrant elaboration into a formal grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

In taking a concatenated approach, it is important to recognise the limitations of the current study, in order that the subsequent study can aim to correct for such weaknesses (Stebbins, 2006). Indeed, whilst the grounded theory approach taken in this study has allowed an in-depth analysis of transition, the design of the study potentially places a limitation on the completeness of the results, since the data collected were entirely retrospective. In some cases the transition had begun several years before the interview, and consequently the results may have been subject to a retrospective recall bias. Whilst attempts were made to minimise this bias through the use of recall interviewing

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techniques (Hindley, 1979), the potential for loss of detail or incomplete accounts cannot be ignored. Furthermore, the results elucidated a transition which occurs over time, and therefore conducting one retrospective interview may not have allowed access to the intricacies of such a temporal process. The enhancement necessary to address this retrospective deficiency would only be possible through a longitudinal study. Wholly predicated on the current study, Study Two takes such an approach, in the tracking of an athlete over 18 months, through the junior-to-senior transition.

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# CHAPTER THREE

## STUDY TWO

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION TO STUDY TWO A

As a research endeavour progresses it may, as Strauss and Corbin (1998) observe, be appropriate to employ a multiplicity of techniques to extract knowledge. Indeed they stress, that such pragmatism will often involve interplay between quantitative and qualitative methods, with both inductive and deductive reasoning considered valid and important in developing theory. In practice, as the investigation unfolds, the researcher can use the information revealed to:

Decide where and how to go about gathering additional data that will further evolution of the theory. The decisions made at any of these critical junctures will be varied. Sometimes, it might be necessary to make use of quantitative measures; other times, qualitative data gathering and analysis might be more appropriate (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; p. 33).

Even in research which lends itself to a qualitative approach, there may (and should, according to Hyde, 2000) come a point, once relevant concepts are identified and hypotheses formed, where it is appropriate to turn to deductive methods, if doing so will mean that theory can be advanced.

#### 3.1.1 Induction versus Deduction

The interplay between inductive and deductive reasoning may enhance a concatenated research project (Stebbins, 1992, 2006). Inductive inference, as deployed in the previous study, produces theory drawn from observations. In contrast, deductive reasoning narrows and intensifies the focus. The researcher's interpretations or theory and the resultant hypotheses, can be tested to determine if they are valid and if they can apply to, or be used to understand, a particular case (Hyde, 2000).

The objective of concatenating the current research is to further the development of a theory of junior-senior transition. This is pursued in this study by revisiting the



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interpretations made in the first, largely inductive study, with a greater emphasis on deductive reasoning, whilst staying within the qualitative framework most appropriate to the nature of this research.

Typically, qualitative research is predominantly based on an inductive approach to reasoning and as a result, the theory generated is frequently left untested (Hyde, 2000). In contrast, deductive processes largely involve quantitative methods that, implicitly constrain the testing of a theory to those elements which are quantifiable. For many theories of social process, this is inappropriate (Bitektine, 2008). Strauss and Corbin's (1998) prescription is that quantitative and qualitative methods should be mixed, in order to optimise the advancement of understanding, and Hyde (2000) defines the process as, not so much a quantitative testing after qualitative inquiry, but an inductive stage followed by a deductive one; or an alternation between the two. According to Bitektine, both elements are required and should be utilised in research. But he cautions that deductive does not *have* to mean quantitative; social theory *should* be tested, including those aspects which are not quantifiable (Bitektine, 2008).

The discussion above suggests that, in order to test social theory, a rethinking of the typical deductive process is required, alongside consideration of how this fits within the constructivist framework of the research. In qualitative research, and when examining the propositions of a theory of social process, such as transition, it is inappropriate (even if it were possible), to use a between subjects design i.e., to manipulate variables and compare groups, as in the classic hypothetico-deductive framework.

It is important to repudiate the notion that diversification in the method of analysis, as described above, transgresses certain key principles within this research programme. There is no contradiction with Strauss and Corbin's (1998) stipulation that research should be undertaken without a list of preconceived concepts or guiding theoretical foundations, (as articulated in the previous study). Also, the intention to allow the research design to evolve throughout the research process, again driven by the data itself, can be sustained.

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### 3.1.2 Deductive Processes, Constructivism and Qualitative Research

A constructivist framework implies a tolerance of the ambiguous and an appreciation of multiple perspectives (Stake, 2003). Equally, Stake (1995, 2003), acknowledges that it is natural for the researcher to be concerned about the comprehensiveness, clarity and validity or accuracy, of their description: “However accuracy is construed, researchers don’t want to be inaccurate, caught without confirmation” (Stake, 2003, p.147). The protocol which qualitative researchers typically adopt, to reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation, is triangulation (Denzin, 1978), whereby additional perspectives on the data are sought. However, within a constructivist framework, the use of triangulation is complicated, since there are multiple possible interpretations and therefore establishing the ‘best’ view is fraught with difficulties (Stake, 1995). Thus, for many qualitative researchers, triangulation is used to discover alternative readings (different ways the phenomenon can be interpreted) and to clarify meaning, in order that it can be communicated to the reader most effectively. It may be the case that, with additional observation or alternative perspectives, there are grounds for reviewing and revisiting the original understanding (Stake, 1995). This is the principal goal of most qualitative researchers operating within a constructivist paradigm; triangulation is a search for additional interpretations which may further theory development, rather than the confirmation of a single meaning per se (Flick, 1992; cited in Stake, 1995).

The form of triangulation most frequently adopted in qualitative research is *member checking* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which is widely accepted as a suitable method of evaluating the researcher’s interpretation (Stake, 2003). An alternative technique, used in Study One of the current research, is *investigator triangulation* (Denzin, 1978). This can involve an independent researcher reviewing the data and comparing their own interpretation with the initial/original findings. Often however, testing of this kind constitutes a last, ad hoc, step in the research methodology, and deductive procedures are not fully integrated into the research process. Greater consistency in this respect would assist researchers and their audience, in that analysis and the resultant theory development would be considered as more robust (Hyde, 2000).

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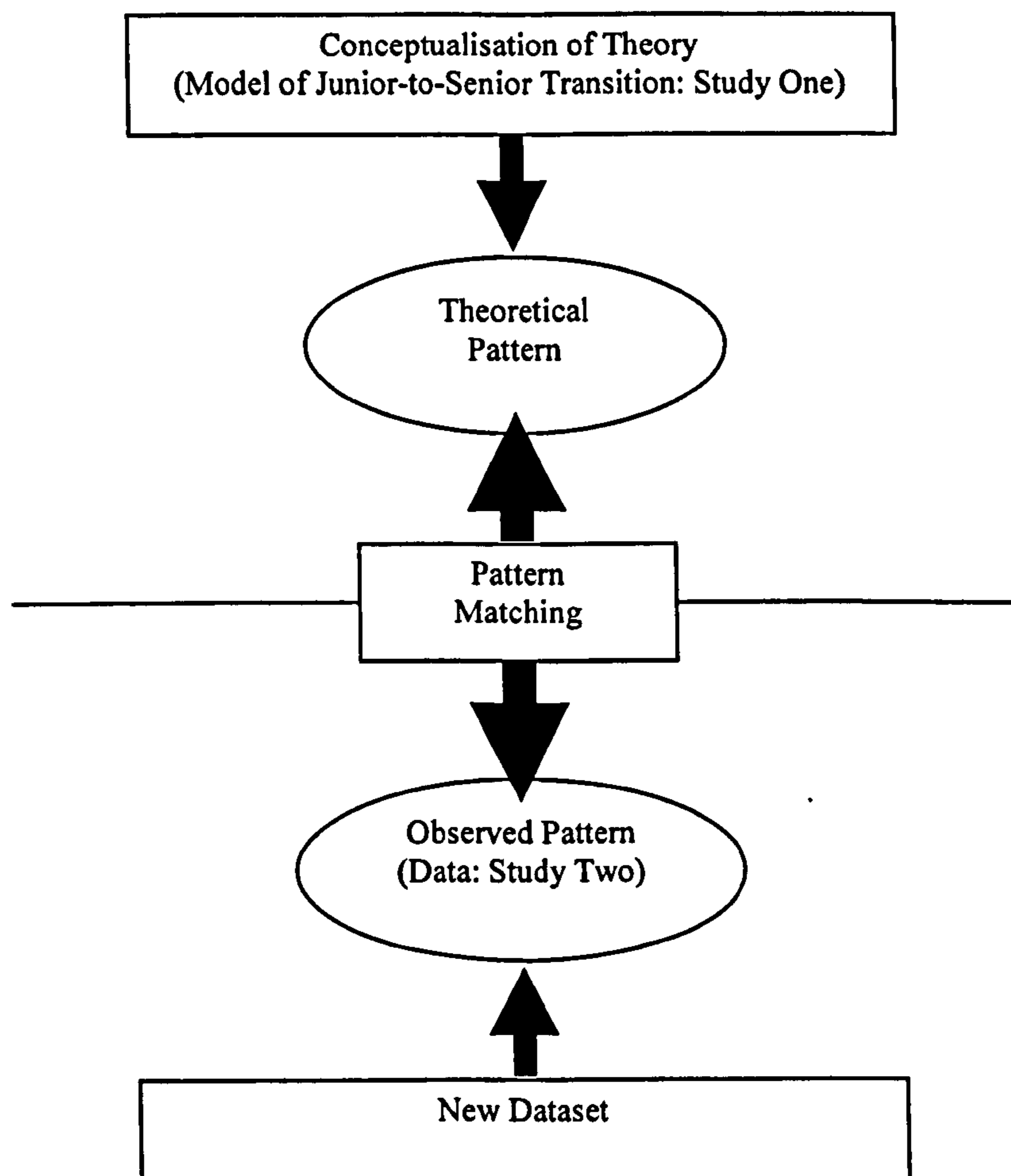
### 3.1.3 Pattern Matching

An extension of investigator triangulation, which formalises the deductive process as a step, in and of itself, in the qualitative research process (and used in the current study), is known as *pattern matching*. In all types of research, the quest for meaning is often actually a search for patterns (Stake, 1995). Investigator triangulation, with the resultant additional perspectives, provides a view on the ability of those patterns to represent the data. However, for this procedure an additional dataset must be used, i.e., one which was not used in the building of the theory being tested. The theoretical interpretations (or pattern) developed from the first dataset (or an existing theory) are juxtaposed (by independent judges) with the new dataset to determine if the patterns are found in the fresh data (Hyde, 2000). Strauss and Corbin also highlight this as a valuable step in the research process: “theory is validated by comparing it to raw data or by presenting it to respondents for their reactions” (p. 161). The interplay between inductive and deductive processes during theory building means that theory is validated as it is created, but it is typically tested in another study (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; p. 213).

Although it is rarely acknowledged or indeed thought of in these terms, quantitative research typically involves a form of pattern matching (e.g., through a test of significance). A useful definition of the method is provided by Trochim (1989), who states that pattern matching is:

“An attempt to link two patterns, where one is a theoretical pattern, and the other is an observed or operational one....To the extent that the patterns match, one can conclude that the theory and any other theories that might predict the same observed pattern receive support. It is important to demonstrate that there are no plausible alternative theories that account for the observed pattern and this task is made much easier when the theoretical pattern of interest is a unique one.” (pp. 356-357).

Thus pattern matching involves the comparison of an expected pattern with the pattern in the data under scrutiny; data which have not been used to develop the theory being examined (Hyde, 2000). The pattern matching process is illustrated in Figure 3.1.



**Figure 3.1: Basic Pattern Matching Model (adapted from Trochim, 1989).**

In some studies, more than one pattern is used and their validity in matching the subsequently observed pattern is assessed. As a consequence, it is possible to subject the two (or more) predicted patterns (i.e., theories) to a falsification test (Popper, 1968; cited in Bitektine, 2008). Popperian hypothetico-deductive methodology asserts that theory cannot be proved through verification with a single case study, but it can be (or certain elements of it can be) falsified (Bitektine, 2008). Within the constructivist framework however, it is additional interpretations and an examination of the theory's ability to represent the data that is pivotal. In the current study, it was also the researcher's aim, not to check the validity of the analysis in a positivist sense, but rather to demonstrate, as alluded to in Study One, that given the same general rules for data collection and

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analysis, similar conditions, and a researcher with a similar perspective, another researcher should be able to arrive at the same general conclusion (Corbin & Strauss, 1990), and that the analysis is, indeed, grounded in the data as stated.

### *The Pattern Matching Process*

It is important to demonstrate that no theory provides a better match than the one being tested (Trochim, 1989), and this is most easily achieved when either a) more than one pattern is used, and their validity in matching the observed pattern is assessed or b) the theory tested is the only one appropriate. In the current research, the propositions developed in Study One were the only published findings in the area at inception of the research, and therefore these were tested alone. Within the constructivist framework, however, the researcher was primarily concerned to incorporate the interpretations of other researchers, to check comprehensiveness in representing the data, and to clarify meaning and further to develop theory rather than to check the validity of the interpretations, or to determine a single or 'best' interpretation (Flick, 1992; as cited in Stake, 1995). Negative findings should be seen as important cues for further exploration and research, and the researcher must therefore be mindful that the theory testing could yield such results i.e., that predictions derived from the theory may not be supported in the pattern matching (Bitektine, 2008).

In practice, the process of pattern matching in qualitative research is not clearly defined, but guidelines can be drawn from authors such as Trochim (1989), Hyde (2000), and Bitektine (2008). The first stage involves the formation of hypotheses to be assessed. In the context of social theories, hypotheses are often less discrete than in classic hypothetico-deductive research (Bitektine, 2008), and are therefore likely to be broad propositions derived from theory rather than hypotheses per se. The conceptualisation of hypotheses can be undertaken in many different ways, depending on the style of research. Trochim (1989) suggests that patterns may be verbal in nature, or consist of a group of mathematical formulae, or pictorial representations as appropriate to the research endeavour. One also needs to consider the level of generalisability of the hypothetical pattern i.e., whether the pattern is described in such a way as to be applicable only to the

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specific model in question, or in a more general context. Such variability should be driven by the purposes of the study (Trochim, 1989).

According to Bitektine (2008), pattern matching as a deductive process in qualitative research, is of particular value when social theory is tested in a social process over time e.g., in a prospective case study. By using a prospective, longitudinal case study design, the hypotheses can be formed before the outcome patterns (of the case study) are known, and tested at a predetermined follow-up time, using a pattern matching technique. In this way, the researcher's hypotheses are not biased by foreknowledge of the outcomes of the data analysis, on the basis that hypotheses will be generated *before* data is collected. Trochim (1989) also suggests that a pattern match will be more convincing when the theory is developed without knowledge of the observed pattern. However, pattern matching can and should be employed at a later stage if this is not possible. A further precautionary measure, which can be useful in qualitative pattern matching for the purposes of minimising possible bias in the development of hypotheses, requires a review of the hypotheses by an independent third party with a view to substantiating their construct validity (Bitektine, 2008).

An additional source of bias arises during the pattern matching process, when there may be a tendency for the researcher selectively to identify information which supports their favoured hypotheses, and to ignore that which does not. Bitektine (2008) proposes several solutions to this problem, such as assigning alternative hypotheses to different researchers in the research team, whose role it is to find support for that theory and to defend it in competition with others in the research team. However this too may be biased by the differences in personality amongst the research team. A further suggestion proposed, and adopted by Hyde (2000), is the use of an independent panel which determines the match between observed and expected outcomes. This removes the problem of selective bias, since a reviewer independent to the research project will have played no role in the development of the hypotheses or the collection of data.

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There are currently no well defined guidelines for interpreting the results of a pattern match (Yin, 2003), and the task is made harder in qualitative research, where things are rarely black and white, i.e., they are ambiguous (Stake, 2003). Nevertheless, the evaluation criteria should be determined before the pattern matching takes place. Conclusions should be made based on the strength of support for the hypotheses (Bitektine, 2008), whilst an understanding pervades that whatever the criteria chosen, the pattern match (whether in quantitative or qualitative research) is unlikely to be exact, and partial matches will often provide a rich source of information to support the modification and development of theory (Trochim, 1989).

In discussing the evaluation of pattern matching in qualitative research, Bitektine (2008) turns to Glaser and Strauss's concept of theoretical saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) for guidance, and in doing so contends that, when there is sufficient evidence to build a proposition from scratch in the outcome data, the hypothesis is supported. Bitektine argues that this does not of course prove that the proposition is correct, but rather that it applies to the data and is not falsified by the available data. A further suggestion is that it is important that the hypotheses are evaluated, based upon how strongly the reviewers believe that a proposition is justified. Thus, theoretical saturation is deemed useful in qualitative research, not only in inductive theory building, but also in deductive theory testing, by enabling the researcher to determine when sufficient case study evidence for a hypothesis is available and by suggesting directions for further data collection as necessary (Bitektine, 2008).

The present research, employing the foregoing concepts of concatenation and deductive theory testing, is designed to further the development of a theory of junior-senior transition and therefore to build upon the initial study. Study One of this thesis was largely exploratory in nature, although through theoretical sampling it became more focused. However, the design of Study One limited the exploration of some important issues; namely, it became apparent that the process of transition from junior to senior occurred over an extended period of time. Far from having definite temporal boundaries i.e., in the prelude to, and the aftermath of the move from junior to senior competition,

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adaptation was gradual, beginning with considerable preparation and continuing with sustained learning, adjustment, and redefinition of the self. This was the context which drove the theoretical sampling and interviewing of athletes at different stages of their senior careers within Study One. These techniques generated a retrospective account of a transition process which had begun years beforehand and consequently, it remains possible that the richness of the transition experience was not fully captured (Lally, 2007).

Because the greatest understanding of social process is achieved using prospective methods (Bitektine, 2008), it was concluded that such a follow-up study could add significant value; firstly, by tracking an athlete through their transition, and secondly through a focus on the athlete's relationship with his/her support team. The initial study findings highlighted the prominent role at the junior-senior transition of social relationships, and in particular the coach-athlete relationships. Therefore, to extend Study One and to concatenate the research process, it was also deemed beneficial to incorporate a greater focus on this aspect i.e., to extend the focus beyond the athlete to develop a greater understanding of the important social processes operating at this transition (Stebbins, 2006).

In summary, this investigation adopts an instrumental case study approach, to prospectively track an athlete throughout transition. An instrumental case study is one conducted with the intention to gain insight of, and an understanding of the phenomenon concerned, and is in contrast to an intrinsic case study, which is conducted purely out of interest in the specific case (Stake, 2003). The coach-athlete relationship is captured in this case study by including members of the coaching support team. The new data revealed will provide a means to a concatenated programme of research, incorporating these supplementary elements. In addition to a more comprehensive picture of the complexity of this social process (Bitektine, 2008), data for the development of and the deductive testing of the propositions of Study One should also emerge.



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A case study is appropriate to uncover the complexity of the transition, since it is the design of choice when the objective is to discover the process behind a phenomenon (Yin, 2003). In qualitative case studies, the aim is the detailed understanding of the particular (Stake, 1995), such as is necessary for development of grounded theory of a social process such as the junior-senior transition in sport. Interestingly, Stake (1995), taking the perspective of the reader of academic research reports, encourages the qualitative researcher to include significant narrative. He recognises that generalisations may be made by readers, as they reflect upon their existing knowledge of the subject and other relevant cases and as they accommodate the new information presented to them, thereby making their own interpretations (Stake, 1995). He expresses it thus:

A constructivist view encourages providing readers with good raw material for their own generalizing. The emphasis is on providing description of things that readers ordinarily pay attention to, particularly places, events, and people, not only commonplace description, but “thick description,” the interpretations of the people most knowledgeable about the case. Constructivism helps a case study researcher justify lots of narrative description in the final report (p.102).

In conclusion, the design of the second study (predicated upon Study One) was driven by a desire to:

- a) Concatenate the research process and correct for design limitations in Study One.
- b) Extend Study One in exploring transition, but to do so longitudinally, tracking the transition process as it occurred over time, in a case study providing rich detail and a greater depth of understanding of the process of transition and the role of coaches.
- c) Test the interpretations made in Study One, thereby progressing from inductive to deductive processes, and moving further towards the building of a grounded theory of junior-senior transition.

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## 3.2 METHODOLOGY

### 3.2.1 Study Design

The current study involved a qualitative examination of the junior- to-senior transition of one athlete. The study was prospective in design, occurring over a period of 20 months and took the form of an instrumental case study.

### 3.2.2 The Case

The case for this study was sampled on the basis that it could provide a valuable format for deductively testing the theory proposed in the primary study, as well as adding depth and detail to the emerging theory and the more general understanding of the area. This is consistent with Stake (2003), who indicates that the primary motive for choosing a subject for an instrumental case study should be the 'opportunity to learn'. Accordingly, the case for the current study was selected due to the perceived potential for learning, for reasons of accessibility and because of its "potential manifestation or representation of important theoretical constructs" (Patton, 2002; p.238)

The single participant was selected from those involved in Study One on the basis of his favourable profile. Scott was a good theoretical match, given the parameters of the research programme and, being the youngest, his transition from junior to senior level was the most recent. Importantly, his first interview revealed an athlete still very much *in* transition. Additionally, from a pragmatic perspective, Scott was the athlete with whom the researcher could gain the most regular access and consequently he provided the optimal learning opportunity (Stake, 2003). Finally, being a tennis player, the importance and transparency of the ranking system in the sport provided an objective marker for tracking and benchmarking Scott's progress.

As explained in the previous study, Scott was an athlete who at commencement of Study One, aged 19 years and 10 months, had a senior world tennis ranking of 570. As alluded to in said study, Scott had reached the quarter finals of a junior grand slam event and had experienced considerable success nationally and internationally as a junior. His senior accomplishments, at the time of first interview, included winning a \$10,000 tournament

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on the Futures tennis circuit. Scott's core coaching support team consisted of a travelling coach, resident coach at his training base and a sport psychologist.

Scott's travelling coach and sport psychologist were interviewed, in expectation that they would provide additional insight of the nature of the athlete's relationships with the coaching staff in his support team (deemed through Study One as a relationship of primary importance during within-career transitions) and in particular, their role in the transition. Both had been working with the participant since he was 13 years of age (i.e., approximately 7 years before the commencement of this study).

### **3.2.3 Procedure**

It is common practice to employ retrospective interviews (e.g., Lavalley & Robinson, 2006; Swain, 1991) and questionnaires (e.g., Stambulova, Stephan, & Jäphag, 2007) to examine an athletic career transition. However, memories of a past transition may fade over time and the quality and comprehensiveness of recall may be affected by this as well as the current emotional state and/or events since transition. Therefore, single retrospective interviews are unlikely to facilitate a comprehensive examination of the process of transition and the concomitant identity changes (Lally, 2007). Given this impediment, in her study of retirement from sport, Lally proposed a longitudinal, prospective approach to the study of athletic career transition, designed to address the limitations of a purely retrospective examination.

Subsequent to the first interview, which formed part of Study One in the current research programme, Scott was interviewed on four occasions at (approximately) six-month intervals, as he progressed through the world rankings. In accordance with their availability, Scott's travelling coach was interviewed at the 6 month and 19 month stage of the study, and his sport psychologist at 1, 10, and 19 months.

#### *Interview Guide*

The athlete and coach interview guides were modelled on the interview guide used in Study One. The design featured open questions falling into three broad categories: i)

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current perceptions of the transition, ii) resources and iii) challenges. In the current study however, there was a greater emphasis on the temporal element of the transition i.e., questions were phrased to probe the athlete's experience over the previous 6 months, including, for example: "What challenges have you (or has Scott) had to overcome in the last 6 months, to get to where you (and he) are in the sport now?"; "What are the differences between the stage you are at now and that of 6 months ago?". Questions were also constructed to establish any changes in the athlete's social network across time and to explore current relationships, such as: "Can you describe your social network at present?" and "What role have they played?" Open questioning, of the kind illustrated by these examples, was adopted in order to avoid leading the interviewee in any way (e.g., "Can you describe your social network at present?" as opposed to "Does your social network still consist of.....?"). For consistency, the same questions were repeated at each interview to ensure that developments and trends over time could be elicited. The coach and sport psychologist interview guide contained similar questions, focused on Scott's transition, but with an additional emphasis on the relationship with the athlete at that time. Questions included, for example: "Can you describe your current relationship with Scott?" The athlete and coach/sport psychologist interview guides can be found in Appendix B (pp. 347-350).

### *Interview Procedure*

Each interview began with an introduction, detailing the purpose and rationale of the study, assurances of confidentiality, and an explanation of the interview aims and process (see Appendix B for participant information sheet and consent form; pp. 345-346). Interviews took place at a time and location convenient to the participant and his team, and around the athlete's (and coach's) tournament schedule. This schedule meant that it was not always possible to interview the athlete, coach and sport psychologist at the same time in the season. Athlete interviews ranged in duration from 52 to 66 minutes, with the coach and sport psychologist interviews lasting between 53 and 73 minutes, and 40, and 80 minutes respectively. All interviews were recorded, with permission, using a digital Dictaphone. As in Study One, participants were assured that there were no right or wrong answers, and were asked to inform the interviewer if they could not remember or did not

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understand the question. Specific probes were identified for clarification and elaboration of a particular point (Patton, 2002).

As in the previous study, the interviewer endeavoured to “bound” (Hindley, 1979; Moss, 1979) the participant to the time frame to be discussed (i.e., since the last interview). Information about events played, results and ranking over the intervening period, was extracted before asking the participant further to bound themselves within the time frame by more generally describing their activities during that period.

### **3.2.4 Data Analysis**

#### *Pattern Matching*

The pattern matching process used in the current study drew upon recommendations from a number of appropriate sources (including Bitektine, 2008; Hyde, 2000; Trochim, 1989), and adapted these to accommodate the research question, the guiding philosophy and the design of the research programme. The objective throughout, was further to develop theory, and more particularly to establish whether and how the propositions developed in Study One could be seen in the data by those with a similar research background and training, and consequently how the theory could further be developed. The procedure, along with relevant considerations, is detailed below:

#### *1. Formation of Propositions*

The first step in the pattern matching analysis was the identification of expected outcomes, or propositions, from Study One. These constituted the ‘hypotheses’ to be tested. In the current research, the propositions were formulated as a concise document detailing the theory of transition developed in Study One. This document can be seen in Appendix B (pp. 354-357), and includes pictorial representations of the model to complement the explanation of the core categories.

Given that the current study was initiated before the conclusion of Study One, the researcher was mindful not to be biased by her knowledge of the current study in the formation of the hypotheses, since the timescale precluded the formation of propositions

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from Study One prior to commencement of the second. In fact, the data from the current study were merely collected and stored and not analysed prior to the pattern matching. Therefore, in practice, the researcher's foreknowledge of the case study data was very superficial and consequently this minimised the potential for bias. Similarly, the researcher sought to mitigate the possible impact of exposure to the outcomes of Study One on the collection of data for the second (case) study, through designing, and then adhering to, a broad interview guide for the case study, which was compiled before the conclusion of Study One.

The propositions were also reviewed by the researcher's supervisor, who already had knowledge of Study One (and no knowledge of the data from the current study), in order to verify their correspondence with the results they were claimed to be representing.

## *2. Preparation of the Data*

In the current study, the data were entirely separate from those used in the previous study. The case (Scott), was a participant in Study One, however the data for each study remained separate and exclusive to each individual study. Also, in compliance with Hyde (2000), the data used in the pattern matching were not analysed prior to this taking place. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and excerpts of this raw data were used for the process. In order to provide insight of the temporal pattern of the transition, the data from each time point were collated for Scott and each member of the support team, to form an overview of the transition process as it unwound, within the timescale of the study. Data were chosen to form the excerpts on the basis of relevance in explaining the athlete's experience of transition. Excerpts were utilised, rather than entire interview transcripts, for practical purposes i.e., to limit the volume of data to a manageable level. The data files used in the pattern matching process can be found in Appendix B (pp. 358-368).

## *3. Identifying the Pattern Match*

To avoid any tendency for the researcher to identify and select information which supported her hypotheses when conducting a pattern match, the current study employed an independent review panel, chosen on the basis of members' similar background to the

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researcher. Eight reviewers were used, all of whom were either current or former postgraduate psychology students or current researchers in sport psychology. Each reviewer received the data from one of the interviewees (athlete, coach or sport-psychologist), and across time points, to perform the pattern match. Along with the propositions produced, the reviewers were presented with instructions and questions, in order to assist them with the pattern matching process (see Appendix B, pp. 351-353).

#### *4. Determining a Pattern Match*

The researcher asked the members of the independent review panel to what extent they believed that the theoretical propositions were represented in the data, i.e., whether the proposition could be built from the data, as recommended by Bitektine (2008). The panel was asked to indicate how strongly members felt that this was the case for each proposition. A Likert scale was adopted from 0 (not at all) to 5 (very much so) for reviewers to indicate the extent to which they believed that the proposition was represented in the data. The reviewers were then asked to justify their response in a long-answer question such as: "In your opinion, *how* is a preparation for transition demonstrated in the transition of this athlete? Please elaborate on your answer as much as possible." This question was posed in order to encourage the reviewer to reveal whether, in their own judgement, the proposition could indeed be developed from the data [in accordance with the theoretical saturation model suggested by Bitektine (2008)].

The pattern match for each proposition was judged on the basis of the degree to which the reviewers believed the hypothesis to be warranted. Therefore, the Likert scale responses were averaged between reviewers to give a mean match between the propositions and the data. This was used to determine the extent of the pattern match, with an average of 5 suggesting that there was a very strong match between the proposition and the data, without any revision required, an average of 4 suggesting a strong match with minor revision required. A mean of 3 indicated a match, but that the proposition could not be built entirely from the data and therefore some revision was required, as indicated by Hyde (2000), or more data were required. A mean of 2 or less than 2 suggests that the match was weak, and substantial revision was required. If the mean was 0 (or close to 0),

the particular part of the model to which the proposition applied could not be found within the data. Where revisions were required, the reviewers' suggestions were taken into consideration. Whilst the mean scores provided a useful indicator as to the reviewers' perceptions of a match, the researcher was especially interested in the comments provided by the panel, as they represented potential to further enhance the theory of transition.

### 3.3 RESULTS

The mean reviewer ratings on the pattern match are shown in Table 3.1, below:

Proposition	Mean*	S.D.
1. Preparation for transition	3.63	1.3
2. Developing readiness	3.75	1.28
3. Adaptation to the transition	3.5	0.76
4. Stability within change	4	0.58
5. A developing identity	3.71	0.76
6. A model of junior-senior transition in sport	4	0

**Table 3.1: Mean reviewer ratings: Match between proposition and data.**

\*Mean ratings on a Likert scale: 0 (not at all) to 5 (very much so).

Whilst all mean ratings were over 3.5, indicating a strong match, the ratings suggested that each proposition requires some minor revision, or extension through further data collection, in order to provide a better match between the theory and the data. The consensus between reviewers on propositions 3, 4, 5 and 6 was high, as highlighted in the standard deviation scores, and lower for propositions 1 and 2. Each of the propositions will now be considered in turn with a summary of the reviewers' comments regarding the match between the proposition and the data (i.e., the evidence for the building of that proposition from that data; Bitektine, 2008), and with comments from the reviewers as to how the model could better reflect the data. The reviewers' comments are presented as



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submitted by them; to provide an accurate representation, and the complete sample can be found in Appendix B (pp. 369-376).

*Proposition 1: Preparing for Transition*

To what extent is preparation for transition demonstrated in the transition of this athlete?

The mean reviewer rating for the pattern match between Proposition 1 and the data was 3.63 (*S.D.* = 1.3). When asked to justify how the proposition could be built from the data, the reviewers drew upon examples in the data of time commitment, sacrifices, mentoring from and communication with older athletes and coaches, and a period of developing an understanding of and learning of, the skills required at the next level. Scott's identification of the gap between his current skills and the skills he needed to have was seen as key in preparing for the next stage:

I think he prepares for the transition by analysing the 'skill gap' between himself and other players- knowing his strengths and weaknesses, and also through comparison with others to know where he's making progress, especially in terms of rankings (Reviewer 8).

The reviewers identified that Scott had to learn how to balance his social and professional life, and become accustomed to the new lifestyle demands and performance level at each stage. Reviewer 6 summarised Scott's preparation in the different areas as being related to competing simultaneously on the junior and senior tours, developing a plan for the transition, and learning to balance the social and professional aspects of his role:

Firstly, the athlete had a period where they were competing at both junior and senior levels, giving the opportunity to experience the new situation while still having the familiarity of the junior tournament. I also think the development of a plan about what their tennis would lead to helped to prepare them for the transition by allowing them to consider the issues they were going to face. Also I think the 'learning' of how to have a social and professional life, and to balance the two is a key theme throughout, and shows the maturity to take on and make the transition.

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A further key area related to the role of others in the preparation process, with other athletes and coaches key, as alluded to by Reviewer 2:

He spent time with higher level athletes or coaches, drew upon their experience, and learnt the psychological skills that would be needed at the next level of performance.

Reviewer 7 also marked the important role of others. Citing a quote from the sport psychologist, this reviewer highlighted the input from these significant others:

I know he has friendships with some prominent coaches who've also been a support, and I know that he's also, you know [he] has friendships with players and other people he texts, like that, who've been an additional social support.

No suggestions were made as to how to amend this proposition. The standard deviation of 1.3, which in relative terms (for a 0-5 scale) shows some disparity in the reviewers' ratings can be explained by the low rating of Reviewer 5, who labelled the match between the proposition and the outcome data from the coach at 1 on the 0-5 Likert scale. In contrast, Reviewer 6, who also reviewed the data of the coach, rated this at 5. All other reviewers rated the accuracy of preparation for transition in reflecting this transition as 3 or 4 on the 0-5 scale.

### *Proposition 2: Developing Readiness*

To what extent is readiness for the next stage (i.e., an ability to cope with the performance and lifestyle demands) demonstrated in the transition of this athlete?

The proposition of readiness was picked out by the reviewers, as neatly summarised by Reviewer 3: "The player talks about being ready to move between different levels of tournament and about certain points and matches which made them feel they were now ready to progress".

The mean reviewer rating for the match between the proposition of readiness and the data was 3.75 (*S.D.* = 1.28). It was perceived that readiness was related to a developing confidence in being capable and comfortable at the current level, and that this was underpinned by a realisation that they were good enough to be at that level, and an

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understanding of what is required and also what will be different in, a move to the next level. In response to reading the athlete data, Reviewer 1 commented that acclimatisation to the current situation led to a feeling of confidence:

One of the re-occurring themes that were apparent from the interviews was developing confidence. The thought processes used during the readiness phase was supported by several statements such as 'having nothing to lose' and 'coaches and support staff believed that the player was capable, so they were', and successful players 'have the same experiences just like everyone else'. It appears that the player has acclimated to playing at difficult levels and as a result is experiencing success.

Being invited to have contact with more senior athletes (rather than merely seeking contact) was also seen as an indicator of readiness and acceptance: "Being invited to hit with top players- people he looks up to and aspires to- supports his sense of being ready to move into the senior network" (Reviewer 8).

From a coach perspective, the reviewers saw encouragement and focus from the coach as important in prompting the development of skills for the transition, and this was related to a readiness for the demands faced. Scott's invited contact with senior peers and his increasingly favourable comparison of himself to other players was also viewed as important in stimulating a feeling of being ready to move in to that network. The skills developed were seen as key to being ready to take on a senior career:

The coach talks about the player's increasing independence and responsibility for all aspects of his career, practising, travel arrangements etc. Also, the fine tuning of other skills such as organisation [will] help him to become ready and take on the responsibility of a career on the senior tour. The developing of a greater understanding about how his life will be as a 'professional' tennis player, i.e., time away from home, shows they are ready to cope with their new/different lifestyle (Reviewer 6).

As with Proposition 1, there were no comments from the reviewers as to how the concept of readiness could more closely match the case study data, although it was suggested that

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confidence continues to be developed throughout each phase, and that this is linked to readiness for the next phase.

*Proposition 3: Adaptation to Transition*

To what extent is adaptation to the transition demonstrated in the transition of this athlete?

The proposition of adaptation to transition was rated by the reviewers at a mean of 3.5 (*S.D.* = 0.76). The reviewers identified several related areas in the data, which centred on Scott's understanding of the demands in his environment, and his possession of skills to deal with them. Demands were perceived by the reviewers to relate to travelling, performance, social, lifestyle, training and competition issues, with new challenges continually unfolding as the player progressed through the rankings. Reviewer 4 summarised the adaptation process: "There are several related answers about this athlete's adaptation. Unlike his junior period, he is becoming used to dealing with his professional tennis player life, such as frequency of travelling, hard training, and tough competition".

Sometimes, the reviewers inferred that Scott's expectations diverged from reality in terms of performance standards, and therefore adaptation, in this case to the level of the Challenger tour, took longer than anticipated. Over the course of the interviews, as Reviewer 4 commented, there was evidence that Scott was able to manage demands which he had previously struggled with: "The earlier interview suggests concerns in off court life, but the later one shows that he seems free from that, and he even found good balance between [finding a] release and hard training". There was also a perception that adaptation took place in terms of adjustment of goals, and the development of the identity of being an athlete as one's job, and taking responsibility for that career. Reviewer 5 saw this as indicative of a stronger identity. This perspective, the reviewers reported, was driven by the coach and echoed by the sport psychologist. Reviewer 7 also picked out adjustments which were required of Scott within levels of the tour, which related to the lifestyle differences between those at the top of the sport, which he experienced when

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selected to represent his country, and the realities of the level he had to return to. This was the contrast between a luxury lifestyle and his typical existence. Whilst a challenge, Reviewer 8 also recognised that this selection provided an opportunity for Scott to adjust to playing on a big court, with a large audience.

Reviewer 3 felt that there was less evidence for Scott's adaptation, and more evidence for his developing an understanding of what was required:

It appears that this athlete focuses on what is required more than actually making the changes. Although in broader terms they do discuss a wider goal of becoming the best that they can be and I guess that they are always adapting towards this goal.

#### *Proposition 4: Stability within Change*

To what extent does this athlete strive to achieve a sense of stability within the transition?

There was considerable consensus between the reviewers regarding Proposition 4, with a mean rating of 4 (*S.D.* = 0.58). Stability was seen as being represented by the provisions of support from role models and a constant support team of coaches and family. That the player had a stable overarching goal to become the best player possible, was also identified within this category. In reviewing the data from the travelling coach, Reviewer 6 saw that:

The plan they [Scott and his coach] developed may offer stability by keeping them focused and allowing them to track progress – it prevents the peaks and troughs having as much impact, as hopefully they can be rationalised and accommodated in respect to the 'plan'.

Reviewer 3 also picked out the importance of Scott's long term goals in generating stability in this period:

The player does talk about the overall goal of becoming the best that they can be and it seems that having this target provides a focus through any transition. They also mention the importance of keeping a good network around them such as coaches and family which will again provide further stability through the process.

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The desire for stability was also noted by Reviewer 2 in Scott's need to find a stable base, since he found being away from home for such extended periods was sometimes a challenge.

*Proposition 5: A Developing Identity*

To what extent is a continually developing identity demonstrated in the transition of this athlete?

The development of Scott's identity was deemed by the reviewers to be predicated on: how he perceived that others viewed him, a sense of belonging resulting from a feeling of being good enough to be at that level, acceptance by other players and by how he viewed himself relative to others and as a part of each new environment. For example, Reviewer 2 commented: "The player recognises how opponents on the 'Futures' circuit now view him", and Reviewer 8 highlighted the junior to senior shift in identity, as well as the impact on identity of the results of a grass court season:

There is a realisation of moving from a top end junior player to a low senior level player, and therefore mastering a changing identity. The grass court season may have caused the realisation that although he has made great progress he still has a long way to go and needs to continually develop and progress at different levels (Reviewer 8).

This identity was therefore subject to change due to variations in these factors, and also when defining events occurred such as selection for teams and losing to particular players, which left Scott re-evaluating where he stood in relation to others and whether he was good enough to be at that level:

The coach speaks of a time where the player 'unravelling' – i.e., they experienced a setback and had self-doubt about their ability to get where they wanted with [their] career. The player needed to refocus after some losses to better players and realise that they would still make it (Reviewer 6).

The comparison to others, which contributed to Scott's identity, was not solely based upon his level of performance, but also engaged other characteristics such as his work

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ethic, and the reputation that this brought him. Reviewer 7 picked out a quote from the coach which summarised this:

No one is working harder than him, and therefore he will win matches, achieve his vision, maximise himself because no one works as hard as him, and it's almost like a symbol, or an identity, and a trademark that he carries, you know he has that reputation (Sport psychologist).

However, Reviewer 3 commented that certain elements of Scott's identity were fixed, i.e., that of an elite player, but that there was a constant moving towards the desired identity (his goals), and his identity changed as he progressed towards that goal:

There appears to be a changing identity as they are moving up the rankings and feel that they start to belong at the higher level. However, Scott's identity remains as an elite tennis player and I am not sure that it is 'constantly' changing. It appears to be more about moving towards the desired identity than changing one's own identity.

Reviewer 4 deduced that Scott's identity evolved across time points and in response to his continuing journey of discovery, in comprehending just how the professional tour really worked. This dynamic was also a function of Scott's changing perception of others; as Scott's level became more aligned with that of his role models, his perception of himself relative to those role models altered, and consequently those players became less significant to him as mentors. The changing nature of Scott's identity was also highlighted by Reviewer 7, who identified that Scott was caught between two identities: one of a player involved in the luxury of the top rungs of the ladder when selected to represent his country, and the other of a player competing at his 'everyday' level on the tour.

The mean reviewer rating for the developing identity proposition was 3.71 (*S.D.* = 0.76). Reviewer 5 did not provide a rating, and suggested that it was necessary to review the player data to provide comment in this area. However, Reviewer 8 neatly summed this concept thus:

Continual identity discovery - I think is fully supported - Scott has gone from understanding his entry level position as a player to various junior levels to being

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ready to transit to a senior player- this being a key milestone and then working through the various levels this would entail. So I think the major times for readjustment to environment, to self-realisation of one's place in terms of their ability and where they fit into the whole world of tennis happens at these key milestones. Acceptance by senior peers I think has a big impact- just being invited to hit with one is encouraging- you feel like you've made it to the 'in' crowd. Learning from them and then seeing good results in your game would be very motivating and justifies your right to be in this crowd. I think acceptance from top players is an important theme. Your family and coaches have quite an unconditional duty to encourage and support you but it's something special when it's from people you aspire to.

*Proposition 6: A Preliminary Model of Junior- to-Senior Transition in Sport*

How well does the preliminary model of junior-to-senior transition reflect what is happening in the transition of this athlete?

In general, the comments from the reviewers strongly support the organisation of the model of transition, with a mean rating of 4 and significant consensus between reviewers (*S.D.* = 0). It should be noted however, that Reviewer 5 failed to rate how well the model reflected what was happening in the transition. Reviewer 1 commented that the dynamic process of transition was well represented in the model, and this reflected the player's constant battle to progress. The third reviewer suggested that for applied intervention, it would be useful to include a greater focus on the external as well as intra-individual influences in transition, such as social relationships and how these factors facilitate transition. Some reorganisation of the model was also suggested, given that incidences such as 'setbacks' and 'breaking through' were perceived to occur at any stage of the transition. It was also suggested that 'confidence' be included in the model, as this factor was deemed to change and evolve during the transition, including through contact with more senior players and playing in more competitive tournaments.



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### 3.4 DISCUSSION

Given the constructivist framework of this research, it was the checking of the grounding of the theory within the data that was most important to the researcher, rather than the validation of the researcher's interpretations or determining the 'best' interpretation. From the pattern match in the current study, it can be argued that the theory of transition which was developed in the initial study was represented in the data. Whilst this lends support to the continued concatenation of this research, in order to develop the theory further, equally the results signalled some minor areas where improvement of the model might be directed. However, it should also be remembered that it is unlikely that a perfect match between propositions and data will be found, and this is especially so at early stages of the development of theory, as in this case. In this context therefore, the results of the pattern match are very promising for the current theory, but nevertheless cannot be viewed as definite 'proof' that the theory is accurate, rather that the results suggest a strong match, with only negligible alterations or additions desirable. As in the development of all grounded theory, further concatenation will always be called for, to enhance the depth and breadth of the model.

The inter-reviewer consistency was high. However, one reviewer (Reviewer 5), who examined the coach data, chose only to provide a rating for propositions 1, 2 and 3. Further, for propositions 1 and 2, the rating of Reviewer 5 was significantly different from the other reviewers, whose ratings were consistently similar. The somewhat aberrant ratings of Reviewer 5 were therefore responsible for the greater standard deviation scores for propositions 1, 2 and 3. Reviewer 5 provided only few, brief comments on the model, and these included references to difficulty experienced in interpreting the coach's style. This was the given reason for the failure to provide a rating for propositions 4, 5 and 6. Possible explanations for this reviewer's lack of comment (of a positive or negative nature), include a lack of understanding of the data, perhaps due to insufficient time spent perusing said data, which, if well founded would be contrary to the nature of qualitative research. Consequently, the comments of this reviewer should perhaps be interpreted with caution.

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In the main, the reviewers commented that overall, the model reflected the dynamic transition process depicted in this case very well, suggesting that the preliminary theory of junior-to-senior transition presented in Study One is broadly supported. Indeed, their reviews mirror the processes of transition described in Study One, such as the important role of social comparison in the building of self-perceptions. However, the reviewers' comments certainly require consideration where they indicate areas in need of elaboration within the model. The most significant subject which fulfils this criterion is the specific role of particular social relationships in facilitating the transition of athletes from junior to senior level, where a deeper understanding would add to the applied utility of the model in supporting athletes in transition.

The results of Study One in this thesis suggested that the process of junior-senior transition involved a development in the athletes' self-perceptions, which occurred as a result of inferences made about various triggers in the athletes' environments. This evolution of identity and self-concept was seen to define the transition, and it took place in accordance with a number of determinants including: the stage of transition, progress and performance, inferences the athletes drew about themselves relative to other athletes, a feeling of belonging in the environment and their perception of how they imagined they were viewed by others. The role of social factors was seen as key, for example in the comparisons athletes made between themselves and others. The transition reflected the development of a senior identity over time, beginning with the pre-transition commitment to the athlete role, moving on to a perception of being a 'small fish in a big pond', and from there to feeling accepted and acquiring a sense of belonging in the post-transition environment.

In the current study, the reviewers concluded that a significant development of Scott's identity was apparent. Again, this evolution was seen to be triggered by Scott's own perceptions of his situation relative to others, a developing sense of belonging at each level, acceptance by others, and his perception of how others viewed him. In Study One, these factors were regarded as being subject to change based upon defining events, both before, during and after the point of transition from junior to senior level. In the data from

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the current study, the reviewers also singled out for comment identity changes which were triggered by events such as fluctuations in performance or setbacks, and an area of the self which was built, not merely upon comparisons of status or ranking, but having regard to individual attributes and reputations, such as work ethic. The idea that Scott could find himself 'caught' between two identities, not only at the transition from top junior to low level senior, but also in his selection to represent his country versus his more mundane life on the tour, was found interesting. Being involved in multiple worlds (junior and senior, and, world class and Challenger level) required further adaptation.

With regard to preparation for transition, this proposition was strongly represented in the data, with the reviewers citing many factors and characteristics which corroborate the body of the theory as described in Study One. These include the use of older athletes and coaches as information and mentoring sources, the identification of the gap between current and required skills, the development of those skills prior to a move to the next level and the adaptation to the new lifestyle and performance level at each stage. The reviewers also recognised the link between preparation and a readiness for the next stage.

Somewhat disappointing was the absence of recommendations from the reviewers as to how this area of the model could be enhanced, since the mean rating of 3.63 suggests some room for improvement. However, this rating can somewhat be explained by the outlying rating of Reviewer 5, without which the mean reviewer pattern match would have equalled 4. Since a perfect match (i.e., a mean of 5) is unlikely, this result is entirely respectable. Alternative possible explanations for the failure to achieve a higher mean rating are available. For example, although preparation for the next stage within the transition was represented in the current data, the contribution may be rather less than was the case *before* the transition from junior to senior level had begun (i.e., in the data which formed Study One). Preparation in the latter stages of transition may prove less conscious than was the case earlier on, because the athlete would by this juncture, be immersed in the senior environment. Adjustments may consequently be more subtle over time, particularly in contrast to the initial change from junior to senior level.

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The reviewers identified that Scott's preparation led to preparedness for the next level, and a readiness to cope with the performance and lifestyle demands was therefore a concept for which they found strong evidence in the data. Again, the rating of Reviewer 5 was in marked contrast to those of the other reviewers, reducing the mean rating and increasing the standard deviation. In view of such divergence, this factor should perhaps be interpreted with caution. Even so, the mean rating for the readiness proposition suggests that this can, to a large extent, be derived from the data of the current study.

The pattern matching reviewers perceived readiness to be represented by a feeling of confidence, generated by the athlete's capacity to compete at the next level and his own recognition of what that signifies. This depiction of readiness is very similar to that found in Study One of this thesis, whereby the preparation for transition prompted a feeling of comfort in the new environment, which the athletes had endeavoured to comprehend and in anticipation of which they had developed relevant coping skills and behaviours, which made them ready for the next challenge, or sub-transition.

Importantly, the reviewers saw the coach as instrumental in stimulating the development of confidence, including through articulating and putting into perspective what was to be expected in transition. This quality of understanding and also the value derived from comparison with peers was recognised as a material influence in gauging whether the next step was achievable. Therefore the associated changes in identity which were accompanied by the athlete's gradual acclimatisation at the new level, with the associated feeling of being on a par with and accepted by his peers, were found important in the development of readiness. Thus, the reviewers picked out the core concepts of readiness and preparation as represented in Figure 2.1.

The synchronisation of an athlete's transition with their state of readiness was an important finding in Study One and this interrelationship was also identified here. The reviewers noted that this athlete, as a consequence of the many and varied influences described, acquired a readiness which allowed him to accomplish the next sub-transition. In Study One however, the focus on social actors in the development of readiness largely

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centred around other athletes, but the greater prominence afforded here to the coach signposts that this subject area is worthy of further exploration.

Adaptation to transition was described in Study One as an on-going adjustment process, in which athletes adapted to lifestyle demands (e.g., accommodating the athlete role as a career, achieving a sport-life balance) and performance demands (e.g., greater and tougher competition). Whilst every athlete will experience a unique transition, and accordingly will face different challenges at different times, those which the reviewers identified in Scott's case, broadly matched those recognised in Study One. These travelling and training demands were seen to be adapted to, in a process over time. A development of identity, to the role of athlete as a career, was also matched in these data.

In the current study, the reviewers perceived that adaptation involved two elements – achieving an understanding of the demands of the transition and adapting to those requirements. A match between the anticipated and actual demands was deemed to be necessary for adaptation to be smooth and swift. The comment made by Reviewer 3, that there was less evidence for Scott's adaptation, and more evidence for his developing an understanding of what was required, may reflect an underlying reality. This being that, developing an understanding of the demands of tennis at each level is relatively straightforward, whereas finding ways to cope with and adapt to those demands and integrate the changes into one's identity is likely to be much more difficult.

In line with the findings of Study One, Scott enjoyed those elements of stability which surrounded him and which helped him to adapt, in a new environment which was otherwise constantly changing. As in Study One, Scott's support structures were seen to provide a key source of stability. This support came both from consistent role models and the constant support team of coaches and family. An additional source of stability was identified by the reviewers, as being the personal goal which the athlete set and sustained to guide him through his transition and which protected him from the ups and downs inherent in the process. The precise nature and type of support which provided this stability is deserving of further investigation.

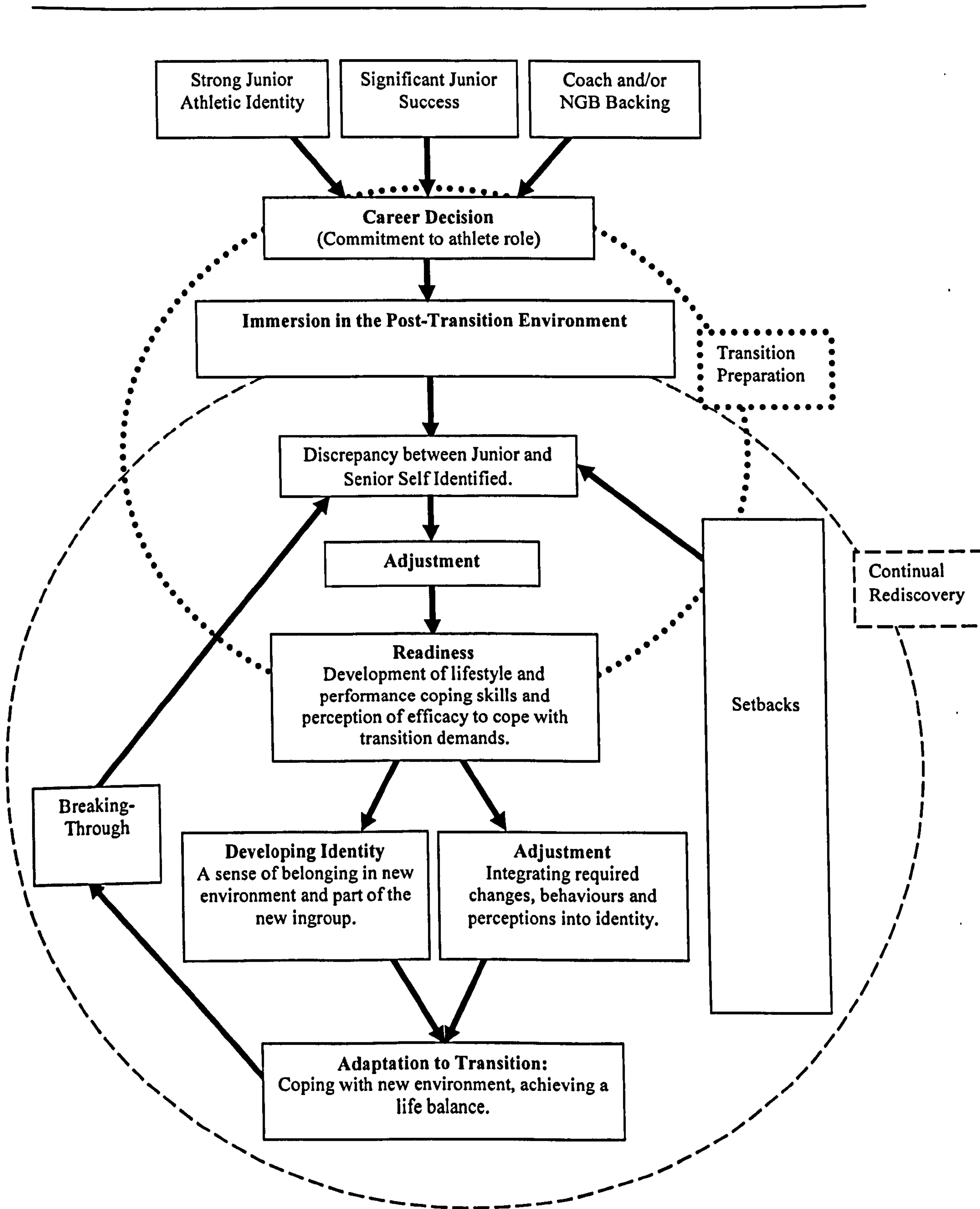
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In considering the various suggestions made by the reviewers, certain minor changes have been made to the preliminary model presented in Figure 2.2. The effect of these, together with the acknowledged need for greater information regarding the contribution of social relationships, in order to facilitate the development of applied intervention, has been to improve and expand the model and move further towards a formal grounded theory of junior-to-senior transition in sport.

More specifically and on the basis of the pattern match, the revised model of junior-to-senior transition (see Figure 3.2) incorporates the following enhancements:

- 1) 'Setbacks' and 'breaking through' can occur at any stage of the transition, not only after adaptation, and this must be made clear in the model. The current researcher concurs with this observation in regard to setbacks. However, having recourse to the data, it may be counter-argued, that a break-through occurs only after a period of adjustment and following the development of relevant behaviours which promote success at that level.
- 2) Confidence to make progress at the next level, which forms part of readiness, is constantly developing throughout the process of transition, not only in the early stages. Whilst the model indicates that transition is a cyclical, iterative process, where adjustment to the current level occurs alongside learning and the development of readiness for the next stage, this dynamic needs to be made more apparent.
- 3) It must be emphasised that identity is developing over time rather than being altered through significant transformation, i.e., certain elements will remain constant, whilst other aspects will evolve.

In order to achieve the desired detail in regard to the role of social factors in the transition, the data from this longitudinal case study will need to be examined in greater detail. Given the support of the evolving grounded theory from the pattern-match, the deductive element of this programme of research can be continued, by applying the current propositions to the data from this case study. The data from the current study can



**Figure 3.2: Revised Model of Junior-to-Senior Transition.**

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therefore be included to provide the narrative required for readers to make their own interpretations, as recommended by Stake (1995), and this is the focus of the second part of the current study.

### **3.5 INTRODUCTION TO STUDY TWO B**

In grounded theory: “Poorly developed categories are saturated through further theoretical sampling (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; p.161)”. As previously alluded to in Study One, theoretical sampling can represent the sampling of further cases, or of further information within a case. In the context of the current study, the case was theoretically sampled on the basis of its ability to add to the building of grounded theory through its longitudinal nature, and with the inclusion of social factors. Having checked the grounding of the evolving theory by comparing it to raw data in the pattern matching process described above, the propositions which make up that theory will now be used in the second part of this study to analyse the data deductively.

Grounded theory methodology involves interplay between inductive and deductive procedures, and the more deductive nature of this study should not preclude induction from taking place where appropriate. Indeed, given the comments from the pattern matching review panel, the theoretical sampling of data should be directed towards eliciting information regarding the role and contribution of significant others in this transition, which requires application of inductive processes.

### **3.6 METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.6.1 Data Analysis**

The data from the current study were subjected to analysis using the codes and concepts identified in the axial and selective coding phases of Study One (and refined in Part A of the current study) in order to give an account of Scott’s on-going transition over time. Where new concepts were discovered in the data, the researcher repeated the grounded theory process of coding, as discussed in Study One of this thesis. To begin with, names were allocated to data in-vivo (i.e., based upon the actions or events occurring or



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represented in the data; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Any labels assigned were carefully considered to ensure an appropriate fit with the data, and as properties and dimensions of concepts became clearer, the open-coding process became more focused, with identified codes being applied to larger amounts of data. The relationships between these new concepts and the existing theory were then contemplated, with notes and assumptions logged in memo form, as in Study One. A continuous checking of the validity of assumptions was made by referring back to the data, to ensure that concepts were grounded in those data. Referring back to the data in this way is a further indication of interplay between inductive and deductive discovery. Where there was information missing in the understanding of a concept's properties, dimensions or relationships, the data were checked again, in order to attempt to answer any remaining questions. Once no new properties, dimensions or relationships were seen in the data, this process was considered complete. Finally, the new categories were absorbed into the model on the basis of the discovered relationships with existing concepts. The data analysis process was again conducted using NVivo (Qualitative Research Solutions International, 2000).

The athlete data from each interview were analysed separately, in order to preserve the prospective, longitudinal nature of the study, and the results are presented below in that same temporal pattern. Quotes are used to highlight the experiences of the athlete through this transition. Subsequently, the data from the support team are presented, to bring out their role in the transition and to add to the emerging theory of junior-to-senior transition. The names of all parties have been changed to maintain their anonymity.

### **3.7 RESULTS**

At the time of the initial interview, which formed part of Study One of this thesis, Scott (then aged 19 years and 10 months) had achieved a world ATP (Association of Tennis Professionals) ranking of 570. The four subsequent interviews coincided with Scott's ranking having improved to 386, 307, 315 and 224, respectively (see Figure 3.3). This reflected considerable success on the Futures circuit of the men's professional tour, as well as a number of significant results at the next stage; the Challenger tour. He had also

qualified and progressed to the second round of tournaments on the main men's Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) tour. These tournaments are only open (without qualification or a wild card) to the players at the top of the world rankings.

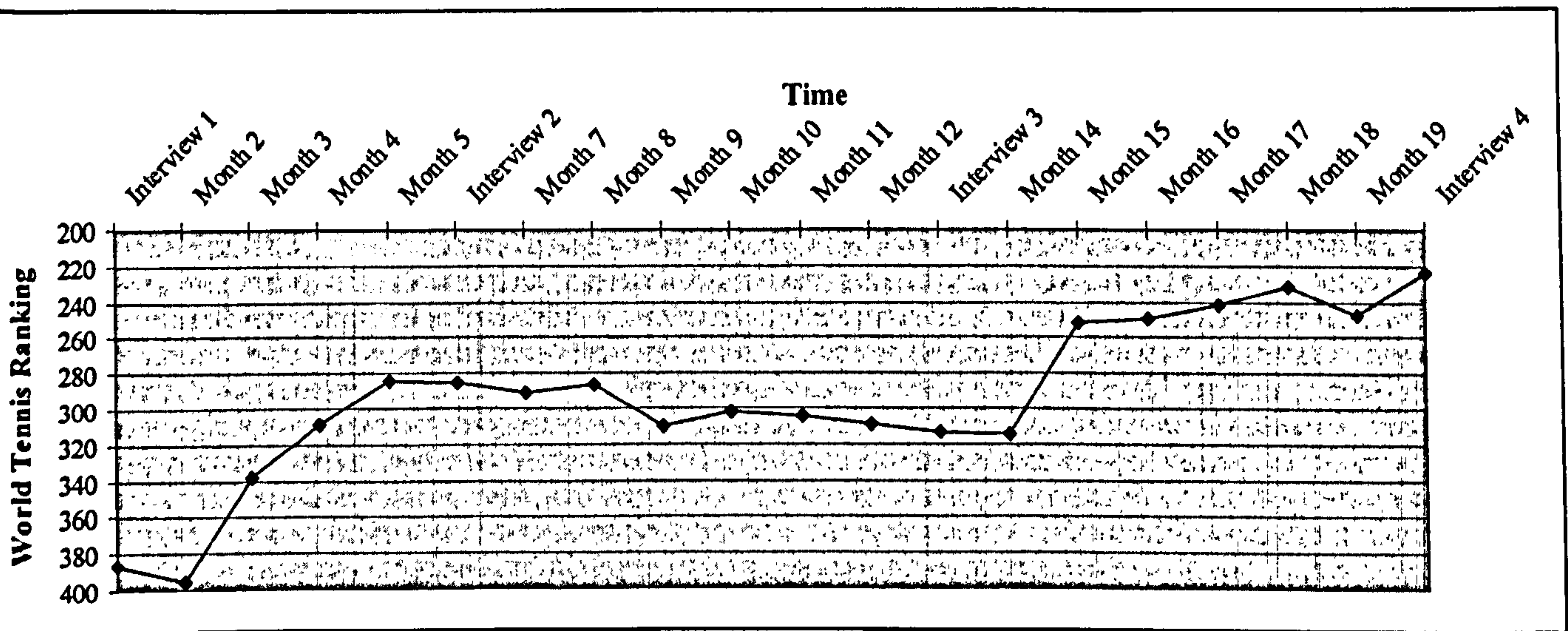


Figure 3.3: ATP ranking of participant from initiation to completion of Study Two.

### 3.7.1 Athlete Data

#### Interview 1: ATP Tennis Ranking 386

Scott's progression from 570 to 386 in the world tennis rankings reflected his considerable success on the men's tour in this time frame. Less apparent, but no less significant, was the impact of Scott's chosen career path on him personally, socially and developmentally.

#### *Identity Development*

During this stage of his career, Scott deliberately made the decision to play tournaments outside of his home country, particularly because the conditions and the quality of opponents were judged likely to make progress more difficult to achieve. In adopting this approach, Scott relished the prospect of pushing himself harder than probably would have been the case in more familiar domestic circumstances and he considered that any success achieved would be more meaningful as a consequence. Indeed, he anticipated that upon returning to his home country, others would perceive his results in a more

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favourable light, thereby enhancing his reputation, and establishing the identity of a successful player at this stage of his transition.

I know that I'm not the only one who thinks that what I've done abroad this year has been a good achievement, because a lot of people have said you know 'oh that's brilliant what you've, you know' and certain achievements that I've done abroad that haven't necessarily been winning tournaments but I've got more credit for when I've come back than I would have if I'd done the same thing here.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned, Scott's impression of his 'new' status was not unqualified. He expected others to be somewhat fickle and acknowledged a need to prove he could also succeed in his home country:

I haven't directly been accused of it but, I think there's been words, because I have played quite a bit abroad, probably a few of the players and the coaches and everybody that would say 'oh why is he going abroad, he's scared to play here', so now I've won something here as well, it sort of again gives me the license to, to go away again, I've proved that I've got nothing to prove at this level in this country.

Scott's perception of himself was thus derived very significantly from how he inferred that others evaluated him and his progress.

Having made progress on the Futures tour (the first rung of the senior tennis circuit) since the last interview, Scott felt more comfortable. He now regarded himself as a significant member of this circuit, with the concomitant reputation of being tough to beat: "No matter where I go now, in this level of tournaments, no matter where I would go, people would know that when they went on the court they would have to beat me they wouldn't get anything from me".

The contribution of others' perceptions in Scott's developing identity was reinforced by his selection for the Davis Cup team (i.e., his first senior international team call-up). This endorsement by senior members of the tennis organisation was internalised by Scott as representing their belief that he had the potential to make it to the top:

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It gave me such like, such a confidence boost but also, to think, like my ranking was probably when I was there, about 450, but I was sort of thinking 'well if I'm here just now I mean, I can, I can definitely get to where they are', like the reason I've been given this chance is because other people think that as well.

Scott's focus had therefore drifted away from acclimatising to the senior tour as a newcomer and then prospering in this more rarefied environment, towards the next stages of his transition - the one to an even more elite level. Selection for the Davis Cup team also affected Scott's assessment of other players. Now a part of the senior tour himself, Scott's perspective was evolving from one of the rookie looking up in awe at the established players, to beginning to see himself as a fellow player. Through engaging with such individuals he discovered less of a difference in terms of capability, between himself and his role models than he had previously supposed. Not only were they 'normal' human beings, but the game they played was not so different from his own:

Apart from anything else it just makes you realise that 'god, this guy is, he's just another person', he wakes up in the morning, he has his breakfast, he does that, he does everything the same, yet he still has a lot he can give to you....That's why those sort of things are so important and to be around like the bigger players cos it basically just tells me, rather than watching it on the TV, you would think it was like a different game, cos its like I'm here and they're on the TV whereas when you're in real life, you're like oh no, this guy's just another tennis player, that's just where I want to go, that's just what I need to be around, and you need to get used to being in that environment rather than every time you're in there being a bit star struck.

### *Performance-Related Adjustments*

The on-going learning process which had lifted Scott from junior-player status to that of a successful Futures tour player had necessitated considerable performance-related adjustments. The modifications now required to sustain success at this level and to move towards Challenger level were finer in technical detail and additionally, were often related to non-technical aspects of performance. For example, as Scott became more

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successful on the Futures circuit the importance of scheduling came into focus. His winning streak and the consequent proliferation of matches, meant quite probably repeatedly reaching the end of tournaments without a break, resulting in exhaustion. Not only did aspects, such as scheduling need to be re-thought and re-engineered to accommodate the pressures of success, in a way that until then had not proven necessary, but Scott also realised that he needed to adapt his mindset to accommodate the unrelenting matches, so that he maintained focus, momentum and did not become complacent.

As already indicated more generally, Scott recognised the contrast between the comprehensive and somewhat daunting step up to Futures level (to which he had adapted successfully) and the next progression which seemed to demand a finessing of his approach, including in regard to his way of thinking about matches. To cope with this 'problem' Scott employed a strategy whereby he changed the mental value attributed to a win at Futures level, meaning that he had to consolidate a win with another win, for it to 'count' for him:

One of the things, the challenge I set myself was almost in a way that...the break of serve, [you've] never broken [serve] until you hold [serve], I was thinking 'right, that previous day's win doesn't become a win in my head until I've backed it up today', so I would, that was how I was sort of keeping myself fresh and focusing on almost, well not forgetting what had happened before cos I was sort of using that but not coming back to that point, not resting on what I'd already done, cos that, you could see how that could potentially be a problem, and it's the same sort of, because its in the same country it's the same players, you might not be playing the same player every day but you're gonna come up against some players a few times and just the same group of people, it's the same thing, the same thing, no its not the same thing, its like 'yeah, come on', yesterday, that didn't happen, unless you win today.

Scott's experiences competing against opponents at Challenger level had prompted realisations about the performance adjustments which would be required to achieve a

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competitive break-through at this next level of the tour. After each match at Challenger level, Scott would discuss his experience with his coach, drawing out the elements which he had not yet adjusted to. He noted that the higher up the rankings a player is, the smaller the margins for error, and thus everything about his game had to be more accurate:

There was probably 6 or 7 or 8 decisions which ended up in [me] missing shots by literally that much [gestures small distance], that was the difference between losing 4 and 4 and being in the 3rd set. So whereas those types of things might not have mattered against somebody ranked 300, they were enough to cost me against that guy.

### *Lifestyle Adjustments*

In addition to the performance adjustments required, there was a (lesser) emphasis on the lifestyle adjustments which Scott had made over the previous 6 months. Whereas at the beginning of the transition, the change in lifestyle from junior to senior was significant, there was now less adaptation to be made. Instead, Scott had to acclimatise to a monotonous continuation of the issues he had faced upon beginning his senior participation. Travelling so much and training away from home, he didn't feel that he had a base at which he was able to completely switch off:

I can't remember how long I went without coming back here home, it was probably about, erm, 10 weeks or so, maybe, probably a bit more....If I'm living out of a bag all the time and I'm, I'm not quite happy with the surroundings then I won't be able to switch off, I'll just get, I just get tense and tense and tense and tense, erm so that probably didn't help with everything, but that is probably one area of my sort of, of my life where I need to try and sort that out, have somewhere for, in between tournaments where I can sort of just have a few days and feel really comfortable and feel like, recharge the batteries.

### *Role of Other Athletes*

Preparation for the next stage also encompassed an intensification of information gathering from more senior athletes. Scott's increasing exposure to elite players allowed

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him to absorb technical and tactical advice, as well as to receive a motivational stimulus, inspiring him to set ambitious goals and embedding in him a conviction regarding the possibility of the next breakthrough:

Obviously it's, the experience that Paul has, its just, you know, being in a Grand Slam final and beating the number 4 in the world, and to have him helping me on literally a daily basis in practise the whole time for about 2 weeks, giving me tips, even when he's playing he's, he's you know helping me, you know 'try and do this'... 'what do you think of that and that', and even off the court as well, he was always, he spent quite a lot of time with me just talking to me and just almost like passing on knowledge, erm, which obviously that kind of thing, I always think that's invaluable.

### *Coaches' Roles in the Transition*

The coaches' role at this stage of Scott's transition was perceived to revolve around imparting knowledge and providing a third party perspective on performance and the demands of the sport. Scott's travelling coach, Sam, was typically present to offer advice and analysis, which Scott found, in a similar way to input from older players, was important:

When he's videoing this match you know, as its happened he says 'no, wrong one', whereas maybe I would get, I would say, I would think, for a few of them, it was, that was the wrong one, but maybe on a certain one I think 'oh no, I think that was the right shot' and then I look back on it and I think 'no, that quite clearly wasn't' so it's important to have, I'm I know I've got the right person with Sam cos he's got so much experience and so much knowledge on that type of thing.

For Scott, having a coach travel with him and moreover, someone he had a good relationship with, was fundamental to his progress. In fact, he attributed his climb up the rankings to having a coach travel with him to tournaments. Scott's respect for his travelling coach, and the value that he added was plain:

Its almost as if every match I will, I'll have something slightly different or fine-tuned or tweaked, for the better, every single match and it might be some of the

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things might be, well both of us might have picked up on it, but then he'll know the way to go and practise it or, well not as much practise but to err, train it in my head, and know how to do that and I don't think there's many people who actually would in the way that he does, so yeah, I think that actually is a huge factor in how quickly I've been able to move up, I think I've moved up 300 spaces this year.

### *Beyond the Junior-Senior Transition: Transition Preparation*

As Scott was reaching the stage at which he would make the transition from the Futures tour to the Challenger tour, he was placing emphasis on preparation for the next level of his campaign. This involved deliberately playing tournaments at Futures level where the draw was perceived as tough, thus pushing him to adjust to a higher performance level, and thereby preparing, and developing confidence for what was to come:

I know that those tournaments are, regardless of what the rankings are, I know they're hard, I know you have to deal with all the weather conditions, the heat and everything, and know the depth of the tournaments is better, so to actually do well as well as getting the ranking, I mean the ranking points are the same, but, it just gives me an extra bit of confidence.

At this level, and in preparation for the Challenger tour it was now less about technical developments, and more about subtle changes in tactical thinking, such as decisions made on the court:

I've got that base level, okay there might be a few things I'm working on my serve to try and get a bit more slice on it or erm moving forward a bit more on my returns, but seriously, even in this training block, the things that I'm working on tennis-wise are simply to do with decisions and how to, whoever I'm practising, even, whoever I'm practising with, how to sort of mess them up, cos that's, that's what it's about really.

Through Scott's experiences, his preparation in gathering information and his continuous desire to learn, he was developing the skills to cope with the many and varied challenges that he faced. This conditioning, together with his increasingly mature attitude, was



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reflected in his taking greater responsibility for and control over, his career. As a consequence, he felt a sense of ownership, both of the process and, the end result:

Everything I'm doing I'm doing for myself, I've got other people doing things for me, so I'm in control of that and it's, and, and then the end result is, it's not disputable, you either win or you lose, you're good enough or you aren't.

Having begun to establish himself as a senior tennis player in his time on the tour, Scott's participation in senior tennis was progressing towards the next stage and the next sub-transition within his overall junior-to-senior transition. Following the significant improvement in his ranking, he was now one of the higher ranked players on the Futures tour, and he was beginning to think about his move to the Challenger circuit. In doing so, he drew upon his experience of starting out at Futures level, as a neophyte senior participant, from which he recalled just how useful it was to play and learn from players of that higher standard as much as possible:

Think how quickly I adapted to that, because I was playing it all the time I was able to adapt to it so if I can get into that sort of level, and play those sort of players week in week out, there's no reason why it would take me any longer than it had in the Futures, just being able to get myself in to that position often enough.

It had become obvious to Scott that transition was an iterative learning process, during which he had to revisit very similar learning and adjustment techniques for each sub-transition encountered. Drawing upon previous experience conditioned his approach to the next challenge, although he had come to realise that incrementally smaller enhancements were required in order to make meaningful progress.

## **Interview 2: ATP Tennis Ranking 307 (Ranking high 287)**

### *Identity Development*

Despite a ranking increase of approximately 80 places (and a peak ranking almost 100 places higher), Scott was still mainly competing on the Futures tour. As with the previous six month period, he continued to stretch himself by playing abroad. However, with his improved ranking, Scott was now typically the highest ranked player in Futures

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tournaments and therefore the top seed. He was a 'big fish again' and had to adjust his mind-set, to cope with this change of status, how his opponents would modify their attitude towards him and how they would be likely to approach playing him:

I was known as the highest ranked player in all 3 of those tournaments and well I haven't, that's never happened in Futures before - in senior tennis for me. Erm so I'm playing, I'll play the first, I'll win the first round but I'll lose the second 7-5 in the third and, it's almost like I expect, I took for granted that I would take, however you're playing in these matches- [that I would go] straight into this and that would just be far too much for anybody in the tournament. But it wasn't as easy as that as you know, I need to be in the other guys world more and be thinking well actually every single match that I play here, because I'm the top seed, is the other guys final, he's preparing to play the match of his life, he's got nothing to lose, he wants to beat me more than anything else so I need to be saying 'Am I ready for that?' So arguably that sort of test could be more difficult than being an underdog.

As Scott considered the next stage of his career, he was able to incorporate into his identity the favourable nature of his performance against more highly ranked players:

I am coming off the court against a guy about 100 in the world having lost 6-3, 7-5 and thinking 'I've only actually, I feel as if I've only actually given him 70% of what I can deliver there'. Those are sort of things that being around, being erm involved and having opportunities at that kind of level. I just know that I'm, I know that I'm getting better, I know how to get better, [and] I know I've got the people around me that can help me to get better.

However, he chose carefully those with whom he drew his comparisons; making favourable ones and ignoring comparisons that would reflect negatively on his position:

Everybody has a different journey; I'm not comparing my journey to anybody else's. Erm one of my favourite lines if I compare to [the World number two player]. I compare myself to him, I stop playing tomorrow! So right, thank you not doing that, see you later. And so would everybody my age, erm in terms of

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my age I'm probably the top in the world, in the top 10%. Less in terms of progress.

Through spending time on the Futures circuit and becoming one of the key members of this tour, Scott had developed a sense of belonging at this level and in the associated environment. This generated a feeling of confidence and of a match between his skills and the level he was at. Even at his lowest points, he felt that his confidence was relatively higher than earlier in the transition. This self-assuredness was due, not only to belief in his ability, but also to his results, to being involved at a higher level, such as in Davis Cup events, to others' belief in his ability and also to his conviction that his support team was capable of getting him to where he wanted to go. He was therefore also developing greater trust in them:

I guess I've got 6 months more tennis in me. Probably 25, 30 more wins, good wins erm, [the] fact that I am coming off the court against a guy about 100 in the world having lost 6-3, 7-5 and thinking 'I've only actually, I feel as if I've only actually given him 70% of what I can deliver there'. Those are sort of things that being around, being erm involved and having opportunities at that kind of level. I just know that I'm, I know that I'm getting better, I know how to get better, I know I've got the people around me that can help me [to] get better.

### *Performance-Related Adjustments*

Whilst Scott was feeling confident in his ability at Futures level and that he was able to compete strongly against highly ranked players, he was also becoming more aware of the challenges which were beginning to present themselves at Challenger level. Towards the end of the six month period which the second interview covered, Scott had begun to acknowledge the need to adapt his mind-set once again. He was losing matches just because of *who* the opponent was and their ranking:

I felt like almost because, because they're sort of a Challenger and there's some conscious level in my mind that knowing oh this a step up, it's not a step up this is a level up from any Futures and sometimes I feel I've lost the first set simply because of what the guy's ranking is next to his name, rather than because of what has actually happened on the court.

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Scott realised that this approach was unhelpful and that he needed to view his new opponents in exactly the same way as those he had encountered on the Futures tour, and to learn to believe that he belonged on the Challenger tour:

I've been focusing on, even though I haven't been in the Challengers [successfully], erm I need to think 'you know this is my level, I'm not out of my depth here' erm and it doesn't matter what the guys three digit number is or whether it's 2 digits or 1 digit next to his name, [just] play the ball and have an attitude where rather than seeing it as almost a threat or wonder what, if I see that ranking I think 'oh I'm expecting him to do something magical'. The guy was so *ordinary*, so ordinary, so if I cannot see it as a threat and see it as 'oh what a chance I've got here, I'm playing against somebody who is 100 in the world' and then sort of if you say 'oh that's how a 100 in the world guy hits the ball, god look what I can do from that, look how I can respond from myself, look how I can break straight back, just like I can do with somebody 500 in the world'.

Again, Scott drew upon his transition to Futures level and his positive adaptation to boost his confidence for the current transition:

There's no reason why, it's no different to when I first started playing Futures but I was first in the qualifying and then I was losing these first rounds and finding I had so little time to do anything and then it only took me 3 or 4 months to adapt to that. Six months later erm less than 6 months later I won the, sorry about 8 months later I won the tournament. So there's no reason why having the same opportunities consecutively at that, at any level why I wouldn't adapt to that.

Because if, if I can learn just as quickly in that then what's the difference?

Scott looked for edges to improve his progress, in all aspects of his game. For example, his team of sport scientists designed a training schedule which allowed him to fit strength and conditioning training around his matches more easily, thus helping him to maintain a lifestyle balance which left him some time to recover between matches.

### *Lifestyle Adjustments*

Scott was now able to cope better with long-periods away from home, having become familiar with and somewhat habituated to the demands of the tennis circuit, including

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extended tournament travel. Scott attributed the source of his adaptation to having more options in regard to a base to relax during training blocks, which allowed him to feel more comfortable.

### *Role of Other Athletes*

At this time, senior role models continued to feature in Scott's thinking about his career. In particular, Scott focused upon the ranking progress of Zac, who was ranked in the world's top 10. Communication with Zac provided a key source of information and encouragement:

I mean there's also, I had two weeks training with Zac, I hadn't spoken to you - I'd spoken to you before that happened I think and, had that in my bank and I still keep in touch with him all the time so I've got him encouraging me as well so I've got, I couldn't have a better person in what - national tennis - to be giving me some encouragement.

This dialogue involved distilling Zac's experience and knowledge into a formula which Scott could apply to his own transition. Once again, this was less about technical aspects of performance, and more related to optimising Scott's career path and defining the tactics needed to make the next step:

[Zac was] outlining to me some of the things that he clearly does well erm and has done well and wouldn't change in his development, in his journey so passing that on to me but also at the same time, saying to - he's able to see in me what my strengths are saying I need to keep really focusing on them and keep going with them but also saying 'Scott these are the mistakes I think I made and I wouldn't do that again'. So passing that on and trying to help me not make the same mistakes as he had made.

### *Coaches' Role in the Transition*

The significant individuals in Scott's support team had remained constant, but the content of their roles was constantly developing. Scott continued to benefit from in depth discussions with his travelling coach, but these had become progressively more sophisticated and in even greater detail. Scott referred to the experience as: "the most

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advanced competing possible". There were often three or four items on the agenda, always triggered by situations which occurred on the tour. However, Scott felt incapable of analysing the events concerned without the support and direction of Sam, and a lesser qualified and less experienced coach would not do.

Therefore the advice and support provided to Scott by his travelling coach was seen as invaluable to his transition. Scott's coaches, in general, also played a key role in the establishment and maintenance of his self-belief: "Being around them just gives me, it's just like confidence coming in every day, constantly. And [they] never say a negative word". Finally, Sam, in spending so much time with Scott, was seen by Scott to be demonstrating an increasing emotional commitment to Scott's progress. So much so, that his role was compared with that of a parent. This emotional engagement was acknowledged by Scott as evidence of the coach's personal investment in maximising his impact:

He's then emotionally attached to make himself squeeze every little bit of knowledge and understanding and whatever it is he's taking from the last match to try and bring that out and then try and get all that effort and puts it across in such a way that I can then grasp from him and then I can understand and not borrow it from him, from what, not just saying 'yeah, yeah, yeah I know, yeah, yeah I hear what your saying' but actually genuinely say 'yeah that's mine now - if you walk away now I've got that' erm so if he's, if he is - I guess it's as simple as somebody just caring.

### **Interview 3: ATP Tennis Ranking 315 (Ranking high 279)**

#### *Identity Development*

Scott's progress over the six months prior to the third interview had resulted in him reaching a ranking high of 279. However, he finished the period on a slightly lower ranking (315) than at the second interview. This was due to his struggle to progress on the Challenger circuit, resulting in him losing ATP points and therefore his ranking slipped. His coping strategy in this situation was to base his athletic identity on more than just his ranking:

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I know that I'm not, not even close to being at my optimum ranking that I can get - I think, I believe - I can get to. I know I'm not, not close to that. I've had so many people, and even other players, where I've heard: 'god how is this guy not ranked higher?' Which just backs up what I think.

Scott decided to immerse himself in what he was doing, his own behaviour and application to the task in hand, rather than the results and rankings. This left him feeling more content and better able to play than when he was preoccupied with unfavourable comparisons. However, he nevertheless found solace in reflecting upon the progress of tennis players whom he considered similar to himself:

I see players in situations that suddenly move up, gradually moving up the rankings where it happens pretty quickly, and I think well what they, a few months ago, they weren't, I was actually better than them. Or, and actually I still feel like I'm, I have the same tools as them; well obviously I don't because they're doing something that's slightly different. But that's the one thing that you think, 'hang on, come on, if this guy can do it, surely - there's - I think there's something else that can be found within me that could make me do that as well.

Despite Scott's de-emphasis of ranking and results, he identified his current situation as a middle ground between juniors and seniors, and along with this perceived change in status came an awareness of pressure to move up the rankings:

The original sort of honeymoon, 'oh he's just out of juniors, he's still getting used to it' is probably over. But I'd see myself in quite, I'm in that middle phase between coming, being like in a - somebody who's, who has got quite a bit of experience behind them, and somebody who is just out of the juniors. So I'm somewhere in between that. Regardless of what I think, I think from people; outsiders who are giving me help, whether that might be financial help, funding, or somewhere that I can train for free, I'd say they'd want to see some pretty significant moves up within the next year.

Scott remained confident that proving himself at this level was entirely possible. Having beaten highly ranked players during this period, he maintained his contention that a top 100 ranking was achievable. In a similar way to his progression at Futures level, Scott

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believed that he simply needed to break down the barrier to the next stage, so that prevailing became a normal; a part of who he was: “It’s just the question of breaking a certain barrier down for the first time, [and] then it becomes normal”.

### *Performance Adjustments*

For the past year, Scott had competed on the Challenger circuit, where significant results had remained elusive. He argued that his game had improved, but without delivering commensurate results. He concluded that his progress had stalled and was surprised at how hard this transition had proven to be. Waiting for the breakthrough, which he hoped would occur (as it had done at Futures level) was stressful, and left him and equally his coaches: “racking our brains the whole time and putting so much work into, how can we get another edge”. Both player and coaches were invested in trying to find the answer to this conundrum:

I’m at a point where I’m, in the last few months, where I’ve been pushing hard, pushing hard, pushing hard and not really going anywhere in terms of the results. I mean I felt I’ve I have taken my game leaps and bounds forward but it’s just a question of building up that pressure and building things up eventually enough where something gives and you push on again, and you push on again. I’ve definitely been surprised in - at how difficult I’ve found it to really make a dent in the Challenger tournaments.

The obstacles which Scott faced at this sub-transition were similar to those he had previously experienced:

1) The competition at this level was proficient, and represented a significant step up from the opponents that Scott had faced at Futures level. As a result, he encountered tough opponents in the first round leaving him no chance to settle in to the tournament. Then losing in the first round, Scott had days to wait until his next match, depriving him of valuable match practise:

It’s not like - you’ve worked hard in this the last ten days, you’re playing so much better, here’s a couple of matches to play your way in, then we’ll give you the 140



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guy in the world, so you actually down the line, you've got some confidence, you've built up some momentum, you've had it clarified that you really are on the right tracks in these last ten days [and] now, here you go, have a shot at him. It's like, no, bang, there he is now, if you don't do it you're out [and] you've got another week and a half before you play again. And that is hard.

2) Scott's ATP ranking left him in between the Futures circuit and eligibility for direct entry for Challenger events. Scott therefore had to cope, for the second time in his senior career, with the uncertainty of having to sign in for qualifying, rather than getting direct acceptance into the main draw of the tournament, a privilege he enjoyed at Futures level:

The next time it happened I thought, right, yes \*\*\*\*, didn't manage this the last time, I'm going to do it this time. One match at a time. Okay. It's just like crossing them off: there's one, who's next? Don't think any further ahead than that. Rather than the first time I probably thought, jeez, and there was a particularly tough qualifier, I was thinking, God, there's two matches in the one [day] there and thinking, you know I'm going to have to play one of the best day's tennis of my life to even get through this day and I'm still not in the main draw. But the next time, okay, it wasn't as tough a qualifying draw but I was like, okay, 'this point'.

3) The time spent by Scott and his support team reflecting on Scott's delayed progress led them to conclude that they needed to search for performance edges everywhere; everything needed to be a little bit better:

I look at my situation I'm, what, 315 in the world. Okay, my highest was 279 I think, but I've truly, well I know I'm a better player than when I was ranked 279 which was six months ago. I mean I just know that I am, even though my ranking is not as high, but it's - it's little, it's not black and white, it's shades of grey; there's edges to be found in different areas.

This search for edges, together with Scott's experiences at top level, led him to concentrate on his physical fitness. Having played in a grand slam event where physically

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he struggled to endure a match of more than three sets, Scott had noted a discrepancy between his own standard of fitness and that required to compete against players at the top of the sport:

I've pushed myself harder than I ever have before and gone through more pain barriers during it than I ever have before, because I know that's what's required for where I want to go to. I'm not; I'm breaking new ground with that because I know that I need to.

### *Lifestyle Adjustments*

Formerly, Scott had struggled to adapt to the long periods away from home and the lack of a stable home base. Nevertheless, in the preceding six months and with the demands of the Challenger tour apparently having stalled his progress, he decided to sacrifice being at home and moved to a training base abroad, where he played many of the Challenger tournaments. This relocation allowed him to immerse himself in the environment of the Challenger circuit and to spend more time on his physical training:

I haven't been home for six months and so that was, obviously, a big, a big thing to do for anyone. But I felt that I needed to, if I was really going to give this a serious crack in terms of the Challengers and turn up and if I'm in not in the main draw play qualifying every week and really make a good solid stab and get a feel for the whole environment that it, it made sense for me to have somewhere to train over here and to stick it out for a long time, which is what I've done.

Scott had confidence that his decision to relocate had been necessary to facilitate his progress. It also provided him with some stability in terms of a base to return to whilst playing abroad. However, he also continued to acknowledge the desire for constancy, and some 'normality' in his life, which otherwise provided repeated disruption in his relationships:

What I do is a lifestyle, so like my number one priority in my life just now and has [been] for a long time is, undoubtedly, this ongoing project of becoming the best tennis player I can be. Because there are so many things involved and it's so demanding that with so many different things, the time-consuming, the travel, I

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mean those two things are a huge are the biggest two - I guess some – I - in terms of meeting people or meeting girls, yes I would rather, I'm the sort of person that would rather be in a sort of normal - kind of relationship where I could see somebody on a regular basis and go back to almost like have a home where I see somebody on that regular basis, rather than thinking, 'God I really like this person but I'm going to be away for the next four months'. That can, that's difficult, but, as I said, I choose my priorities so that's something that just has to be dealt with really.

### *Coaches' Role in the Transition*

Scott's increasing profile in national tennis, due for example to his involvement with the Davis Cup team, meant that he was continually developing new contacts in the world of tennis. Often these included high profile coaches who had experienced life on the tour with highly ranked players. Until this point, Scott's main sources of support and information had been his own coaches, his sport psychologist and other, usually more senior, tennis players. At this time however, and with the support of his own coach, he began to seek, and receive input from additional coaches:

I got on quite well with Peter Lundgren...and I felt that he was pretty decent, he had a lot of good things to say, and, especially that could help me. So we were talking about how; Sam and I were talking about how that could, that could work and how that could best help my situation and we were thinking if there was any chance that to get him along for a week or so.

More senior athletes, such as Paul and Zac had, thus far, fulfilled the role of information providers regarding requirements at the very top of the sport. Scott had enjoyed practising with them, but he now had more opportunities to play against and learn from, more highly ranked players through his own competitive involvement. Rather inevitably, his preparation for the next level on the court was now conducted during matches. The decline in influence of his former mentors coincided with a change in the nature of Scott's relationship with them, as he progressed up the rankings. The resultant void was largely filled by those coaches who had operated at the higher level:

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Somebody like Peter Lundgren would have, could bring everything up...simply because he's had [worked with] Roger Federer, Marat Safin and - who's the other guy? Rios. Those three guys that he's worked with, I mean that's pretty bloody good, those three players and that gives him lot of weight in what he says. Not because he says anything different or better or more sophisticated than [my coaches] would because he's a better coach, no, I don't actually believe that for me. But he would, he has - he has been in situations where I want to be in and that that makes a big difference.

Despite Scott's openness to new coaching influences, the stability he enjoyed through maintaining the same core support team remained highly important to him. Scott had come to realise the significance of these long-term relationships, both personally and for his career, and he was invested in them.

#### *Transition Preparation*

Despite Scott's difficulties at Challenger level, he maintained his belief that he would make a breakthrough and be in the position to play on the main ATP tour (which consists of tournaments, typically only open to players ranked in world's top 100), in the near future. Having previously been awarded wild cards into three such events, Scott was already gathering information concerning what he needed to do to make the next transition i.e., the one from Challenger circuit to ATP circuit:

I've been able to learn from the big matches and then the big tournaments I played over the summer, about how, where my game is at and how I was able to take it forward and where, what I need to do to now break into the next level I'd say. I'm pretty clear in what, what I need to do and...because of the sort of the experience I had and how much I enjoyed it and how exhilarating I felt it was to play in those tournaments, I'm even hungrier now to make that a regular part of my diet.

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### *Identity Development*

Shortly after Scott's third interview, he achieved success at Challenger level, reaching the final of an event at the beginning of the following tournament circuit. Reflecting on this breakthrough, he talked about feeling part of the environment and how important this integration was to his success; the sense of belonging rather than being an outsider:

Actually a big thing was being like around the environment for a certain amount of time, so I actually felt part of the deal and I wasn't just sort of an intruder on another circuit, as it were. Now, when I go sort of over to those tournaments, I know that people know what I can do and I'm actually not a very good draw anymore, you know in those kind of tournaments I'm comfortable in and it's not intimidating. Yes, so I just sort of, [am] feeling comfortable with that level of quite a big - big thing. However long that took - and for me it did take quite a while.

As Scott had hoped, a result at the next level of competition led to a snowball effect in results and a recognition that one is now in the tournament on merit. Akin to his earlier experience at Futures level, Scott perceived that others had altered their view of him, and he had also changed his view of himself. He now felt part of a new group of players:

That is a big thing - it's almost like, it's like one kind of big win on a certain level, it's sort of not only it is to myself but also to the others, and its like 'okay, I'm part of this'. I've broken, it's like in a match, you know if you have loads of breakpoints, and then suddenly you take one, it's like right, *now* there's a game on. It's like, now I'm no longer just a, an intruder or just somebody making up the draw, I can actually win matches.

The 'snowballing effect' on results was important; in order to consolidate Scott's developed identity. Furthermore, the importance of other people's perceptions in forming Scott's perception of himself was obvious. He had been building up to this moment for over a year and the breakthrough, when it came, was significant:

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People just look at you differently, because there is no, it's not one win, it's like backed up and backed up and backed up, you know. I would say that it is almost like building up pressure and then finally its just something happens and at the finish it just tumbles....It's a bit like training, doing lots of hard training and you keep doing it and keep doing it and sometimes you can feel like you're just trying so hard but not going anywhere but then suddenly [clicks fingers] it all seems to click at once, that's the best way to describe it.

For a considerable time at Challenger level, Scott had felt once again, like a small fish in a big pond: "There's times when I think that, yeah this is how I expected it to go, but there's also times where I think I've been surprised by the depth of competition". Having made a breakthrough, and feeling like he belonged at Challenger, Scott was able to draw favourable comparisons with fellow competitors at that level.

Conversely, soon after this new self-conception was stimulated, Scott was drawn to make comparisons with players at the next level (the main ATP tour), which in turn rekindled his perception that he was, in practical terms, still a 'small fish'. These reflections took his focus away from his own journey and profoundly affected how he perceived himself relative to others. The result was the most significant psychological setback of his senior career. The recovery process involved Scott analysing his status, and reiterating and remembering not to define himself entirely in terms of his role as a tennis player. Overall, he had to focus on his own state, rather than indulging in (unfavourable) upward comparisons with other athletes:

Being around well especially kind of Tony and Zac, especially Tony sort of how, sort of how well I was playing and then seeing that, I actually played a few sets against him and seen sort of how well he was actually playing. I found it, I expected him to, I just lost sight a bit of my own kind of journey and felt a bit somehow like meaningless compared to what he was doing, especially in that group environment. Yeah, so it just took me sort of, it took me a while to get my realistic perspective back because as I said, everybody has their own path and everybody's doing different things and people - the way I sort of a weakness I

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sometimes have, I'm trying to get all the time trying to get away from it, sort of judging myself on how good a tennis player I'm going to be, but as Scott the person that for some of the day becomes Scott the tennis player. The rest of the time I'm a son to my Mum and Dad, all those kind of things, but not the tennis player. So that again that's another question of perspective, but it did take me a while to get back on track.

Overcoming this setback was a significant developmental task for Scott. It prompted him, for the first time, to seriously invest in acquiring a skill-set which had been on the agenda of his coaching team for a considerable time; i.e., to focus on external factors as little as possible, and to concentrate his mental resources on his own trajectory. It took a setback of this magnitude to make him commit fully to the concept and to recognise the discipline required:

Trying to focus as little on external things as possible, and that's actually its something that honestly I can only really say that I've bought into 100% in the last month or so....So just as much as I possibly can focusing on a process the whole time and that actually, because I went through a month or so when I was really struggling with my game and not, not playing well at all and I was like trying so hard just like: What is going, why isn't anything happening here? And then I suddenly just shifted end positions with a help from a few people and went totally on performance and tried to pull something out just as much as I could, and then suddenly I, you know, I found myself, God I didn't feel any, I didn't even spend any energy, let alone sort of apprehension or nerves or anything to do with it or fear to do with results, spend any energy on it at all and I'd come off the court having won, so that was a big lesson for me. It's much easier said than done, but that's definitely going to be like the way forward for me.

This was a time of reflection and adjustment rather than gathering information and learning, which had largely taken place in the previous interview periods. The adjustments which had led to Scott's breakthrough at Challenger level were a culmination of the preparation he had completed in order to make the breakthrough at Challenger

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level. The learning during this time, and in recovering from his psychological setback, had been considerable and as a result Scott had emerged a more mature athlete, with a significant understanding of the transition process he had encountered:

I think the perspective on processing the actual life that I have sort of made for myself, I wouldn't have been able to have that perspective two and a half years ago, I wouldn't have had the experience, I don't think that I had the maturity. I'm learning, I think I have learnt in that time to not always, it's not always about trying harder or training harder. Sometimes it's about being smarter; training smarter as well as hard.

### *Performance-Related Adjustments*

Prior to this setback, Scott's emphasis on physical fitness had paid off, since this contributed in no small measure to his breakthrough, having given him the efficacy to deliver results on the Challenger circuit:

Although it didn't show straight away which is quite often - well I say, it didn't show straight away, [but] I went straight out and I beat a guy that was ranked higher than me in my first match. And then I had two match points against the guy ranked at 150, so at half my ranking, so I mean I did start pretty well. From that, I felt as fit as I'd ever been and then finally the big break through came in Hawaii when I qualified and got all the way to the Final and that's the first time I'd done anything close to that in a Challenger. So that's sort of all it, you can imagine the sort of confidence and springboard that would act as.

Looking forward however, Scott realised that his work was not complete. He would need to continue to adjust, echoing the earlier experience at Futures level, from which he extracted other lessons. Scott knew he had a tendency to recidivism; to drop his level back down after a successful start. A further mental adjustment was therefore required, in order to sustain his, then current, form and to avoid dropping back into a comfort zone. He needed the new higher level he was playing at to become part of him i.e., to become his average.



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### *Lifestyle Adjustments*

Scott's maturation and greater sense of perspective was also evidenced in his ability to incorporate a social life alongside his committed and intense approach to his sport. Having acquired a wealth of self-knowledge as he matured, he realised that in fact he needed a different balance in order to unwind and allow him to deliver his best, to focus, refreshed, on his tennis:

I used to think that I would just, I would just never, that wouldn't even sort of even enter my head but now actually I feel like, after a certain amount of time I need some kind of a release before I then start again. Some sort of a just a complete lose yourself couple of hours, almost like okay, I'm going on holiday but like your mind just steps out my body for however long, maybe 12 hours or something and then it's like clicks fingers Okay, I'm ready again...The way I am with how intense I am it's unsustainable. It has to be managed quite well. So I guess that idea of socialising and going out is something that most normal people do. Laughs I would say, I mean I don't know the last I probably hadn't done any of that, though this time last year, I've probably still only done it about three times.

Despite constituting a risk in terms of Scott's sport and life balance, his relocation to a training base abroad had been fundamental to his adaptation to the Challenger tour. It meant that he rarely returned home now, since his only time away from competition was spent training abroad. Not only had his new base enabled him to become more familiar with the Challenger circuit, it had also allowed him to focus on his physical fitness, and provided him with input from some knowledgeable coaches, which had contributed significantly to his adjustment, at a performance level.

### *Coaches' Role in Transition*

At interview 2, Scott's travelling coach was judged to have become yet more emotionally involved in his progress. This growing closeness posed something of a dilemma regarding the benefit of more clearly differentiating between the roles of 'coach and player' and 'friends'. The final interview revealed that this emotional support role had

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nevertheless continued, but with positive implications. The coach was regarded as having made a valuable contribution towards Scott's recovery from his psychological setback:

He somehow got me to get some perspective back and he got me to re- and, I don't know, reset goals and go back to process orientated goals, all that kind of stuff. That was all down to him. I don't think there's anybody else that could have got that out as fast.

A further development in the role of the coaches in Scott's progress, was his recognition of the consolidation of the multi-disciplinary team which operated around him. The strength-in-depth of this team and their team-spirit was represented by their ability, seamlessly to interchange with one another. As such, Scott no longer distinguished between the roles of those in his support team, which was consistently made up of his travelling coach Sam, his training-base coach Jacob, and his sport psychologist:

I would say our actual kind of team has changed a bit. For one I see it more as a team now than I did a few months ago....[And] it is so unique and amazing and such a credit to everything how we set everything up but literally Sam spending all that time [with me] and Jacob- having been along with him, I can't even remember the last time, and it's just [clicks fingers] straight in like that. Sam didn't even need to be around, I mean how I've hardly even spoken to him and we're working on the same agendas....I think that has been the main difference in the last three months or so how much that's sort of blended together.

Scott's growing appreciation of the support of this team, demonstrated just how important they had become to his transition progress.

### **3.7.2 The Support Team**

The data from the travelling coach and sport psychologist will now be presented, with the aim of highlighting their role in the transition from their own perspective. In the data from these interviews Sam (Scott's travelling coach) and Adam (Scott's sport psychologist) often echoed Scott's perspective. The role played by these individuals in

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Scott's transition will be the main focus of this analysis, but a brief insight of their perceptions of the transition will form an introduction.

In Scott's perception, his support staff act as a team, and he makes little or no distinction between individuals in that team. Whilst Scott's synthesis of his team's professional input may conceal more discrete differences regarding their contributions in terms of the skills they bring to bear, the interviews with the coach and sport psychologist also reflect a team approach. As such, the role of the coach and sport psychologist will be discussed together, and collectively they are referred to as 'the coaches' or 'the support team', whilst their individual contributions, where relevant, will also be referenced. To begin, the coach's and sport psychologist's reflections with regard to the process of transition are presented, followed by their perspectives regarding their specific roles.

#### *Initial Preparation for the Transition from Junior to Senior Level*

Sam recollected that Scott's initial transition from junior to senior level involved a "changeover period during which men's tournament and junior tournaments were taking place, so it was, quite a seamless arrangement". However, he considered that the preparation process had begun long before Scott would have been aware, when Sam asked Scott, then aged 13, to visualise his career and to set related targets. This exercise, in revealing how Scott wished his career to unfold was also designed to form a foundation on which their relationship could be constructed:

I said I was not prepared to be involved unless Scott was prepared to put on paper a visionary statement about where his tennis would lead him to and after all the hard work that was going to be put in by him and the people around him, about what it would look like, in the end. So in some respects I would have thought I would be a catalyst in, in helping him to define what his game was going to look like, at a future date.

By adopting this didactic approach, Sam was, amongst other things, preparing Scott for the various transitions to senior level. The 'visionary statement' provided a framework for the training which needed to be conducted and, as Sam proclaimed to Scott:

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“Provided you stick to it and provided there’s no reason to change that statement, you’ve already defined what every lesson and every practise is going to be about from now until - for the rest of your life”. As importantly, the document articulated the nature of Sam’s relationship with Scott and bound the parties in a pseudo contractual manner. Should Scott fail to adhere to the letter or spirit of the vision statement, Sam would remind Scott of his commitment and the basis of Sam’s continuing involvement.

Scott’s sport psychologist, Adam, viewed the preparation, planning and goal-setting which Scott had engaged in pre-transition, as a stability-generating strategy, and a key benefit to Scott at the beginning of his transition. The support team engaged in this process was also seen as fundamental to the generation of this stability, having provided Scott with consistent support across the transition thereby minimising the degree of dislocation and reducing the associated stress:

He’s got a team around him who’ve, who keep things seamless in terms of the, the preparation and the confidence in him, and erm, the support structure around him, you know, he goes from tournament to tournament with no real erm, not excessive levels of stress or external baggage to carry.

### *Identity Development*

The contributions of comparison to other athletes and also the inferred perception of others, in the formation of Scott’s self-perception were confirmed by the coaches. This phenomenon was most apparent when Scott experienced a crisis following his comparison to a top ten world ranked player at a Davis Cup event. Sam suggested that this comparison left Scott re-evaluating the worth of his current success:

He got blown off his own flight path by experiences with players a lot better than himself....And it changed Scott – [he] was, out of nowhere, out of being on the very best form that he ever was, after a ten-day experience of being with Tony and in Tony's company and practising with Tony, [he] came back at only 60% of the player.

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In the second interview with Scott's travelling coach, it was noted that the breakthrough Scott had achieved at Challenger level and the results he had enjoyed on the main ATP tour, were perceived to have led to an increase in Scott's self-efficacy; a feeling that he now belonged, in certain circumstances, amongst that group of players:

He sees himself capable of beating players who are - and as we speak now, he sees himself capable of beating people in the top 100. Until last week he saw himself capable of beating people who were below 120, towards 100. So I think that he probably has established a self-belief that people who are automatically in ATP main events automatically in the draw at Wimbledon, given certain circumstances, he could be in their place.

Similarly, the way Scott believed that he was perceived by others formed a component of his self-image. As Adam intimated, Scott's reputation was a label which he internalised, and it gave him confidence:

I think one paper described him recently as 'an unexceptional talent with an exceptional work ethic', and erm, that's probably not necessarily that far off the mark, erm, in terms of that he's maximising the talent that he has, erm, but potentially not as gifted as other players would be, but he has an exceptional work ethic, and I think he takes confidence away from that work ethic, that no one is working harder than him, and therefore he will win matches, achieve his vision, maximise himself because no one works as hard as him, and its almost like a symbol, or an identity, and a trademark, that he carries.

### *Lifestyle Adjustments*

The combination of lifestyle and performance adjustments in this transition was acknowledged by both coach and sport psychologist. But, whilst Sam conceded that Scott had found a better balance between his social and professional life, he cautioned that the adjustment was ongoing. As Scott proceeded through the transition, he had modified his outlook on having and maintaining such a perspective, becoming increasingly comfortable that this could and should be achievable. However, the challenge of sustaining relationships back home and the ordeal of meeting new people he might like to

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get to know better in the expectation of soon hitting the road again, remained, according to Sam, undiminished.

### *Performance Adjustments*

One of the most telling of the performance adjustments witnessed by the coaches centred upon physical capabilities, as Sam reported: "I think he does hit the ball harder. And he is quicker and he's faster on the turn. And when he's going in to the net he gets there a bit quicker rather than catching the 92 bus and stopping half way type arrangement". Scott had attributed his breakthrough at Challenger level, in part, to improvement in his physical prowess, driven by an understanding of what was required if he was to compete against top hundred players. Although this assessment broadly was shared by his support team, Sam observed that the first half of the transition had been the relatively 'easy part', and that Scott remained very much in transition in the second half of his journey, therefore further adjustments would be demanded of him:

The first half was just a little trial effort, you know. It's a little practise run at it. And it's pretty hard to - I mean when you're - when you're anything going towards 400 in the world, it's very hard - I mean it's admirable in itself...[but] I think it's a bit of a trial run, beginning to find out what is required...the foundations of the travel, of the lack of time in being at home, the idea that you're going to be cut off from many people that you would like to see regularly...But the second half has been the part that's actually talked - reassessing that [whether] he can become a player who's a professional player.

### *Role of Other Athletes*

In a similar fashion to that which was evident in Scott's own rendition of the transition, other athletes were seen by the coaches to have played an important, but changing role throughout the process. Scott's sport psychologist acknowledged the important part played by more senior athletes early on in the transition, when Scott was gathering information from and role modelling those athletes. However, their contribution was seen to diminish later in the transition:

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You know, 16 months ago...when he was hitting with Zac, hitting with Paul, they were role models which had an effect, at that time. And now there are different people who are having confidence building impacts on him.

The 'other people', to whom the sport psychologist referred, were now more often additional coaches, who enjoyed a high profile within the governing body, or on the men's tour, rather than older athletes. As Scott's progress had aligned him more closely with these former role models, their influence had abated.

### **Specific Roles of the Support Team**

From the perspective of the coach and sport psychologist, their roles throughout the transition fell into three main categories, as follows: i) transition guidance, which included direction of Scott's training, ii) personal development, and finally iii) emotional support. Whilst there is overlap between these areas, they are discussed, in turn, below:

#### *Transition Guidance*

In guiding Scott through the transition, his team focused beyond short term results, and onto making strides towards the top of the rankings and Scott's longer-term career. For this reason, Sam suggested it was important to enhance Scott's mental and decision-making skills, in addition to his physical strength:

One day you might find yourself late in, later on, in your late 20's and the way you felt when you were 21 isn't the way you feel now when you're 29...because you've done so many more miles...because that, you go through earlier on by just being brutal, now you've got to get on by being both strong, but also very smart, so, so, for a longevity of your tennis life, you'd better learn to become smarter, because you can't waste as much energy in the latter part as you could at the beginning, because at the beginning you had a lot more...Its to do with brainpower later on, and...how nice to have it pulled forward into earlier on in your career when you have both.

More specifically, at the beginning of the transition, the coaches prepared Scott for the particular demands associated with the change from junior to senior, such as being

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psychologically ready, once out of the small pond which was the junior tour, to compete against any player of any age and experience. Adam was especially involved in this aspect of preparation, with his horizons not restricted merely to the prospect of Scott facing players ranked 600 in the world, but extending to those Scott might encounter at the next level of the tour, i.e., how to: “prepare well and manage himself and compete in the right way against a guy who’s 250 in the world”. In the early stages of Scott’s participation at senior level, this involved their working on his self-management in the new environment, including developing Scott’s understanding of how he presented himself on the court and how this was interpreted by others. This was recognised as a key area for continuing improvement:

He [must] increase [his] emotional intelligence on court, to make him more self aware and to be more opponent aware on the court - because I think that’s going to be the big difference at this level, about winning or losing matches, because the margins are going to get tighter and tighter.

As Scott became more comfortable as a senior competitor on the tour, the sport psychologist’s work with Scott became more focused on the management of particular psychological barriers to his performance, such as his tendency to make a slow start in a tournament circuit following a training block and also periodic lapses in concentration. Strategies employed included the use of cue cards and cognitive triggers, to prompt Scott to focus in the appropriate direction:

We [have] worked long and hard on trying to, find a way of simply getting him back to the here and now, and understanding what perspective he should have for a particular point in a particular game situation...[and] one of the ways in which he can improve, to manage himself when he goes on walkabout in between changeovers when he’s down in games, is to be able to, erm, you know, have reminders with him, which he can, which can bring him back to the here and now.

### *Personal Development*

At the start of Scott’s transition to senior level, the coaches concentrated upon assisting him in his adjustment to the life of a senior; to deal with the pressure inherent in that



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position and to build his identity; to fully integrate the role of an individual whose occupation was that of a professional tennis player:

He's going to be facing matches now where he's employed, I think that's...before as a junior player, you know, he was out on tour just playing largely intrinsically, whereas now, if he doesn't win a match, he doesn't earn any money, he doesn't earn any points, so, erm, I think the biggest transition for him is being able to deal with the, the erm, the outcome oriented nature of, of the game properly, and not lose sight of the behaviours and the processes and the management skills, that he, that he's developed over the past few years (Adam).

Drawing on his own direct experience and also perceptions of successful players, Sam wanted Scott to become what he referred to as: a more 'intelligent' tennis player. In cultivating the relevant attributes in Scott, Sam was preparing him to progress up the world rankings and, simultaneously developing Scott as a person. One tactic employed in the first phase of Scott's time on the senior tour entailed encouraging Scott to direct attention outside of himself, rather than inwards:

Talking about Scott's development of his game from at least three different perspectives would show him something about [that] the world is not, its not a simple place out there, you'd better have your eyes open and look out and genuinely see what's happening, its not always as you think it has to be and is, and that would be very good for tennis, because...on the whole you know exactly what you are as a tennis player...what is always the unknown is who's on the other side of the net and what they're capable of...so you better keep looking at them because you, you need some information on which you can make decisions, and the idea of actually looking at the opponent rather than thinking I can sort it out by taking care of my own game all the time would be one of the kind of the jump from being junior to senior.

Sam's mentoring had, to a significant extent, expanded beyond on-court related coaching, to touch upon core elements of Scott's world, off the court. The considerable time which Sam and Scott spent together off the court, whilst travelling around the world, facilitated

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this. Sam therefore had the opportunity to cultivate Scott's emotional intelligence in various day-to-day real life circumstances, and to encourage him to interpret situations differently and to manage people. Through this strategy, Sam hoped Scott would appreciate that since tennis involves a social interaction, he needed to have an understanding of his opponents beyond merely an appreciation of their tennis strokes:

Instead of him having a, an analysis of a good player is a player who hits the ball hard with his serve like Sampras, defining it [instead] as Sampras is a very good player who actually understands the weaknesses and strengths of his opponent very well, and, if he wants to can hit his serve hard. It, it takes it onto another level... [because] as a tennis player, you want to be the hunter, and you want your opponent to be the prey, and one of the best ways of getting them as the prey is to understand what they do, and that's how they hit the ball and how do they think, and what do they react, and therefore they become - once you understand them - they're vulnerable.

When it became apparent that Scott's rise through the rankings was stalled at Challenger level, his support team sought strategies specifically designed to prepare him for a breakthrough. In addition to the focus on physical fitness, Scott's sport psychologist directed considerable time, during Scott's end of year training block, towards building Scott's self-efficacy; that he was indeed capable of reaching the latter stages of these Challenger tournaments:

We focused entirely on, on confidence in breaking into the semis and quarters of the Challenger circuit....By the end of the week, we'd gone through that process of goal-setting, [then] monitoring, [and] goal-setting, [then] monitoring to see, you know, how confident he was about, the tour coming up and his own game you know, goal setting and, and erm, you know, daily planning of what his achievements could be, physically, both in the training session, and in an on court session...how that would contribute to overall confidence by the end of the week. Erm, and in his own mind he felt that it had.

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In this phase of Scott's transition, Sam and the sport psychologist were keen to promulgate the model of the true professional, capable of earning enough money to support himself, rather than being a full-time player who was funded to play tennis. This marked a changing emphasis; onto delivering results *every* time, in the manner expected of a professional athlete, and towards consistently improving results in order that he could qualify for a position in tournaments for which there were many hundreds of players in contention. Sam and Scott engaged in many discussions revolving around this topic, with Sam's emphasis on the hard fact that, Scott certainly had a job to do, if he wished to make the next step on the tour:

You have chosen to go into a career of playing tennis. You wouldn't imagine that you're going to wake up from some general anaesthetic in a hospital and the surgeon says 'I've had a bad day and I'm sorry about it being a wrong hand that I operated on, I mean we all make mistakes, what do you expect', type of thing, 'I had a bad day'. So you're either going to be a professional tennis player or you're just going to be a full-time player.

This objective approach, was merely part of a foundation in the process of building Scott's belief that he was good enough to make a breakthrough at this level. For Sam, Scott not only needed to see tennis as his job, in terms of developing an identity as a professional player, but Sam had to instil in him the ability to see each element of a match as a task, which it was his job deliver:

I said to Scott, 'Scott, when you stand up to serve for a match or to return from a match, instead of saying I would love to break the serve or I'd love to hold the serve, if you just say much more calmly to yourself, 'it's my job to serve this match out, it's my job to do it''. So it takes away the kind of 'I wish it will happen for me' to kind of rather like 'this is where I deliver'; a slightly calmer approach towards it, a slightly more clinical approach that it would work. And it was after that he then put a run together which was very good. And it was very, very difficult to beat him.

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This goal of intensified professionalism was targeted on improving Scott's average performance. At the time of Scott's breakthrough at Challenger level, the team was focused on Scott earning a place in main tour tournaments on a regular basis, and on putting him in a position to be a professional player capable of supporting himself on the tour as a consequence.

Looking forward, Scott's support team hoped that he would find it possible to adopt and perform successfully some of the roles hitherto played by his coaches. This formed part of their broader drive for Scott to take more personal responsibility in his sport related relationships. By way of illustration, in his final interview, the sport psychologist revealed what he hoped he was teaching Scott ultimately to be able to do:

I expect him to continue making improvements in his erm, self management, erm, to be able to manage himself in the different game situations he's going to face, erm, without, without the need for me to, psychologise the situation, for him to tell me what the psychology of the situation is that he's going to be going in to.

As Scott matured through the course of his time on the senior tour, Sam reported (during his second interview) that it was now possible to push Scott to take greater responsibility for all aspects of his career, including their own relationship. For instance, Sam prompted Scott to take responsibility for the effort which both parties invested in their relationship, and to operate as the leader of his own team:

It [our relationship] would have gone now towards him realising that on my particular relationship with him it's on a matching relationship. If - much more to do with how much he puts in I match, because I've already shown I can put in more than he puts in. I can go, I can continue to raise the stakes all the time, whereas he might not be able to raise the stakes. So if he puts in 50 units into the relationship, I'll put in 51 units. If he wants to put in 60 units, I'll give him 61...But if he only wants to put in 25, that's fine by me, I'll put in 25, rather than overbearing him - overwhelming him with me doubling on his input. And because of that, that created a balance. And it therefore threw much more

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responsibility towards him than it was - than it would have been if he had been the younger boy being taken care of.

As already intimated, the coaches had recognised the importance of Scott's overall personal development, the evolution of Scott's identity during the transition and their respective roles in guiding this. Much as this was designed to impact his tennis performance, Sam and Adam remained alert to the ups and downs inherent in Scott's chosen profession and just how important it is to retain a sense of perspective and a rounded identity:

You're a person first and then you're a tennis player as one of your roles, and if you're, if you've got yourself sorted out as a person, well that person is now walking on to the tennis court and just adopting a very specialist role for a few minutes of the day, so the person is, if the person is a pretty solid, well balanced, then the chances are that you can be well balanced at this specialist part of your life, and that I think is healthy...even if it didn't go particularly well on the tennis court, you haven't failed as a person, so its not quite as catastrophic or as traumatic as it would be for someone who's only invested in themselves as a, as a one dimensional person...and I think that would be a major rebalancing act in his life.

At times of crisis, such as when Scott experienced a crisis of identity due to social comparison, Sam invited Scott to unpick the meaning he derived from being a tennis player, to analyse the quality of the associated experiences and reflect on just what constituted a return from his efforts.

If it's only worthwhile if you're winning it as the very best in the world, then it is on such shaky ground that you're not going to be able to overcome the obstacles which are going to be thrown in your way. So think about it. Is it really the game that attracts you or just the rewards of the game?

This reinforcing of the ability to live in and to appreciate the moment, to enjoy the game as an end in itself, rather than merely a means to an end, can be seen as consistent with

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another element of Sam's tactics, i.e., of Scott developing a detachment from the kind of critique which can divert attention from raising one's own average performance. Sam challenged Scott to mould himself into what he wanted to be, so that the average performance which defined him was raised:

I want your average, your normal every day, what you actually put onto the court to be just simply too good for most people. So it's up for other people to say you're playing well, you just look at them back and think well thank you very much for the compliment, but to me, that's just what I do. So if you - that's how hard I hit the ball. That's how quickly I run. That's how quickly I recover from a negative experience. To me that's just an everyday occurrence.

### *Emotional Support*

During the setbacks which Scott experienced, Sam provided emotional support in an attempt to soften the impact upon Scott's self-concept. The most significant setback of his senior career thus far, featured Scott comparing himself extensively and unfavourably to other players. Sam recalled the seriousness of this episode in that: "It took a lot of effort, both by him and myself, to see if it was possible to glue it back together again". In this instance, Sam adopted an approach with a balance of empathy and sympathy, whilst attempting to inject realism and, in a diplomatic way, probing Scott to determine how he wanted to proceed:

A balance of empathy, sympathy and also no nonsense about it; of reality. [I told Scott:] 'this is what you're looking at, do you want to, have you got the energy to talk about it again? I don't think it's anything to do with your tennis, Scott; it's to do with who you are. Do you want to talk about that? Do you want to reveal anything? Do you want me to probe you? Do you want to see if I could give you a list of five avenues that we could explore to go down, which one do you want to choose?'

Whilst Sam was empathetic and emotional support was forthcoming, he also provided Scott with an objective assessment of what was happening, with a view to manoeuvring him towards a solution. This was a defining moment for Scott, (as he alluded to himself;

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see above), in which formally he began to recognise the individuals who were supporting him as a team. Scott was reminded by Sam that there was indeed a team, and that Scott was, and needed to remain, at the centre, leading that team:

I told him how he was - how little responsibility he was showing to everybody else that was around him, I told him...that if there was a team going on, he is by far the weakest person in the team, he is not taking on his responsibility, he is the one who's volunteered to be the centre forward, who we pass the ball to, and he just boots it into the crowd and shrugs his shoulders to say 'what else can I do?'....He doesn't do any of the things which are not easy, but are simple to do because his opponent can't stop him from doing them, which are to do with performance and process goals, and that he's got to make up his mind now because either he's going to be a person who's in a team and therefore he fulfils his role, which is to play tennis at a performance level with these things welded in, it's nothing to do with winning, it's just the controllables, or else he's not going to be in a team.

In this way, Sam helped Scott to reshape his self-concept, to understand again where he fitted in relation to other players, and to get back his focus on his own journey. Whilst the emotional support was crucial in this situation, so was the dose of reality:

Right now, with somebody who's not a professional player, to talk about being the very best professional player when the evidence of people who become good very quickly are such that they make a dent at grand slams in their late teens, and you're already 21, you're not that - I'm not saying it, but the world is saying it. .

The emotional support which Scott perceived from his coach was a factor in the development of their relationship. With the encountering of these setbacks, the coach and athlete grew closer together, and particularly so on the part of the coach, who came to develop a greater understanding of Scott's strengths and weaknesses. Scott acknowledged the emotional commitment, and caring attitude shown by Sam, which was perceived as evidence of Sam's belief in Scott that he had the ability to continue to make progress.

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### *Developments in the Coach-Athlete Relationship*

Over the course of the transition, the coach and sport psychologist felt that the importance of individual elements of their roles became greater, or lesser, as Scott became more mature. For example, Sam found that certain roles had been exchanged. As Scott initially had transitioned, from junior to senior level, Scott began taking responsibility for the organisation of travel and tournaments:

I can feel, erm, start to feel a genuine type of, err, myself having a bit of dependency upon him, in areas which we're, which we rub along side professionally, so I will be saying to Scott, as I have just done, on a telephone call this morning, err, 'have you booked a hotel for this forthcoming tournament?', erm, and because I would take it that he's going to do that, and he will say 'oh by the way, we are booked into', so in that respect that's quite a, kind of a feeling of erm, you, know, he's in charge of many of the arrangements, in fact, he is in charge of the arrangements.

In addition, Scott now dictated the nature of, length of, and intensity of his practises, to a much greater extent than he had done as a junior, and in doing so, Sam suggested Scott was increasingly taking charge of his own agenda. Developments in the coach-athlete relationship were therefore at times, a reflection of Scott's increasing maturity, or as in the case of Scott's setback, a catharsis which made them both realise how their relationship needed to evolve:

[I said to Scott:] 'It's quite easy because if you say to me stop talking, let's get out of professional mode, that's fine, let's go out for dinner'. He said: 'I couldn't possibly go out for dinner like that'. And I said 'well that's your issue, not mine, because I can because we were just talking about your role as a tennis player and what you bring - what you're bringing to the court as part of a team....Let's put the tennis to one side and let's get on with our - an enjoyable part of our lives'. And I could do it, but that's because I might have had enough experience of being able to say I'm talking to you as a professional as opposed to I'm talking to you as Sam. And Scott, of course, as a youngster, wouldn't - he might have been aware of what I was talking about, but he certainly wouldn't have had any requirements



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to practise it or to need it as a tool in his armoury of coping with relationships. So that - that took quite some time to get through before kind of we landed on solid ground again.

## **3.8 DISCUSSION**

The results and discussion of Study One focused extensively on the development of the self and the identity of young aspirant athletes, whilst they were navigating the junior-to-senior transition. However, Study One relied heavily upon the participants' retrospective recall of earlier events, thereby potentially exposing the findings to an associated distortion. Study Two has therefore been undertaken to extend the earlier findings. In addition, it aims to bring to light the role of the coach in the junior-to-senior transition, and extend the theory of transition through concatenation.

### **3.8.1 Identity and Self-Concept**

Commensurate with this, the results of the current longitudinal study confirm the important roles of identity and of self-concept development throughout the process of transition. The results from the pattern matching analysis lend support to the earlier conclusions, and in combination with the second phase of this study, provide a valuable foundation for the enlightenment of the transition process. What the current study adds, through its longitudinal nature, is additional evidence for the core understanding derived from Study One and, in particular, that a change in the athlete's perception of the self and development of the role of athlete indeed occurs over time. The roles of the athlete's behaviour, inferred appraisals of others and social comparisons, all of which were identified in the previous study as important to self-concept development, are attributed further attention in the current discussion, along with explanation as to the significant impact of the coach-athlete relationship at this transition.

The findings are consistent with Mead's (1934; cited in Charon, 1995) claim that the human being exists in a state of constant development. Mead argued that everything is a process and mutable, including our own perceptions of our selves and of our worlds. A

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practical manifestation of this phenomenon is presented in the earlier analysis of Scott's transition. Scott's own perceptions, both of himself and his world, were subject to ongoing revision.

In addition, the results of the current study demonstrate that, throughout transition, an athlete infers others' perceptions of their own progress and uses these to build his/her self-concept (Tice & Wallace, 2003). The current study's findings do suggest that these inferred perceptions have significant power, leading the athlete in some instances to modify behaviour in an effort to influence the perceptions. Whilst this impact upon the quality of self concept is consistent with the results of Study One, and furthermore with much of the self-concept literature, the relationship between self- and other- perceptions does not appear to be straightforward. In their review of the subject, Tice and Wallace (2003) noted that, on the balance of evidence, whilst the inferred appraisals of others predict the content of self-appraisal, self-appraisals also influence inferred appraisals. Thus, a rather nuanced, reciprocal relationship exists in that, reflected appraisals do have an influence on the self-concept, but the individual plays an active role in constructing the inferred appraisal i.e., we interpret our own behaviour and assume that others perceive us in the same way. Therefore, in the current study it may not have been the participant's inferred appraisals alone which drove behaviour, but ultimately his perception of himself, and a desire to create a favourable impression, recognisable to himself as such. Thus, Scott aimed to produce results which would prove to others that he was capable, in order that the feedback-loop driving his self-concept could reflect that. This would occur through an internalisation of his behaviour (i.e., changes in the self-concept follow overt behaviour), and its effects, as Tice and Wallace (2003) explain:

People may actively try to create desired selves through a self-presentational-reflected-self process. In other words, people may try to present themselves in an ideal manner (a presentation that is consistent with the ideal self) and may thereby come to see themselves as more similar to their ideal selves because they perceive (accurately or inaccurately), a reflection of their ideal selves in the eyes of others (p. 100).

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A further consistency in findings between the first and second study, reaffirms that being immersed in an environment, and having contact with those who populate the new environment, encourages a feeling of belonging and the early adoption of relevant behaviours, which then form a constituent of the emergent athletic identity. According to Baumeister and Leary (1995) and Ryan and Deci (2003), the building of relationships and acquiring a sense of attachment or relatedness to others, is a key driver of identity formation appropriate to the role concerned. Thus, athletes will strive to feel a sense of belonging at each level in order to develop his/ her identity. The results also reveal that a combination of belongingness, together with the inferred (positive) perceptions of others and the associated internalisation of roles, ultimately had a positive effect on self-concept and identity. A positive athletic self-concept and a strong athletic-identity, may, in turn, have a positive effect on performance (Marsh & Perry; 2005; Werthner & Orlick, 1986), and therefore this process is likely to prove adaptive for a competitive break-through at transition.

Overall, the results of both studies indicate a process which includes the interaction of a number of factors. These include the pursuit of a reputation which appears to be internalised, within the self-concept, making this more positive and providing a boost to the athlete's perceived competence at that level. This, it is concluded, can be an exponential process; one where the conjunction of interrelated behavioural dispositions, stimuli and responses can prove synergistic. When embedded within the self-concept and athletic identity this is revealed to have a powerful impact on performance. However, as demonstrated in the present study, the causal intermediaries are inevitably fragile and, the results suggest, the potential for negative effects on self-concept is very real.

### **3.8.2 Self-Efficacy**

A further outcome arising from the current study is the important part 'significant others' play in the building of the athlete's self-efficacy beliefs. This group includes the immediate coaching team, in addition to respected relevant members of the sporting organisation. For example, in the current study, the athlete's selection for the Davis Cup team had a considerable impact, particularly because the individual selecting the squad

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members was highly respected by the athlete. Along with previous performances, vicarious experiences and physiological state, verbal persuasion (i.e., a statement of belief in someone's ability) is a recognised source of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977, 1997). Research conducted specifically on verbal persuasion also suggests that credible sources, i.e., ones which are perceived to be experts, and those whose opinion is trusted, will have more impact on one's beliefs than a less credible source (Bandura, 1997). Thus, where a well known coach or athlete pronounces that an athlete has potential, this is likely to be internalised and influence the self-efficacy of the athlete.

Scott also derived self-efficacy from sources including his physical training (i.e., his own performance accomplishments and preparation; Bandura, 1977, 1997), the knowledge and belief he had in the skills of his coaching team, and the skills which he developed which, he believed, would help him to make a break-through at each new level of competition.

### **3.8.3 Social Comparison**

The status of sub-transitions within the overall transition, once more reflected in this longitudinal research, echoed the findings of the initial study. The cyclical process shown in the revised model of junior-to-senior transition presented in Figure 3.2 above, was supported in the results, with the athlete establishing readiness and self-efficacy for the next stage of the senior tour through: the gathering of information, exposure to other athletes, understanding of roles, behaviours and skills required and the internalisation of these within the identity. Once readiness was reached and a break-through at the higher level achieved, there was a consolidation of performance at that standard, before the focus again shifted to the next level of the tour and thus the process was repeated. Upon a transition to the next level however, there may be a recurrence of the Big Fish Little Pond Effect (BFLPE; Marsh, 1984; Marsh & Craven, 2002; Marsh & Parker, 1984), where a shift in the athlete's frame of reference triggers forced social comparisons which can be negative for the self-concept. This appears particularly to be evident if the athlete's coping skills for the demands of the new level do not allow him/her to make swift and sustained headway. Indeed, the results of the current study indicate that when progress is

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delayed beyond what was predicted, the athlete may be prompted to make upward unfavourable comparisons to fellow athletes. In the current study, once a break-through is made, the results make comparisons more favourable and, along with the concomitant sense of belonging, the self-concept becomes more positive again – therefore the athlete again feels like a ‘bigger’ fish. Consistent with the literature, previous experience of transition facilitates preparation and adaptation for subsequent transitions (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995), and the value of familiarity with this cyclical process was also evidenced here.

The reduced influence of older athletes as role models, witnessed over the course of the transition, may be explained in two ways: an incremental falling away in the need for observational learning or, an increasing desire to distance the self psychologically from those athletes whom one is growing closer to in terms of competitive standard. The findings of the current study lend support to the second hypothesis, since the athlete’s utilisation of the role models around him fell away as he progressed through the world rankings. This, despite his continuing desire to learn about the next sub-transition on the tennis tour, a purpose for which increasingly he turned to knowledgeable coaches. Psychologically distancing himself from the player role models, may equally have eased the perceptual transformation of former idols into potential competitors.

According to Tesser’s self-evaluation maintenance model (SEM; 1988), there are three factors which influence the outcome of social comparisons. These include the self-relevance of the comparison dimension, the other person’s performance on that dimension relative to one’s own, and the degree of ‘closeness’, to the frame of reference. So, Tesser predicts that when an individual compares him/herself to another on a self-relevant attribute (i.e., something which is important in defining the self), and they compare unfavourably, then the self-evaluation is likely to be affected negatively i.e., they will feel less positively about themselves relevant to that dimension. The degree of closeness (either in terms of intimacy or similarity) between the individual and their frame of reference, Tesser argues, moderates the comparison process, because being closer to an individual makes upward comparisons on self-relevant dimensions more

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threatening. Conversely, where a self-*irrelevant* dimension is involved, it becomes easier to enjoy the other party's success. Thus, in order to maintain one's self-concept when comparing on self-relevant dimensions, the individual should opt to distance themselves from a frame of reference who might otherwise threaten the self-concept. In the current study, the comparison attribute (i.e., tennis performance) is a self-relevant dimension. Therefore, it may be argued that as an athlete becomes closer to their former role model in terms of ranking (and there is therefore less perceived difference between himself and the role model; so that they become 'peers'), that comparison is more threatening and therefore is best avoided by creating distance and seeking alternative sources of informational support. In the current study the alternative sources of insight regarding the top level of the tour were gleaned through the intermediation of coaches with experience working with those top level athletes, rather than direct from the athletes themselves.

The self-evaluation maintenance model can also be used to explain the significant psychological setback experienced by the athlete in the current study. This problem, which had a deleterious effect upon the athlete's self-concept, was prompted by comparison to a fellow team member in the Davis Cup squad. Whilst social comparison research has traditionally emphasised the active role which individuals play in seeking comparison information, the reality is that comparison is likely, at times, to be forced (i.e., not sought) when one is confronted with relevant comparisons with individuals who are superior to oneself (Mussweiler, Gabriel, & Bodenhausen, 2000). In such circumstances, where upward social comparison is forced in self-relevant dimensions (therefore being threatening to the self-concept), Mussweiler et al. contend that this triggers a desire to distance oneself from the comparison target in order to protect the self-concept, and that people use various self-protective strategies to minimise the impact of such comparisons. These include: i) de-emphasis of the importance of the domain of reference, ii) convincing oneself that there was, in fact, very little difference, and iii) emphasising differences between oneself and the comparison target such that a comparison is less meaningful, e.g., that the individual had outside assistance on a test or that they belong to a different social group. The authors cite the example of students who take joint classes but who major in different subjects and therefore dismiss unfavourable

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comparison on a test on that basis. These strategies, whilst revealing a biased and perhaps unrealistic world view, are nevertheless functional for psychological health. Mussweiler et al. suggest that differentiation is quite possible, since most individuals simultaneously bring a number of identities (e.g., gender, educational status, occupation etc.) of which some are quite possibly irrelevant. Therefore, fixing on identities that one does or does not share with a frame of reference may either exacerbate or mitigate the self-relevance of the comparison. Manipulating this, in so far as one is able, could be employed to control the influence of comparisons on perceptions of oneself. In Mussweiler et al.'s studies using undergraduate students, they found that the ability to do this is moderated by self-esteem. Those higher in trait self-esteem (who are presumed to have more experience or skill at using self-protective strategies; Schmitt, Branscombe, Silvia, Garcia, & Spears, 2006) are more likely to dismiss comparisons on the basis of self-irrelevance, i.e., by focusing on aspects of their identity that they did not share with the comparison target. In contrast, those low in self-esteem focus upon shared identities which tended to emphasise the impact of the comparison. Mussweiler et al. also found further evidence for the positive psychological effects of these self-protective mechanisms in that those able to de-emphasise the comparison experienced higher levels of positive affect and state self-esteem than those who could not freely shift the focus of their identity. They report that, even those who had high trait self-esteem were affected this way. It should be noted however that the search for difference to protect one's self-concept may only apply where upward comparisons on self-relevant dimensions are forced. When self-evaluation is sought (i.e., when individuals deliberately seek comparison in order to determine their relative standing), they will search for individuals similar to themselves to provide a more informative guide to self-evaluation (such as in the search for role models). Where threatening self-relevant information is forced upon an individual from a target whom they deem similar to the self however, the information should (optimally) be disregarded in an effort for self-enhancement (Mussweiler et al., 2000).

Therefore, it may be speculated that at transition, where an athlete finds it difficult to distance the self from a social-comparison which is forced by the environment post-

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transition and in a self-relevant domain, then the self-concept with regard to that domain is likely to suffer. It is apparent that in the case of the current study, the athlete was unable to differentiate himself sufficiently, on the basis of identity, from a comparison target similar to himself in terms of age, sex, nationality and a comparison made on a self-relevant dimension (i.e., tennis performance; Mussweiler et al., 2000). The associated impact may indeed have been exacerbated, because both the participant athlete and the comparison target were likely to have a narrow identity, defined mainly by the athlete role (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Petitpas, 2000). It appears entirely possible that a highly salient and exclusive commitment to the athlete role can make the athlete more sensitive to forced social comparisons in relation to their athletic ability, since they have a lesser ability to differentiate themselves (or their comparison targets).

Despite this well-fitting explanation, alternative theories, such as the social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), seem in some circumstances to counter the above argument. SIT suggests that personal self-evaluation can benefit from upward comparison with a group member, in the form of basking in their reflected glory (BIRG). The BIRG effect is long established in psychology, and involves identifying oneself with a successful other or group, on the basis of their success, despite having played no role in their achievement (Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman, & Sloan, 1976). Drawing upon self-categorisation theory (SCT; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), Schmitt et al. (2006) explain this disparity, in that the effect of an upward comparison is moderated by the level of identity made salient in the context (i.e., personal or group identity). An upward comparison can be positive for the individual only if they are currently categorising themselves with reference to their group membership.

Marsh, Kong and Hau (2000) investigated the interaction of the role of the BIRG effect with the BFLPE in academically selective schools in Hong Kong, where, they predicted, the collectivist culture might result in large BIRG effects due to a strong identification with social groups. Whilst they found evidence for a BIRG effect, the overall net effect on self-concept at transition to a selective school was negative, i.e., the BFLPE outweighed any BIRG effect. However, Margas, Fontayne and Brunel (2006)



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investigated the predictions of social identity theory in relation to social comparison and the BFLPE in a physical education setting. Their results showed that where social identification with an ingroup is strong, making a transition to a high ability group could, in fact be positive for the self-concept, due to a sense of pride associated with the identification of the self in a high ability group (i.e., the BIRG effect). In their results, the BIRG effect over-shadowed any negative effect of the BFLPE. However, they also noted that the social-identification effect in their study decayed over time, and could not rule out the fact that over time, social comparison to those within the group might result in reduced self-evaluations of ability and a more negative self-concept (as predicted by Marsh, Hau, & Craven, 2004). Whilst further research is required to determine whether the protective effect of social identity can be maintained, it appears that in certain contexts, identification with a high performing group may not be negative for the individual, if the social identity is made salient (Margas et al., 2006; Schmitt et al., 2006).

For the athlete in the current study, in a Davis Cup scenario where tennis players compete as a team, an upward comparison to a team member could be positive for one's self-concept if the team identity is currently salient e.g., during the actual team-competition. However, in this context, the upward comparison to another team member was made during the training period before the competition, in which team-members were practising (and playing practise matches) against each other. In these particular circumstances, personal identity is likely to have been salient, and therefore upward comparison is probably harmful, if the individual could not distance him/herself (in terms of similarity or closeness) from the comparison target, as predicted by SEM. Therefore, Schmitt and colleagues conclude that "SEM applies to contexts that make salient one's personal identity, and SIT applies to contexts that make collective identity salient" (Schmitt et al., 2006, p. 297).

The results thus show that for a positive self-concept, athletes and their support teams must endeavour to control or at least manage the selection of those with whom comparisons are drawn, and have available, strategies to deal with unexpected situations which might prompt or force unfavourable comparisons. In addition, the role of social

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identification at within-career transition should be explored further. In a sport such as tennis, where world rankings are highly symbolic and an easy reference for evaluation of an individual's standard, comparisons may be more easily prompted than in sports where ranking is unclear. In evidence of this, the tennis player in the current study experienced periods when he perceived his performance to be directly affected by the ranking of his opponent, even before the striking of the first ball. Once again, upward comparisons perhaps proved detrimental, directly affecting performance. The participant in the current study was fortunate in that he had a support team, including a psychologist, who together with the coaches, were able to help the athlete to focus on his own performance and attributes rather than the unfavourable comparisons made on the basis of ranking.

Whilst it is clear that social comparison is important for individuals to judge their competence relative to others, Festinger (1954) also suggested that individuals will, where it is available, use objective standards in order to judge themselves. In reviewing the evidence, Wood and Wilson (2003) claim (whilst acknowledging that it is not wholly clear), that given the choice, people often prefer social comparison (i.e., "how did I do relative to everyone else?") information to objective information (e.g., a score on a test), and that social comparisons have resonance, even when objective standards are available. Accepting this position, it may be argued that a standard such as a ranking has the potential significantly to impact one's perception of oneself, because it acts not only as a form of objective standard, based on the number of points earned in the previous twelve months, but also, a ranking, by its very nature, is an indicator of standing relative to the other athletes.

#### **3.8.4 The Coach-Athlete Relationship**

One of the primary aims of the current study has been to develop a greater understanding of the role of the coach at the junior-senior transition. The functions carried out by the athlete's significant others in terms of transition guidance, personal development, and the providing of emotional support, reaches far beyond mere training and the enhancement of the player's tennis skills. The support team, including the sport psychologist and particularly the coach, developed a close relationship with the athlete. This extended

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beyond the respective roles of athlete and coach, and was intensified over the course of a transition which dictated that they spent a significant amount of time together. The coach fulfilled a mentoring role, guiding the athlete athletically and personally in terms of his emotional, psychological and interpersonal development. It was certainly the athlete's view that he was supported by a team of professionals and it is appropriate to recognise that, whilst the coach occupies a prominent position in this narrative, the athlete was able to draw upon the rest of the team and their expertise in structuring his approach to the transition. In the coach's description of the transition, it is not possible specifically to identify the individual contributions of the coaching team, especially where the travelling coach acted as intermediary. Therefore, it is difficult to assess the relative input of the individuals concerned, but the coach was often the vehicle through which the shared expertise of the team was delivered.

The importance of the coach-athlete relationship during transition is highlighted in the current study, and this reflects the extant sport psychology literature and research. For example, Jowett and Cockerill (2003) identify a link to motivation and performance (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003) and also, importantly in the context of this study, to the personal growth of the athlete. Indeed, research shows that athletes value their coaches taking an holistic approach, extending their field of interest in their development beyond that of their identity as an athlete (e.g., Balague, 1999). In the current study, the personal development of the athlete was a prominent feature within the coach-athlete relationship, as well as a focus for the sport psychologist. The support team particularly concentrated upon the athlete's emotional and interpersonal skills due, in part, to their perception that these factors underpinned effective performance on the court. However, the resources acquired by Scott as a consequence were acknowledged to be equally useful to the athlete in terms of his interactions with people within and without the tennis community, as well as to his all-round development.

Both the travelling coach and the athlete's sport psychologist were mindful to help the athlete develop his identity in relation to different roles, and therefore they invested time in areas less directly related to his tennis career. This type of caring relationship made the

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athlete feel valued, and the development of a more rounded personality was considered as something of a shield against the impact of the inevitable setbacks and disappointments. However, despite this goal, the psychological setback which the athlete provoked by comparing himself with other athletes, may have been somewhat reflective of a narrow identity, one focused on the athlete role (Mussweiler et al., 2000). This factor has been observed to inhibit the development of the coping strategies necessary to deal with difficult situations. That is, an exclusive commitment to athletic identity may be a risk factor at a time of setbacks (Brewer, 1993). Working through this problem required emotional support from the coach, which needed to be focused on the athlete as a person, rather than merely as a tennis player. The understanding inevitably associated with counselling of this nature, resulted in a closer coach-athlete relationship. This, in turn, appeared to fulfil, at least in part, the athlete's desire for relatedness, or belongingness. Human beings, according to the 'belongingness hypothesis' (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) fundamentally are motivated to form and maintain stable, positive and significant relationships, within which mutual concern is displayed. In this instance, the coach-athlete relationship had to fulfil this need, since the schedule of the sport provided little opportunity for suitable contact with significant others, beyond the support team. Research suggests it is typical that a successful coach-athlete relationship is underpinned by a considerable degree of closeness between the parties (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003).

The nature of coach-athlete relationships has been a major research area over recent years. The related conceptual models emphasise the importance of a close relationship between the athlete and coach; not merely one which is functional in terms of the resources of the coach to develop the athlete's ability. The most notable of recent developments has been Jowett and colleagues' model, based on interpersonal research in mainstream psychology (Jowett, 2003; Jowett & Cockerill, 2002; 2003; Jowett & Meek, 2000a,b). This framework includes four concepts which, it is proposed, are vital ingredients for a successful coach-athlete relationship: closeness, commitment, complementarity and co-orientation. Closeness, reflects the emotional tone between the coach and athlete (i.e., interpersonal liking, trust, and respect). Commitment, reflects a coach's and an athlete's intention to maintain the relationship and/or to maximise its

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effectiveness. Complementarity, is seen as a crucial cornerstone in the working of the relationship. Both coach and athlete bring resources to the relationship, and for a functional and productive working relationship both must be motivated to apply their competencies in a coordinated fashion in order for performance to improve. Complementarity thus reflects a co-operative relationship. Finally, co-orientation refers to the sharing of common goals, beliefs, values and expectations which allow the pair to work together, and for which communication is a necessary pre-requisite. A lack of any of these factors Jowett et al. argue, leads to a coach-athlete relationship defined by negative closeness, dis-orientation, and non-complementarity. An analysis of a relationship in crisis has shown this to have an adverse effect on the quality of the relationship and the degree of effectiveness (Jowett & Meek, 2000a).

The principal coach-athlete relationship in the current study demonstrated a good fit within the parameters promulgated by Jowett and her colleagues. In brief, an enormous respect was evident from both sides, but particularly emanating from the athlete. There was also a degree of 'liking', and a willingness to spend considerable time together. These factors complemented and were inextricably intertwined with the emotional closeness which had evolved over the course of the transition and the time 'on the road' together. The emotional engagement shown by the coach, as well as his empathic understanding, was appreciated by the athlete. The coach spoke of a complementarity in the sense of a matching of efforts, with him committing to the relationship just a little more than the athlete, so as not to overwhelm him, but always providing him with insight and reiterating his dedication to the cause, whilst allowing the athlete to dictate the pace and to retain a sense of control. A dedication to shared goals was obvious from both sides, as was a commitment to sustain the relationship; indeed the athlete perceived that he had found the ideal coach. The sharing of ideas and planning for a long-term future, reported during the time of the current study, had been a feature dating back to the beginning of their relationship when the athlete was just 13 years old. Similarly, the quality of communication between the athlete and his coach was strong, a factor deemed important by Jowett et al., in unifying individuals in a relationship.

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Communication provides for the sharing of knowledge and a common perspective upon goals, beliefs, opinions and values, all of which constitute important elements of a successful and sustainable coach-athlete relationship (Jowett, 2005). According to the presently available literature, communication unrelated to sport (especially in youth sport; Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005), helps to develop a sense of closeness in the relationship (Jowett, 2005). In the current study, the athlete and coach spent considerable time communicating, not least because of the intense travel involved in the tennis tour. The results also show that their dialogue was discursive and certainly not restricted to tennis matters. Often this related to the overall personal development of the athlete, thereby demonstrating a depth of interest on behalf of the coach. This served to augment the personal growth of the athlete. Importantly, the coach had adopted a personal goal of helping to create a well rounded individual, as well as optimising the athlete for his performance on the court. The longevity of the relationship was also telling in all respects, because the grounding of the coach-athlete closeness occurred when Scott was a junior, in his early formative years and this facilitated the establishment of trust and relatedness.

Relevant to the current research, Jowett and Cockerill (2003) conducted a qualitative study of the interpersonal relationship between athlete and coach, drawing on the experience of twelve former elite status athletes who had all achieved at least one Olympic medal. They found that, even at the highest level, the coach-athlete relationship was crucial to athlete development. Contrary to what may be the stereotypical image of professional coaching, the regimes were, in a similar fashion to that illustrated in the current study, athlete centred and not exclusively or overly focused on results. More specifically, the relationships were: “underlined by mutual respect, trust, care, concern, support, open communication, shared knowledge and understanding” (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003, p.327).

In the current study, where the existence of a strong relationship is clear, the leadership and control dynamic shifted towards the athlete, as he grew into the principal role. Thus, the degree of autonomy adopted by, or granted to, the athlete, increased over the course

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of the transition from junior-to-senior level, being triggered in response to his developing maturity. The athlete had become more self-sufficient and more responsible, both in general and for his own career. This reflected in Scott's organisational abilities, to the extent that he began to make the travel arrangements for himself and for his coach. Such a migration of control is to be expected, due to Scott's increasing independence and his desire for autonomy at this stage of his life (Eccles, 1999), but, as already signposted, this is something which the coach encouraged, i.e., he allowed the athlete to become more autonomous in his career and his life, both on and off the court.

### **3.8.5 Psychological Need Fulfilment**

Beyond the direct study of the coach-athlete relationship, research into coach behaviour deserves discussion in the context of the current study. Three of the characteristics of the current coach-athlete relationship which have already been alluded to, namely; enabling athlete autonomy, belongingness or relatedness between the parties along with instilling a sense of perceived competence, have been the subject of considerable research attention in sport psychology. As mentioned in the discussion of the first study of this thesis, individuals are motivated to fulfil these three basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence and relatedness; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000). The current literature shows that coaching behaviours are predicted to have an important influence on the fulfilment of these needs (e.g., Hollembeak & Amorose, 2005; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). This interpretation is supported by the current study, with the coach proving instrumental in progressively enabling athletic autonomy, engendering a close, relationship and a sense of perceived competence.

Whilst the athlete in the current study enjoyed increasing autonomy over the course of the transition, with a growing responsibility for practical arrangements as well as for orchestrating the division of labour between, himself and his coach and sport psychologist, there was a concomitant increase in closeness and emotional engagement, and this particularly applied to the relationship with the coach. These two concepts (autonomy and relatedness) are not incompatible, but according to Jowett (2003), coaches and athletes should strive for an optimal balance. Being too close, Jowett suggests can be

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as isolating as too much independence. Being excessively controlling or directive in manner may be interpreted by the subject as constraint, with the associated decrease in feelings of control. In the current study, it seems that the 'matching arrangement' which the coach had established as part of his development strategy for Scott, provided the required balance, with the coach always committing slightly more (without overwhelming the athlete), and making it clear that the commitment of each party could be increased at the athlete's choosing. The emotional relatedness component was grounded in a continuous and mutual sharing of ideas and aspirations, and also empathy. The athlete acknowledged from the coach a genuine concern for his wellbeing and appreciated that the relationship with his coach was of value beyond his function as a tennis player. Consistent with this, a study by Kimball (2007) showed that athletes are more disposed to accept and to follow suggestions (and therefore to sacrifice autonomy), when their coach demonstrates an interest which stretches beyond what is directly related to the athletic domain.

In relation to competence information, the athlete in the current study frequently alluded to the contribution of his entire support team in building his competence. His confidence that he had the appropriate people in his entourage, who served as a fountain of knowledge and provided immensely valuable support and third party perspective, was clearly apparent from his personal account. That he saw the coach-athlete relationship as fundamental and of unsurpassed importance to his progress was indicative of the confidence this generated. The athlete believed that his support team could drive him to where he wanted to go, and his belief in his own ability (and in the team's knowledge and contribution) to achieve success grew (albeit in a non-linear fashion) throughout the course of the transition.

The current research suggests that the support team went a considerable way towards fulfilling the athlete's needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness. However, it is not feasible, given the scope and nature of this study, to determine and/or quantify the specific contribution which the fulfilment of these needs made to the athlete's progress at transition. It is nevertheless possible to speculate, in reliance on the existing literature,



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since the fulfilment of these basic psychological needs is purported to play an important role in whether a person experiences self-determined motivation (according to self-determination theory, or SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000), and self-determined motivation is in turn, an important predictor of determinants of sport persistence and performance (Vallerand & Rousseau, 2001). As such, psychologists have investigated the role of specific coach behaviours in promoting various types of motivation in their athletes (e.g., Hollembeak & Amorose, 2005). On the whole, in the current study, the athlete was motivated by intrinsic reasons, especially early in the transition. However, over time, his focus shifted somewhat, and became directed increasingly toward his ranking and results. Whilst these represent extrinsic reasons for participation, the athlete remained highly self-determined in his pursuit of success. Indeed, extrinsic motivation can either be self-determined or non-self-determined (Deci & Ryan; 1985, 2000). Self-determined extrinsic motivation occurs when the individual fully internalises and accepts the extrinsic reasons for undertaking the activity (as opposed to feeling pressured to participate by, for example a coach or parent, or through guilt). Thus self-determined extrinsic motivation, like intrinsic motivation, occurs where the reasons for participating are fully endorsed and are consistent with the athlete's value system, as was the case here. Research has shown that, like intrinsic motivation, self-determined types of extrinsic motivation are also important determinants of sport persistence and performance (Vallerand and Rousseau, 2001), and therefore are likely to have underpinned the athlete's continuing and relatively unfaltering ambition to progress through the junior-to-senior transition in pursuit of an elite world ranking.

Until recently, research has overlooked the question of whether, in fact, the fulfilment of the three basic psychological needs mediates the link between coach-behaviour and motivation (Hollembeak & Amorose, 2005). Whilst Mageau and Vallerand (2003) have proposed a detailed motivational model of the coach-athlete relationship, which predicts how a coach's behaviours influence an athlete's intrinsic and self-determined extrinsic motivation through their impact on the athlete's perceptions of autonomy, competence and relatedness, they do not provide data of their own to validate their findings. In a review of the existing research evidence, Mageau and Vallerand found that coaches were

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able to satisfy their athlete's needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness through a high level of involvement in the relationship, providing structure, whilst allowing the athlete some control over their training and career. The prescription they offer, in order for the athlete to feel competent includes: involvement (in a supportive sense) which is necessary for relatedness, and some delegation of control, which allows the athlete to feel autonomous. They therefore suggest a model in which coaches should adopt an autonomy-supportive style in which (for example) they provide the athlete with opportunities for choice and actively involve them in decision making, show empathy for the athlete's feelings and perspective, and provide non-controlling competence feedback. Again these factors are consistent with the results of the current study, which would suggest that the athlete's relationship with his coach promoted self-determined motivation.

As highlighted by Hollembeak and Amorose (2005), the coach is unlikely to be the only influence on an aspirant athlete's psychological needs and therefore the impacts on motivation will be diverse. This conclusion is derived from their own study, using structural equation modelling, whereby they tested the relationship between coaching behaviours, psychological needs and motivation using data from 290 American University students aged between 17 and 25 and participating in a variety of college Division I sports. Whilst they found support for certain relationships, other expected relationships were less clear and therefore require further investigation. For example, the relationship between autocratic (controlling) coach behaviour and feelings of autonomy and relatedness (with high levels reducing feelings of control and connectedness) was as expected. Equally, democratic behaviour (where choice is provided), was found positively to influence feelings of autonomy and thus intrinsic motivation. Unexpected relationships were found, for example between social support behaviours and relatedness, where social support was found not to predict feelings of relatedness. The authors suggested that in order to be understood, this relationship may necessitate an examination of social support from a multidimensional perspective (Rees, 2007; Rees & Hardy, 2000); because different types of social support might fulfil different psychological needs e.g., emotional support could fulfil the need for relatedness. More intuitively, training and

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instruction behaviours had a somewhat negative effect on perceived autonomy and therefore a coach utilising a great deal of programmed training and instruction may not be allowing the athlete sufficient space to exercise a degree of ownership and control, through choice or say in the nature of training sessions (Hollembek & Amorose, 2005).

Taking this analysis as a whole, it is reasonable to infer from the current study as well as from the presently available literature, that preliminary suggestions for a template of the optimal coach-athlete relationship at the junior-to-senior transition can be assembled. Thus, a coach-athlete relationship which contains the following attributes, should support the athlete in making progress and successfully adjusting to the demands of the transition:

- 1) **Autonomy:** The coach to allow, encourage and facilitate increasing autonomy of the athlete during the course of the transition and beyond. This should however, be introduced at a rate sympathetic to the athlete's individual needs, maturity and coping skills. Mageau and Vallerand (2003) point out that an autonomy-supportive style must not be confused with a passive or 'anything-goes' style, since athletes rely on their coaches for information due to their relative inexperience, and, as the results of the previous study have shown, the knowledge deficit is likely to be significant at within-career transition, where athletes are moving into the unknown. The contribution of the coach, as an important source of informational support in the current study also underlines this factor.
- 2) **Relatedness:** A permissive style also prevents feelings of relatedness (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003), but an overly-involved style may reduce feelings of autonomy (Jowett, 2003) To resolve this dichotomy, a balance must be struck in which relatedness is built with the athlete through democratic behaviour, demonstrating a commitment to maximising athletic performance and to the relationship as well as an holistic interest, caring for the welfare of the athlete beyond the role as a sports performer. Coaches must communicate the principles underpinning their involvement and their respect for their athletes, in order to foster feelings of relatedness (Hollembek & Amorose, 2005; Jowett, 2005; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003).

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3) **Competence:** Structure in terms of guidance and rules, should also be provided for optimum feelings of competence (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). A permissive style would again potentially restrict the athlete's access to the coach's knowledge and performance feedback. However, competence feedback given in a controlling way (i.e., pressure to think or feel in a certain way) is unlikely to be effective and will reduce the athlete's sense of autonomy, shifting their locus of control. Ideally, athletes should be given the opportunity to experience performance accomplishments in an autonomous manner, i.e., to take initiatives in which their locus of control enables them to attribute success to internal sources, thereby increasing the athlete's sense of self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1985), and competence (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). The current study also demonstrates that when the athlete acknowledges the support of a competent team, there will be, instilled in him, an efficacy in his own ability to progress through the transition (as well as an impression of being supported to do so). Indeed, athletes who recognise their coach's competence and experience can choose to let their coach make certain strategic decisions and still feel self-determined (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003).

### **3.8.6 The Coach-Athlete Relationship and the Junior-to-Senior Transition**

Whilst the strength of the coach-athlete relationship is important at all stages of an athlete's career, the transition from junior to senior level may have special significance for a number of reasons. Firstly, existing literature suggests that the coach plays a pivotal role at this transition (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004), and the current research study supports this. In Wylleman & Lavallee's developmental model, the coach is a primary social influence at this particular juncture. Secondly and as already alluded to, at times of change individuals have a desire for continuity, in order to maintain stability of the self (Burke, 2006). A coach-athlete relationship which spans the transition has been shown, through the current research, to address that requirement. Finally, there is likely to be a reduced perception of autonomy in certain aspects of an athlete's life at the junior-senior transition. For example, at junior level, athletes compete largely for intrinsic reasons whereas at senior level, the extrinsic pressures increase; to earn money; to receive

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sponsorship, and to demonstrate to the governing body that one is worthy of their support, as noted by the athlete and his support team in the current study. Kimball (2007) observes that at such a transition, relational autonomy is important, based on a study with student athletes who had signed an athletic scholarship and therefore were also navigating a transition characterised by reduced autonomy. Kimball claims that attachments to others may be an important source of motivation, and these do not necessarily, as it is sometimes assumed, diminish an athlete's sense of autonomy, as long as the individual is not being forced to engage in the behaviour, which would reduce intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2002). This is consistent with the literature reviewed above (e.g., Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). In Kimball's synopsis, she suggests that individuals may actually choose to engage in activities due to their connections with others:

If choices based on how people see themselves are at the heart of autonomy, and how people see themselves is based on connectedness with others, then the needs for autonomy and relatedness ought to coincide. Because student-athletes are "socially embedded" in their environment, they are motivated for reasons that can only be explained in reference to their team-mates, coaches, and to the structure of collegiate sport. Therefore, it is difficult to separate the student-athletes' deepest desires (e.g., do they actually want to go to practice?) from those desires influenced by the culture of the team (p.831).

Kimball deduced from her qualitative study, that relational autonomy can fill the 'motivational hole' which is created when an athlete signs up to play their much-loved sport for external reward. Here, Kimball argues that when an athlete's needs are fulfilled in other areas, their intrinsic motivation may remain stronger when an element of autonomy is removed. In a similar way, athletes at the transition from junior to senior level may experience a decrease in their independently based choices, which could, according to Kimball, negatively impact on the fulfilment of their need for autonomy, and the literature focused on motivation concurs with this (choice is important for autonomy; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). In the current study, the athlete's connectedness with his support team, and particularly with his primary coach, may therefore have mitigated the impact of his need fulfilment in terms of autonomy, as displayed by the student-athletes in Kimball's study. Whilst the athlete experienced considerable

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autonomy with regard to his coach-athlete relationships, he acknowledged that he was under increasing pressure to perform, in order to earn money and to prove that he warranted the support of the governing body, and his lifestyle was also increasingly restricted by his involvement in tennis.

### **3.8.7 The Coach-Athlete Relationship and the Formation of an Athletic Identity**

The fulfilment of the three basic psychological needs also has implications for identity formation, as discussed in Study One. In order to foster the adoption of the role of athlete, an internalisation of the identity must occur (Ryan & Deci, 2003). The more pressure and control that is used in the socialisation of that identity, the less well anchored the identity will be in the subject's self. For internalisation to occur, people must experience relatedness, and support for autonomy. Deci and Ryan (1985; Ryan & Deci, 2003) suggest that fulfilment of the need for autonomy is necessary for behaviours to be integrated into a person's sense of self, as well as being required for self-determined motivation.

In order to construct an identity, one must also develop an understanding of the roles associated with the identity being built (Ryan & Deci, 2003). In the previous study, and early in the transition of the athlete in the current study, this comprehension was achieved mainly through observational learning (Bandura, 1965), derived from older, more senior athletes. As the athlete moved through his transition, and these role models became less pertinent, coaches (both within and without the support team) became primary sources of informational support, in profiling the prospective behaviours relevant to his identity at each sub-transition. Therefore the coaches' role in identity formation at the junior-senior transition is one of increasing significance.

The current study indicates that coaches may impact the performance of their athletes through maintaining stability at a time of much change, such as transition. The context where a sense of equilibrium is valued is primarily related to lifestyle and the prevailing relationships. This supports Brettschneider and Heim (1997), who commented that stability is typically generated from the routines of everyday life. For an athlete who

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competes in a sport such as tennis, where a peripatetic lifestyle is implicit, such overall stability is, perhaps almost impossible to sustain. This study substantiates the view that the continuing relationships which members of the support team provide, therefore assume particular significance in such a context.

### **3.8.8 The Role of the Sport Psychologist in the Junior-to-Senior Transition**

The coach-athlete relationship has been at the centre of this analysis up to this point. Whilst overall his contribution has been primary, not least because he accompanied the athlete on tour, the other members of the support team also deserve prominence. Chief amongst these in terms of the athlete's personal and professional development has been the sport psychologist whose influence, given the closeness of the team, is discerned in the focus of the coach on psychological aspects of the athlete's development.

However, the best evidence for the psychologist's importance in the transition is to be found in the athlete's recognition of the value added. The current study validates the benefit which an athlete enjoys when a professional team of coaches and sport scientists is available and on whose knowledge and expertise he or she can rely. Equally, in this case, these professionals worked on an interdisciplinary level, to display a seamless support system, working on the same agenda.

Nevertheless, it is apparent from the current study that the relationship between the athlete and his primary coach was the closest of those within the support team. This may have largely been attributable to the amount of time which was afforded to this relationship, and, as a consequence, that relationship dominated the athlete's perception of his support as a whole. It may also be the case that the confidentiality agreement between athlete and his psychologist precluded the overt discussion (by the psychologist) of pertinent information. However, on the basis of the results of this study, it can be concluded that the psychologist played an integral role in preparing the athlete for each step of the transition, helping him to understand the psychological demands which would confront him at each stage, and developing the mental strategies and self-efficacy to deal with those demands. The psychologist also aimed, through doing this, to teach the athlete

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to conduct his own analysis; to develop an ability to independently understand the situational demands which occurred, and to develop a self-concept which was not entirely based on his perception of himself as a tennis player.

A key strategy, adopted by the psychologist in conjunction with the coach, was encouraging the athlete to concentrate upon his own performance and his own strengths, as opposed to being distracted by those of his competitors and the ranking of his opponents or results. Focusing the athlete's attention on his own journey, his own skills and his own processes was important, since it could help to prevent, or to ameliorate, the impact of upward social comparisons by psychologically differentiating himself from others (Mussweiler et al., 2000). More particularly, Mageau and Vallerand (2003), suggest that in order to promote self-determined motivation, coaches should aim to reduce, and not to encourage ego-involvement in such comparisons. Research shows that an ego-involved athlete (i.e., one fixated on performance goals, and particularly those related to validating one's ability or status), is likely to cope less well with performance failures and setbacks than is one absorbed by their own development and in growing their individual competencies. Being ego-involved may also result in attributions of low ability, loss of self-worth, rumination about setbacks, loss of intrinsic motivation and ultimately poorer subsequent performance after multiple setbacks (Grant & Dweck, 2003). Consistent with this, the results of this study reveal that the support team devoted considerable effort to steering the athlete's attention towards his own development and upon developing his personal strengths. The results also indicate that the sport psychologist and coach emphasised the athlete's personal journey up the rankings. Tangentially, the coach and the psychologist made their charge aware of additional identities within the 'athletes' hierarchy' (Stryker, 1980). In valuing these diverse parts of his persona, they provided the athlete with alternative roles on which to differentiate himself when upwards comparisons proved unavoidable (Mussweiler et al.) or setbacks occurred, since a narrow identity is a risk factor for adjustment difficulties (Brewer, 1993).



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### 3.8.9 Summary and Conclusions

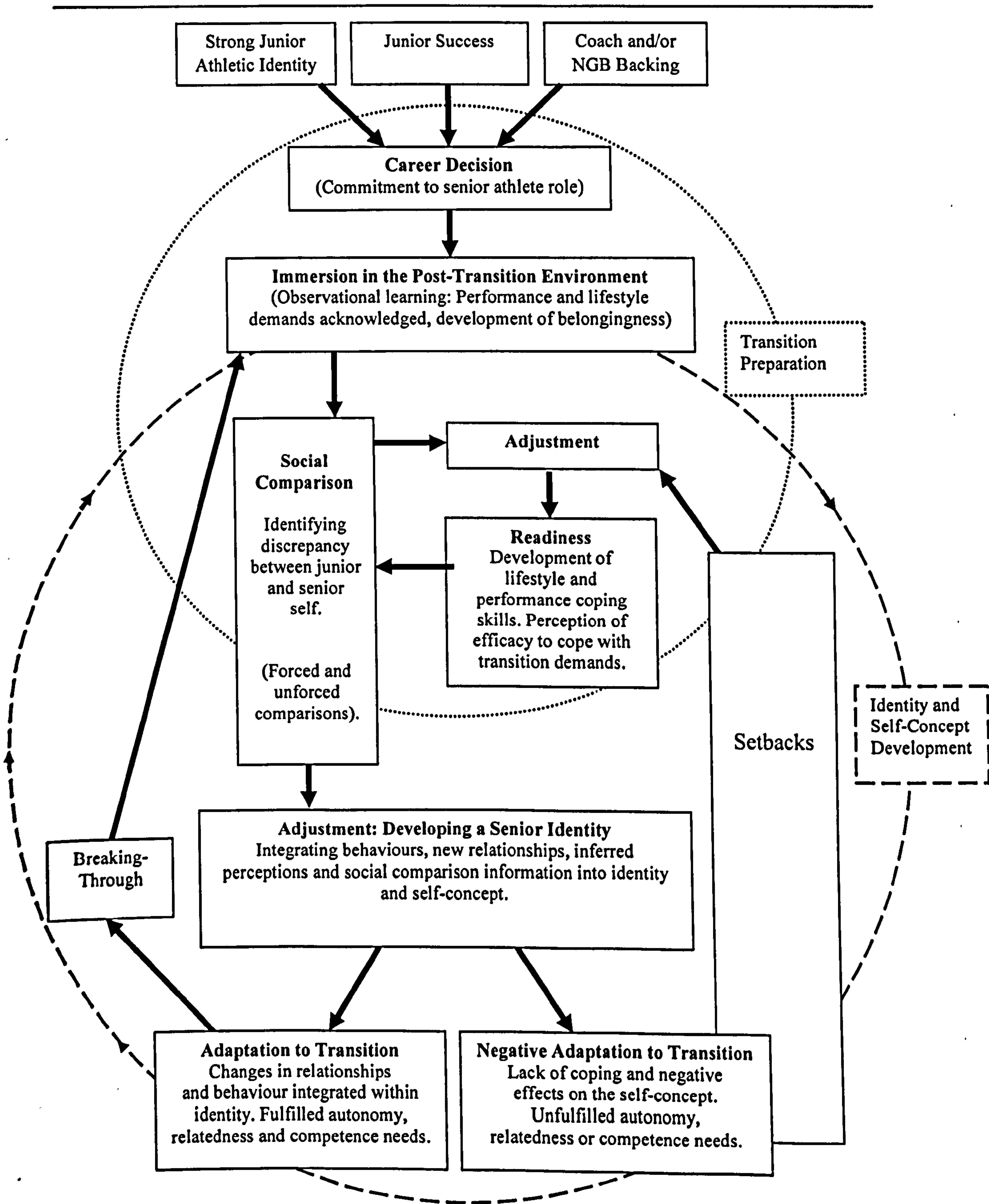
Discussion of the second part of this study has centred around the key findings which have emerged further to advance the model of junior-to-senior transition as presented in Figure 3.2. The particular case-study involved has served to explicate the developments in identity and self-concept which are fundamental to the junior-to-senior transition process. Subsequent to his initiation on the senior tour, the experiences of which formed part of Study One of this thesis, the athlete in this case worked through a cycle of adjustment and adaptation to the demands of the transition which he faced. This iterative process gave rise to modifications in mental approach, understanding, and an emergent identity and self-concept which was increasingly based around the senior athlete role. However, the primary motivating forces behind the subject's psychological development over this period of transition were social factors. Indeed it is this knowledge that can be considered the most significant advancement beyond the results of Study One. The following serve to elucidate this point:

- Social comparison assumes a significant role in the junior-to-senior transition process. In the preparation phase of transition, social comparisons (Festinger, 1954) are sought for self-evaluation purposes, i.e., to determine the differences between the current self and what is required at the next level of the transition. Ideally, this knowledge drives the adjustment of behaviours in a manner appropriate to progression. The results of this thesis suggest that when this occurs, the athlete develops coping skills appropriate to the demands of the transition, which in turn leads to a readiness for transition and a feeling of efficacy in the coping ability.
- Beyond the point of transition, the process of social comparison is likely to continue, due to the shift in the athlete's frame of reference inherent in the change of peer group (Marsh, 1984; Marsh & Craven, 2002; Marsh & Parker, 1984). This potentially can have a negative effect on the self-concept. In such circumstances an on-going period of adjustment ensues, during which the athlete must resolve any emotional distress which this study has shown can result. In addition, the inferred appraisals of others can be seen

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as contributing to this overall effect, which ultimately may be positive or negative in regard to the athlete's self-concept (Tice & Wallace, 2003).

- The results suggest that those athletes who cope with the transition demands, experience positive inferred appraisals (e.g., through vicarious persuasion), manage social comparison information and experience the fulfilment of autonomy, relatedness and competence needs (particularly via the coach-athlete relationship; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003), are likely to experience positive adaptation to transition. In doing so, the necessary changes will become integrated within a self-determined identity (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2003). Such an identity and self-concept profile is likely to result in a competitive break-through, due to the positive effects of self-determined motivation and positive self-concept on performance (Marsh & Perry, 2005; Vallerand & Rousseau, 2001).
- Conversely, if an athlete fails adequately to cope with the demands of the transition, perhaps experiencing negative forced comparisons from which they cannot differentiate the self (Mussweiler et al., 2000), and/or unfulfilled autonomy, competence and relatedness needs, then they are less likely to develop a positive self-concept and self-determined identity. Where this occurs, the athlete may experience negative adaptation to transition, which results in a setback in performance and progression, requiring a re-evaluation of current and ideal behaviours in order to re-adjust to the transition demands.
- The current study demonstrates, in accordance with Study One, that there is an ongoing integration of new learned behaviours and changes in relationships (e.g., new or developing relationships) within the identity throughout transition, since the learning and adjustment process regarding transition demands is continual (Ryan & Deci, 2003; Schlossberg, 1981). Adaptation to each of the sub-transitions within the overall transition from junior-to-senior level is therefore a reflection of the athlete having fully integrated the necessary changes in behaviours and relationships as a component of their identity (see Figure 3.4).



**Figure 3.4: A Model of Junior-to-Senior Transition.**

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### **3.8.10 Strengths and Limitations**

The strength of the current study lies in its particular contribution to the sport psychology literature. There is a dearth of published work addressing the experience of athletes at within-career transition (Wylleman, Lavallee, & Alfermann, 1999), and more especially of studies tracking an athlete through their transition longitudinally, in order to uncover the processes behind the experience. This study helps to fill that void and has also served to move the research emphasis somewhat, within its concatenated programme (Stebbins, 1992, 2006), towards a more deductive approach, through the use of pattern matching and deductive analysis. Importantly, the results of the application of this technique largely endorse the conclusions of the first study in this thesis, the testing of which was a primary objective of the current study.

The second element of the current study also attempts to rectify the gap identified in the initial part of the research programme (as recognised by the reviewers in the pattern matching process), i.e., to discern the role of the coach at this important athletic transition, and has largely succeeded in this goal. Whilst further research is needed to examine this transition and the role of social support systems at transition in different sports, (including perhaps team sports), the present study represents a useful first step towards developing a substantive grounded theory.

Nevertheless, certain limitations of the current study must be acknowledged. Firstly, it was only possible to interview the athlete every six months and therefore, as in Study One, information (particularly from the beginning of the previous six months) may have been biased by recall decay or intervening events. However, logistical problems, dictated by the international tournament schedule, precluded the possibility of more regular contact with the athlete and his team. Notwithstanding this potential impediment, the nature of the study provides that the results offer an unprecedented insight of the junior to senior transition process. Finally, confidentiality issues are likely to preclude sport psychologists (and perhaps coaches) from fully disclosing sensitive information regarding the nature of their relationship and work with athletes. This inhibition, together with the richer material likely to emanate from a relationship as close as that between the

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athlete and coach, may account for the preponderance of material quoted from that source. In the current study, this source, through travelling with Scott was oftentimes the delivery mechanism for the whole team, including the input of the psychologist.

In conclusion, this study builds on the results from Study One. The findings display a considerable fit with existing theoretical research on the nature of the self-concept, identity, the coach-athlete relationship and coach-behaviours as they relate to transition adaptation. The integration of this knowledge within a theory of the junior-to-senior transition provides an unprecedented perspective and therefore adds considerably to the comprehension of within-career transition in sport. This programme, guided in its design by the previous study, moves the research towards a grounded theory of junior-senior transition. The objective of the final study of this thesis is to concatenate the research process, in the manner asserted by Stebbins (1992, 2006), through the development of an applied intervention to prepare athletes for the junior-to-senior transition.

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# CHAPTER FOUR

## STUDY THREE

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION TO STUDY THREE

The junior-to-senior transition is a process which encompasses the planning for and the aftermath of the point at which an athlete moves from one athletic stage to another. It is described by Danish, Petitpas and Hale (1993), as a “critical life event” (p. 359); an episode which results from a change in life situation and which typically generates a degree of stress. Consistent with the results of Studies One and Two of this thesis, Danish et al. suggest that in order to minimise the associated disruption, the individual should prepare for transition in order that they confront the change; they counsel viewing transition as an opportunity, rather than as a threat. Danish et al. further suggest that those individuals supporting aspiring athletes should work to optimise the transition process, to include ensuring that they are properly informed and equipped in anticipation of transition (Danish & Hale, 1981; Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1995). Thus, Danish and his colleagues propose there should be intervention, to prepare athletes systematically and to help those athletes to see a forthcoming transition as an opportunity.

#### 4.1.1 Career Transition Intervention

Stambulova (2000) cautions that: “every sports career-related transition has the potential of becoming a crisis” (p. 591). Hitherto, the most studied of the sport-relevant transitions has been that of athletic retirement. Here, evidence suggests that the long-term, intense commitment required to compete at a high level has an adverse impact on the successfulness of adjustment to life beyond athletic career termination (Baillie & Danish, 1992; Werthner & Orlick, 1986), as discussed in Chapter One. Sport psychologists have therefore recommended that this transition should be anticipated and planned for carefully. Research has demonstrated that when suitable preparation has occurred, the experience typically has been perceived as smoother than would otherwise have been the case, and the aftermath less traumatic for those affected (Crook & Robertson 1991; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). The results of this thesis support this contention, with

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preparation for an optimal transition beginning long before the point of transition from junior to senior level, highlighting the nature of transition as a process which occurs over considerable time (Schlossberg, 1981).

In response to this challenge and drawing on the aforementioned existing research relating to athletic retirement, sport psychology researchers and sport organisations have developed programmes termed 'athlete lifestyle programmes', or 'life-skill programmes', which aim to prepare athletes personally, socially and educationally for life outside of sport. The intention behind implementing such programmes for athletes quite early in their careers, has in part been that they would then be able to focus on their within career sporting performance, without worrying about life beyond athletic retirement. When the time comes to adopt a more typical lifestyle then they would consequently experience an easier transition out of sport (Anderson & Morris, 2000).

In North America, the Canadian Olympic Association's (COA) Athlete Services transition programme was established in 1985 and designed to equip athletes in preparation for a second career, following retirement from elite sport. The scheme offered a platform for career planning, peer support, access to resources, skills workshops (e.g., public speaking, interview preparation, financial management) and opportunities for work experience (Sinclair & Hackfort, 2000). Similarly, Anderson and Morris (2000) cite the USA Career Assistance Programme for Athletes (CAPA), which was assembled in 1990, to prepare athletes for retirement, structured on the basis of interviews with Olympic athletes for the United States Olympic Committee. One of the key components of CAPA was the social support provided to participants from their peers, whose contribution was found most relevant and comforting, given the commonality of experience and outlook.

As reported in Chapter One, the most comprehensive lifestyle support programme, at the time of Anderson and Morris's review of career transition programmes in 2000, was the Athlete Career and Education (ACE) programme, devised in Australia. This comprehensive system was designed to support athletes during their athletic careers,

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whilst at the same time affording them the opportunity to acquire a more rounded identity and the skills likely to prove useful upon retirement from sport. Participating athletes are evaluated on the basis of their educational, vocational, financial and personal development needs with an analysis undertaken to identify appropriate education and training modules. The ACE programme's success is evidenced by it having served as a blueprint for systems in other countries (Anderson & Morris, 2000), including for the Performance and Lifestyle Support programme run by UK Sport in the United Kingdom. An effectiveness audit of the ACE programme found that it had a positive impact on athletes' mood states, when participants were compared to those not on the programme. They also reported more consistency in performance than those not involved (Anderson, 1998; Morris & Anderson, 1994; as cited in Anderson & Morris, 2000), which suggests that the programme had benefits both during the athletes' careers, as well as (potentially) at retirement.

The focus of athlete lifestyle programmes has now been extended to non-elite athletes. The Life Development Intervention model (LDI; Danish et al., 1993; 1995) is centred on goal setting and the teaching of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. The objective is to empower athletes, to give them a sense of ownership of their career trajectory and to help them to develop the competencies necessary to cope with the transitions they will inevitably encounter. The underlying premise is that the identification, setting and attainment of goals represents a powerful heuristic, encouraging a greater sense of control over one's life and a feeling of self-efficacy. Research on self-efficacy suggests that individuals higher in such beliefs are more likely to perceive the demands they face as challenges rather than threats (Bandura, 1986, 1997). They may also be more likely to persevere in the face of difficulties when pursuing occupational goals (Bandura, Barbarabelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001).

This is not to presume that the mere setting of goals will result in goal attainment, as Danish et al. point out, for such achievement may be inhibited by factors such as; deficiencies in skill, a lack of courage to take the necessary risks (including to develop new skills), a lack of knowledge or a range of environmental factors including inadequate



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social support. The LDI approach aims to mitigate or if possible remove the barriers to goal achievement by inculcating relevant skill-sets and knowledge, developing social support systems and learning to see critical life events both as a challenge to be overcome and as an opportunity. Danish et al. also remind practitioners that the goal (i.e., to adjust to critical life events such as a career transition, or recovering from injury) should be broken down into manageable steps, and strategies adopted to maximise the likelihood of achieving the sought-after objective.

Critical life events, according to Danish and colleagues, are processes which manifest themselves in three phases, namely: anticipation, occurrence and aftermath. The life development interventions which Danish et al. focus specifically upon the 'anticipation phase', termed *enhancement strategies* (Danish et al., 1995; p.25) are particularly relevant to the current research. These aim to build self-efficacy by helping individuals to develop an understanding of future normative transitions, thus fostering a sense of confidence and familiarity in anticipation of the life event and control once the associated process begins to unfold. By conditioning athletes for a transition in this manner, what may have been imagined as a potentially insurmountable obstacle to progression is more likely to be recognised as an almost routine, on-time and expected event (Schlossberg, 1981). This aspect is discussed more fully in Chapter One of this thesis. Through enhancement intervention, Danish et al. encourage athletes to recognise how their existing skills may be useful to them when navigating future events and to set goals to acquire relevant new skills. This, whilst simultaneously teaching them such skills and providing information to put future events into context, thereby reducing apprehension and facilitating educational planning and development.

Danish and his colleagues have also employed the LDI approach with school students, using sport as a metaphor and a means through which to learn life skills. The Going for the Goal programme (Danish et al., 1993), teaches life skills such as problem solving, using social support, recovering from setbacks and indeed goal setting. The programme was designed particularly to reinforce the student's ability to avoid health-compromising behaviours such as drug-use. It is delivered in 10 hours of sessions addressed to middle

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school students, and presented by high school students, i.e., the programme uses mentors who are slightly older, but from a similar background to the students they are teaching. Danish et al. recognised that, not only was delivering the programme a positive learning experience for the mentors, but also the students in receipt of the programme were found to have acquired practical knowledge, had adopted more positive expectations of the future, demonstrated higher self-esteem and had positively modified their opinions in regard to certain unhealthy behaviours.

In summary, the body of research directed at creating an enhancement programme for athletes, including that cited here, reveals the significant value derived by participants. As indicated, the benefits include engendering a sense of ownership and control over the career trajectory and, at retirement, leaving sport with a more rounded identity and additional skills, thus fostering readiness for transition and softening the effect of the loss of the athlete role.

Given this backdrop, there is good reason (including the writings of researchers such as Danish et al. [1993]), to infer that a programme based on the LDI framework would prove equally therapeutic when applied to athletic transitions more generally. Indeed the current programme of research, detailed in Studies One and Two of this thesis, is consistent with such an hypothesis; the value of preparing for transition is apparent, not only for approaching the issue of retirement, but also for the transitions which occur during the athletic career, of which the transition to senior level is one of the most difficult (Stambulova, 2000).

#### **4.1.2 A Concatenated Research Programme**

In the current study, as with Study Two of this thesis, the aim has been to continue a concatenated research effort, whereby the studies are not only linked but also predicated upon one another (Stebbins, 2006). This type of investigation can be claimed to provide the greatest contribution to research and applied contexts (Stebbins, 1992). At the beginning of the chain, qualitative methods are likely to predominate, and as the chain progresses, quantitative methods may increasingly be used (Stebbins, 2006). For the

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current study, the purpose has been to deliver a significant contribution to the applied context, through creating an intervention to facilitate preparation for junior-to-senior transition. The results of Studies One and Two (which demonstrate the important role of preparation and the development of readiness for transition), along with the contribution from extant literature, as reviewed herein, suggest that such an enhancement strategy, as described by Danish et al. (1993, 1995), is potentially valuable. Further, this is a necessary area for research if athletes are to be adequately prepared for critical life events, like those they will face at the junior-senior transition. To date, there is only one intervention published in the peer-reviewed literature which has tested the efficacy of a life development intervention on career transition adjustment. This involved recently retired professional football players from premiership teams in the United Kingdom (Lavalley, 2005). Whilst this was successful in supporting the adjustment of the intervention group when contrasted with the control group (there were significant treatment group differences in favour of the intervention group from pre-to-post transition on the Transition Coping Questionnaire; Schlossberg, 1993), this was not an enhancement intervention i.e., one designed to prepare athletes for transition; rather it employed supportive and counselling strategies. The foregoing thus demonstrates that research is lacking in regard to transition-enhancement interventions.

The current study was therefore guided by the existing literature and the available results of this thesis<sup>2</sup>. The programme has been designed to develop and evaluate an enhancement intervention which prepares athletes for the transition from junior to senior level. No specific hypotheses were identified, but it was hoped that the athletes would develop knowledge of, a readiness for, and a greater sense of self-efficacy for the transition as a result of taking part in the intervention programme. The combination of these outcomes, it was envisioned, would provide the athletes with an understanding of the transition, a familiarity with what to expect, and therefore a sense of autonomy over their preparation and the upcoming transition, increasing the perception that this was a

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<sup>2</sup> Since this study was commenced before the conclusion of Study Two, its design was predominantly based upon the results of the first study.

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normative, or expected, event (Stambulova, 2000), and one for which they had the necessary coping skills.

As noted in Study One and Two of this thesis, the transition from junior to senior level involves significant psychological development in terms of an athlete's self. Situational factors which occur both before and during the transition will result in the development of the senior athletic identity (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Petitpas, 2000; Burke, 2006), whilst the self-concept will be constructed on the basis of an individual's appraisals (including inferred appraisals) of their competence and confidence with respect to that role (Kernis & Goldman, 2003). Not only must the athlete learn (and internalise) the roles and behaviours associated with a senior athletic identity (Stryker, 1980; Ryan & Deci, 2003), but they must also manage their self-concept in terms of their self-evaluation related to that role, in the face of significant challenges and potential threats. Being surrounded by athletes who one once idolised, and who now represent one's competitors, many of whom have ability which exceeds one's own, is a potentially threatening new environment for a neophyte senior athlete. However, the results of this thesis so far, suggest that where an athlete has begun to develop an understanding of the new environment, incorporate new roles and expected behaviours into their identity prior to the transition, and develop skills which will help them to cope with the demands which they have come to know, they acquire a sense of readiness for the transition which represents a coping ability. This readiness results in a smoother transition, one over which the athletes perceive they can exercise some autonomy, and within which they can focus more easily on their athletic performance.

#### **4.1.3 Preparation for the Junior-to-Senior Transition**

Individuals tend to be apprehensive about and to dislike change, due to the disruption it causes in their routines and relationships (Danish et al., 1993; 1995), and consequent changes in identity (Burke, 2006). These realities are reflected in the results of Studies One and Two in so far as the athletes demonstrated a desire to seek stability within the changes dictated by their transition from junior to senior level.

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To date, the results of this thesis indicate that an enhancement intervention should aim to prepare athletes for their junior-to-senior transition and attempt to create a sense of equilibrium, notwithstanding the inevitable disruption. Groundwork of this kind should engender a sense of control during this period of change, a perception that the transition is a challenge to be overcome rather than a threat to be avoided (Danish & Hale, 1981; Danish et al., 1993). According to the results of Studies One and Two, this process of preparation should provide a sense of readiness to cope with the future transition. There is consensus that preparation for a critical life event such as a transition is one of the predictive variables in determining the adaptation to transition (Crook & Robertson 1991; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). Optimally, preparation should involve the acquisition of relevant knowledge, the developing of skills which facilitate coping at the transition, and goal setting (Danish et al., 1993). The results of Studies One and Two support this hypothesis. In particular, foreknowledge of the demands of senior level, together with goal-setting to develop relevant skills, are both identified as key elements in the development of readiness for the event. A programme of this kind should help participants to modify their perception, from one of a significant hurdle, into a more controllable process.

Based on the above, the following elements were considered in the design of this enhancement programme to prepare athletes for transition: mentoring and informational support, building self-efficacy for transition, knowledge and readiness, identity development and skill development.

#### *Mentoring and Informational Support*

Mentoring has been defined as “a close but non-familial and non-romantic relationship between a young adult protégé and a more experienced adult mentor, in which the mentor supports, counsels and guides the protégé” to reach their aspirations (Perna, Zaichkowsky, & Bocknek, 1996, p.77). The potential of mentoring and peer support, as part of an intervention created to bolster and to provide guidance for athletes preparing for career transition, has been mooted by sport psychologists such as Danish et al. (1993). CAPA and the COA’s Athlete Services transition programme have also been involved in

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such an initiative. Furthermore, Perna et al. cite existing research (e.g., Kram, 1988; Merriam, 1983) which has revealed mentoring to be an effective means of facilitating personal as well as vocational development. And, an unpublished study by Cockerill and Edge (1998; cited in Lavallee, Nesti, Borkoles, Cockerill, & Edge, 2000) has highlighted the potential psychological benefits for athletes of receiving mentorship. The study of four Olympic athletes showed that those in receipt of mentoring during their transition out of sport adjusted with less distress than those lacking a mentor at this time. The evidence for the value of mentoring is thus significant.

The results of Studies One and Two of the current thesis corroborate the claim that during the transition to senior level, and particularly in the early stages of the process, the communication of relevant information from, and the guidance of, more senior athletes is critical to progress, and particularly in the preparatory phase. Therefore, this cultivation of talent by role model figures should form a component of any enhancement programme directed at the transition from junior to senior level.

#### *Building Self-Efficacy for Transition*

A review of the literature relating to observational learning in psychology, as included in Studies One and Two, lends additional credibility to the use of role models for learning and preparation at transition. Role models are found to be particularly influential during childhood and adolescence when they provide young people with a guide to their environment and roles (Biskup & Pfister, 1999), and hence their identity as a senior athlete. According to Bandura (1965, 1997; Rosenthal & Bandura, 1978) the act of modelling (vicarious learning or observational learning) of either live or symbolic models, is a powerful tool, through which there can be a learning of new behaviours and coping strategies and a development of self-efficacy for the behaviour. In sport, modelling is often used to more effectively teach motor skills, since it is considered that such demonstrations can represent a more effective teaching method than verbal instruction alone (e.g. Atienza, Balaguer, & Garcia-Merita, 1998; Williams, 1989).

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In this context, Rosenthal and Bandura (1978), plus a discussion from Bandura (1978), offer suggestions intended to maximise the effects of observational learning in psychological therapy. However, some of these recommendations are equally appropriate to the current study, including the use of relevant and credible models such as peers. This especially where there is a commonality of experience, which will engender affinity as a consequence of similarity to the learner and will therefore act as a relevant reference. Indeed, the sources of information must be sufficiently similar to the athlete for enhancement of self-efficacy in their own ability to occur when they compare themselves with the model (i.e., that they believe that they can emulate the model). In addition, once the behaviour is observed, the subsequent enactment of it can be maximised by positive reinforcement.

It is not only senior athletes who contribute in this fashion. Perna et al. (1996) identify the input made by coaches in the mentoring of athletes and this finding also features in the results of Studies One and Two. In the early stages of transition the coach seems to be regarded as occupying something of a secondary support role, with the primary contribution coming from more senior athletes. It is only as the transition experience unfolds that the coach comes to the fore in this respect. Therefore, on the basis of this thesis, the development of self-concept and identity is enhanced by the mentoring of more senior participants in the sport and also coaches, a finding which is consistent with existing literature (e.g., Burke, 2006). The athlete's identity will develop in accordance with the fulfilment of psychological needs (autonomy, relatedness and competence; Ryan & Deci, 2003), supported by other athletes and coaches, whilst the self-concept is also influenced by the evaluations of significant others, and reinforcements and attributions regarding one's behaviour, both positive and negative (Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976).

The results of Study One show that the synchronisation of the timing of the transition with the athletes' readiness reduces the disruption associated with transition. Further, reaching readiness via extensive preparation and absorption of roles also generates a

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sense of self-efficacy. This self-efficacy is likely to make the athlete feel motivated to make, and prepare for the transition (Bandura, 1986, 1997; Maddux & Gosselin, 2003).

### *Knowledge and Readiness for Transition*

Developing an understanding of transition is a key component in the preparation of athletes for retirement (Sinclair & Hackfort, 2000) and, as the results of this thesis have thus far demonstrated, this educational imperative applies equally to the transition from junior to senior status. The gathering of information from coaches and older athletes, experienced at the higher level, is a powerful aid to the acquisition of readiness. To achieve this state, prior to the transition to senior participation, requires the possession of skills and behaviours relevant to the role of senior athlete, such as independence, responsibility and professionalism. Once these attributes are acquired, they equip the aspirant athlete with the coping skills necessary to prosper at senior level.

The results of Studies One and Two also reveal that an appreciation of what is needed in order to succeed at the next level, enables an athlete to evaluate their own skills and behaviour relative to their new contemporaries and therefore to identify areas where these need to be honed. Such a needs analysis, identifying a discrepancy between the actual and ideal (or ought) self (Higgins, 1987), is likely to encourage the aspirant athlete to address any shortcomings revealed.

In order to develop the identity of a senior athlete, the individual must acquire such an understanding of the expectations implicit in the role i.e., the behaviours and interactions, which are expected in the fulfilment of that role (Ryan & Deci, 2003). Obtaining a theoretical understanding of and some practical insight regarding the transition experience is likely to optimise the process and to develop a readiness for transition, that in turn reflects a fit between the athlete's skills or coping strategies and the timing of their transition, and a confidence to navigate through the process. The importance of readiness and the correct timing is alluded to by Schlossberg (1981) and was a key finding of Study One, in which it was demonstrated that a lack of fit between the athlete's readiness for transition and the timing of the transition can result in delayed progress.



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### *Identity Development*

The quality and nature of experiences at retirement are closely correlated with the strength of athletic identity when this occurs, with a stronger identity being negative for adjustment (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993). For this reason, career intervention programmes typically have been constructed to prepare athletes for career termination by cultivating those life skills which will be valuable at inception of their non-sport careers and beyond. The results of Studies One and Two demonstrate that at the junior-to-senior transition, the development of athletic identity is important, with athletes being required to develop commitment to and knowledge of the requirements of this role as a prerequisite of success. A feeling of belonging in the senior environment, through familiarisation with the senior tour is also important here and should form a component of any intervention programme with junior to senior transition in mind. Nevertheless, any transition programme must also be mindful of the need to develop a balanced identity in case of premature retirement, and therefore attention should be directed toward cultivating the ability to balance lifestyle and performance demands, as acknowledged by the participants of Studies One and Two.

### *Skill Development*

The programmes which have been designed to support athletes preparing for the retirement transition have included an element of skill recognition and skill development (e.g., the ACE programme). The results of Study One also point to the importance of transition-related competencies and the need for athletes to acquire the skills to navigate the process from anticipation through to the aftermath, in both lifestyle and performance. Thus, an enhancement intervention designed to prepare athletes for the junior-to-senior transition should encompass: acknowledgement of how current skills apply to the upcoming transition, a needs analysis identifying those new capabilities which will be required, the establishment of goals to bridge any skills deficit revealed, and the creation of opportunity to learn and practise such skills (Danish et al., 1993, 1995).

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The aims of the enhancement programme were therefore to:

- 1) Build self-efficacy for the junior-senior transition.
- 2) Increase the participants' knowledge with regard to the nature of and demands related to the junior- to-senior transition.
- 3) Increase the participants' feeling of readiness for the junior- to-senior transition.

The intervention was thus designed to fulfil these aims on the basis of an enhancement intervention as described by Danish et al. (1993; 1995). The specific details of the programme are described in the following method section.

## **4.2 METHODOLOGY**

### **4.2.1 Participants**

The participants were seven in number; three female and six male, junior tennis players of between 13 and 15 years of age at the start of the intervention ( $M$  age = 15.38 years,  $S.D.$  = 1.37). A letter, along with a consent form (see Appendix C, pp. 377-379) was sent to 12 players (and their parents), who were aged between 13 and 16 years and were registered on the elite training programme at a high performance tennis centre in the United Kingdom. Participation in this programme meant that the athletes were recognised as talented juniors. They attended the academy full-time, receiving schooling around their tennis programme. This group size was deemed appropriate for a single programme leader, whilst still providing some opportunity for group discussion and interaction (Petitpas & Champagne, 2000). The athletes were offered a place on a sport psychology programme on the topic of the junior-senior transition. Those parties who wished to pursue a career in tennis at senior level were asked to register their interest in the programme by returning the consent form, signed by a parent. Of the twelve players contacted, eight returned their consent forms and expressed an interest in the programme. Of the initial eight participants, seven (three females and four males) completed the programme ( $M$  age = 15.1 years,  $S.D.$  = 1.24), with one participant dropping out due to other commitments.

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All of the tennis players taking part in the study were competing at national and/or international junior tournaments. The national rankings of the participants who completed the programme were obtained at the beginning of study; with three ranked within the top 20 players of their age group, and a further two in the top 50. The remaining two participants were ranked between 70-80 and 110-120.<sup>3</sup>

#### 4.2.2 Study Design

The intervention followed a B within-subject design. Single case designs allow for the monitoring of chosen parameters at the individual level, either through direct behavioural observation or introspective self-report methods. The researcher examines change, or differences between baseline (i.e., pre-intervention) and post-intervention measures of the dependent variables. Rather than exposing different groups to different treatments, as in a between-subjects design, all participants can benefit from the treatment condition, acting as their own control. There is a call for sport psychologists to be more flexible in their choice of research method and to consider single-case designs where appropriate to the research question (Hrycaiko & Martin, 1996). Indeed Hrycaiko and Martin highlight several advantages of the single-case approach, including (in relation to the current study): the potential to evaluate an intervention with only a few participants, the lack of need for a no-treatment control group, and the use of social-validation methods of evaluation (i.e., how the participants themselves feel about the methods used and the results obtained). Where time or the nature of the dependent variables allow, and particularly in studies involving the measurement of behaviour or performance, a single-case multiple baseline design is used, where the treatment is only introduced once baseline measures are stable and the introduction of treatment is staggered across individuals. This increases the internal validity of the study, since it reduces the risk that any changes in the dependent variables were due to chance or extraneous variables. Time constraints, and the nature of this intervention (i.e., group education) and measurement issues (explained in the following section), meant that it was impractical to conduct a

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<sup>3</sup> Precise rankings are not given in order to protect the identities of the participants. It should be noted that, at the commencement of the study, some of the participants had moved to a higher age group and subsequently their ranking had suffered. In addition, the lowest ranked participant had been competitively inactive due to injury, and this inactivity also affected the player's ranking. The rankings provided should therefore only be seen as a loose representation of participants' playing standard.

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multiple baseline design where administration of the treatment was staggered, and therefore a B design was adopted. The dependent variables in this study were: i) readiness for transition, ii) knowledge for transition, iii) self-efficacy for transition, and iv) athletic identity.

Whilst the analysis of data is discussed below, it is necessary at this point, before an explanation of the instruments used in the study, to explain the procedure for the evaluation of treatment effects in single case designs. This typically serves two purposes, with the first to examine the effects of the treatment on the dependent variables, and the second to determine the clinical or practical assessment of the effects of the treatment, as discerned by the participants (i.e., how useful the participants find the research; Hrycaiko & Martin, 1996). This information, on the evaluation of method and results, according to Hrycaiko and Martin, is invaluable in the marketing of sport psychology services. They suggest that on completion of a study or programme of intervention, the researchers should first assess whether there is convincing evidence that the treatment was responsible for any effects on the dependent variables, and secondly, the practical significance of any change to the client should be assessed through an examination of social validity (Wolf, 1978; cited in Hrycaiko & Martin), which typically involves an interview to determine whether the procedures were acceptable, and the results important to the consumer. This, Hrycaiko and Martin attest, is important if practitioners are to provide the best service to their clients, and is particularly relevant in the current context, given the potential for the use of transition preparation programmes in elite junior sport.

### **4.2.3 Instrumentation**

Measurement of the dependent variables was via self-report, through the use of questionnaires and a social-validation assessment. The dependent variables were:

- i) Readiness for transition.
- ii) Knowledge for transition.
- iii) Self-efficacy for transition.
- iv) Athletic identity.

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Athletic identity was assessed in this intervention, given the importance attributed to it in the thesis so far. Whilst it was unclear whether the intervention would have a specific effect on the strength of the athletic identity, it was deemed important to collect these data. Previous research has suggested that situational fluctuations in athletic identity can occur (e.g., over the course of a competitive season; Brewer, Selby, Linder, & Petitpas, 1999).

Given the lack of existing self-report measures with which to assess the dependent variables (with the exception of athletic identity), it was necessary to construct questionnaires for their assessment. Based on the results of Studies One and Two, a pool of items was developed for each of the remaining dependent variables to be measured, and items were checked for face validity by two experts in the area of within-career transition in sport before pre-testing with four junior tennis players. The pre-tests led to the re-wording of items which players found ambiguous or confusing. The words '*right now*' were also added to each of the items, to ensure that participants rated themselves as they felt at that moment in time. This was important because athletes in the pre-test sometimes questioned whether they should respond as they felt right now, or if they were to imagine themselves at the age of making the transition to senior level. The development of the measures for each dependent variable will now be discussed in more detail. The instruments can be found in Appendix C (pp. 394-401).

### *Readiness for Transition*

Readiness for transition was assessed using an instrument based on the Transition Coping Questionnaire (TCQ; Schlossberg, 1993). The original TCQ contains 45 questions that ask respondents to rate themselves in four areas (the four S's): i) their Situation (i.e., how they see the transition that they are facing), ii) the Self (i.e., personal characteristics that they bring to the transition), iii) the Supports they have (i.e., what help they have from others), and iv) their coping Strategies (i.e., the skills they possess to cope with the transition). This questionnaire has previously been used with sport populations in relation to career termination. For example, Lavalley (2005) used the measure to examine adjustment to retirement in professional soccer players. However, many of the items in

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the original questionnaire were deemed inappropriate for the specific transition under investigation, and for the junior age group. The questionnaire was therefore adapted for the particular transition and population. The four areas of the TCQ were retained, and therefore participant readiness was assessed using 22 items with regard to:

- a) The perception of the situation (5 items; e.g., *If I was to make the transition to senior level right now, I would feel that it was totally within my personal control*)
- b) The self (6 items; e.g., *I am preparing myself off court specifically to make the transition to senior level*)
- c) Supports (4 items; e.g., *I receive support from my coach for the transition to senior level*)
- d) Coping strategies (7 items; e.g., *I have specific goals which I've set for the steps I will take from junior to senior tournaments*).

Participants rated their response on a 7 point Likert-type scale from 1 (not at all true) to 7 (completely true).

### *Knowledge for Transition*

Based on the results of Study One, areas of knowledge were identified which athletes had reported were important in helping them through the process of the junior-to-senior transition. Broad questions were formed in these areas to assess the development of participants' knowledge pre-, during- and post-intervention.

After the development of a pool of items, and a face validity check by independent experts, the knowledge scale was pre-tested. During the pre-testing, it became clear that junior tennis players were unrealistic in their self-rating of knowledge concerning the transition from junior to senior level and as regards life as a professional tennis player, rating their knowledge at or near 100% on all items.

According to Rozenblit and Keil (2002) and Keil (2003), people typically have a superficial understanding of how the world works, but they actually believe that they

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understand it in far more detail. This is known as the ‘illusion of explanatory depth’ (I.O.E.D.). According to Rozenblit and Keil, we often do not realise the shortcomings in our understandings of a phenomenon until we are challenged to explain: “We frequently discover that a theory that seems crystal clear and complete in our head suddenly develops gaping holes and inconsistencies when we try to set it down on paper” (p.522). This illusion, it is thought, can be explained by our overestimation of our ability to remember causal patterns, together with an underestimation of the role played by the relations apparent in the world when presented to us (as opposed to being mentally represented). Thus when challenged to explain a phenomenon from memory, and without objective cues, we may struggle to provide our theory. Typically, the I.O.E.D. has been tested in regard to illusions of explanation for the operation of devices, organs and natural phenomena. However, Keil (2003) advocates that the illusion is also likely to hold for the understanding of human behaviour. Such an illusion of understanding may be brought about because humans will mistake familiarity with a situation for an understanding of how it works (Stafford, 2007), and this bias holds for adults (e.g., Rozenblit & Keil, 2002), as well as for children (e.g., Mills & Keil, 2004). In pre-testing the knowledge instrument, it was apparent that junior players’ awareness of their own knowledge was influenced by this illusion; their familiarity with the tennis world and senior tennis tour (from the media and their identity as junior tennis players) led them, mistakenly, to believe that they possessed an in-depth knowledge of what it was like to compete on the senior tour and to make the transition from junior to senior level. As noted, research has shown that once a person is asked to explain how something works, their self-rating of their understanding drops i.e., when asked to provide an explanation, people then recognise the gaps in their knowledge and the shallow nature of their understanding (Rozenblit & Keil, 2002). Thus, for this study it was concluded that before the participants were asked to self-report their knowledge at baseline, they should be questioned about the transition to senior level and the senior tennis tour in order to reduce the impact of the I.O.E.D. and to allow for a more accurate baseline assessment of pre-intervention knowledge.

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In order further to facilitate the reduction of the I.O.E.D., the participants were asked to rate their current knowledge as well as to identify a knowledge goal which they would like to attain by the end of the intervention programme, thereby prompting them to recognise the discrepancy between their actual and ideal knowledge, and to empower and motivate (Danish et al., 1995) the participants to direct their preparation. Two versions of this knowledge instrument were pre-tested; one used a 7-point Likert-type scale, and the other a visual analogue scale on which participants placed an 'X' at the appropriate place to represent their knowledge status. Research has shown that the Likert-type scale and the visual analogue scale are of comparable reliability (Van Laerhoven, Van der Zaag-Loonen, & Derkx, 2004). A decision was made to use the visual analogue scale, as according to the athletes at pre-test, it allowed them more clearly to rate their current knowledge and their knowledge goal.

As indicated above, recognition that the I.O.E.D. is prevalent amongst the population generally, resulted in an enhancement of the programme design and the use of a focus group interview before conducting the baseline assessment. The interview guide can be seen in Appendix C (p.380).

#### *Efficacy for Transition*

An instrument was devised to assess efficacy for the transition, based upon Bandura's recommendations for the construction of a self-efficacy scale (Bandura, 2005). However, in pre-testing of the instrument, ceiling effects were encountered with athletes reporting between 90-100% efficacy in their ability successfully to make and to cope with the transition. After rewording the items and re-testing the instrument on four occasions with the same problem recurring, it was concluded that efficacy would be best assessed retrospectively and qualitatively during the social-validation phase.

#### *Athletic Identity*

Athletic identity was assessed through the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS; Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993; Brewer & Cornelius, 2001), which assesses the strength and exclusivity of identification with the athletic role. Participants were asked to



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respond to the items on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Brewer et al. (1993) reported high internal consistency (alpha coefficients ranging from .81 to .93 across three different samples) and a test-retest reliability coefficient of .89 over a 2-week period for the original ten-item AIMS. More recently, Brewer and Cornelius have suggested that the seven-item scale reflects athletic identity better than the original ten-item scale. The internal consistency of the seven-item scale is also acceptable (Alpha = .81) and scores on the seven-item measure are highly correlated with those on the original ten-item measure (Brewer & Cornelius, 2001). In this study, the wording of the seven items was adapted for the specific population, for example, the item "I have many goals related to sport" was changed to "I have many goals related to tennis."

#### *Instrumentation Considerations*

Despite the above mentioned difficulties, self-report combined with social-validation was deemed the only appropriate method of assessment, since it is impossible objectively to rate a person's knowledge, efficacy and readiness. The use of replicated assessment (as detailed below) and social-validation, provided additional evidence that change in the dependent variables was indeed a result of the intervention and not due to extraneous variables or merely a return to baseline (or I.O.E.D.) levels.

#### **4.2.4 Procedure**

The intervention took place over 11 weeks, from January until March, which coincided with a school and tennis-academy term. Participants had a one week break at week 7 due to the school/academy half-term holiday. Data were collected at 3 time points; baseline (at week 1), week 6 and weeks 10/11 (with quantitative data collected in week 10 and qualitative data in week 11). To ensure an effective transition programme, the deliverer must become familiar with the idiosyncrasies of the target sport, e.g., the competition schedule, timing in relation to training etc. (Petitpas & Champagne, 2000; cited in Danish et al., 1993). As such, a time suitable for players was chosen which would minimise impact on practise sessions and during a period of the year when there would be minimal disruption from tournaments. Finally, repeated measures were taken under the same

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conditions to avoid spurious effects in the data, i.e., with the location, time of day, and instructions given, standardised for each data collection point (Hersen & Barlow, 1976).

The intervention was based predominantly upon the results from Study One. This suggested that the gathering of information and interaction with and/or observation of current senior athletes played a significant role in participants' preparation for the junior-senior transition, by building an understanding of the athlete role. Since it was impractical to provide weekly contact with senior tennis players, a virtual mentoring programme was constructed. Five current senior tennis players were interviewed informally about their experiences on the tour and their own junior-to-senior transition (see interview questions in Appendix C, p.402). A strength and conditioning coach, who had previously worked with players ranked within the world's top one-hundred, was also interviewed, in order to provide an extra perspective on the performance differences between junior and senior level. With consent from these 'video models', the interviews were video-recorded and later edited down to group clips and into relevant topics as identified by the participants in Study One. The grouped video clips were inserted into videos using Windows Movie Maker, which permits titles and a narrative to be added to the clips to explain the context of the content. These videos formed the basis of the group education sessions along with group discussion, tasks, and pertinent examples from the media and role models with whom the players were familiar.

The use of video rather than real-life models, was considered acceptable on the basis that Bandura (1989) has claimed that such a medium can have a beneficial impact on learning. Discussing the powerful role of the media, Bandura observed that the world increasingly relies on the media to construct reality and as a result, the impact of symbolic modelling (i.e., modelling through television, video and radio), is magnified. Also, and relevant to this study, symbolic modelling is a means through which a single model can provide opportunities for observational learning to a greater number of people than would otherwise be possible. As stated hitherto, modelling is used in sport psychology to enhance the learning of motor skills, and studies often use video-models for this purpose (Atienza et al., 1998; Williams, 1989). Whilst this is, to the researcher's

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knowledge, the first time symbolic modelling has been used in a transition preparation programme, there is therefore evidence that symbolic modelling can be an effective teaching method.

In order to maximise observational learning through the intervention, the considerations of Rosenthal and Bandura (1978) were applied to the design of the videos. Accordingly, care was taken to provide information in a coherent form, which did not overload the participants. Thus, the videos were of no more than 20 minutes in length and segments were punctuated by discussions with, and between the participants. The programme was designed so as not to contain too many cues simultaneously, i.e., each session related to one particular topic. Finally, the researcher was mindful to ensure that the information had personal relevance to the participants and that they perceived the models to be credible and relevant. This was secured, as far as is possible, through the use of athlete models who were British, of both sexes and who had developed through the same national governing body structure. They had enjoyed success at senior level, on a world stage for at least one year, and therefore had considerable experience and knowledge of the tour and thus should be seen as credible sources of information.

### *The Programme*

The intervention programme was titled 'Readiness, Attitude, Commitment, Knowledge and Efficacy for Transition' (R.A.C.K.E.T.). The excerpt below, from week three of the intervention, which covered the lifestyle adjustments required on the senior tour, demonstrates the type of content included in the educational videos:

What does being a professional tennis player mean for your social life?

I don't have as much of a social life as the average 23 year old girl. That doesn't mean I don't go out at all, but you have to pick and choose, you just have to be a bit more careful, you know, I don't go out on [big nights] every week. I'm sure they are good fun, but you know, I couldn't think of anything worse, you know hung over for training the next day.

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What are the lifestyles of the top players like?

With Pete [Sampras], [Jim] Courier, [Justine] Henin, err, those are the ones that I've been around, and they *live* for tennis, you know, you see it night and day, they, they sacrifice their social life with their friends, you know, while they are all going out, they are in bed. You can take a lot of things away from those guys, but one thing you can't take away is their rest, they know, get their nap every day, and then erm, and they don't go out at night, that's the main thing, they don't go out, there's no partying here or there, its strictly business, and I see it *all* the time, you know, all year round.

How much travelling do you do?

Once you're on the tour full time, you're travelling up to, at least 30 weeks of the year you're away from home. Since I was 16, I have spent 30-35 weeks a year out of a bag, different place every week.

So what does that mean for your lifestyle?

You learn very quickly that you have to be very self-sufficient, and independent, very organised, it just makes you grow up quickly, there's no-one that wants you to do well more than obviously yourself, and your family, and the people closest to you. There are so many people out there who want to get one over you and stab you in the back, you know, it's a really bitchy place, especially on the women's tour, so you've just got to keep your head down and get on with it, it's not very friendly.

Is tennis a 9-5 job?

Being a tennis player is definitely a lifestyle, for me anyway, it's a lifestyle not a job. It's not something I do 9-5 and then come home and sort of detach myself from, for me anyway, it's a 24/7 project.

So how much time do you spend at home?

You come home maybe, it all depends on how you're doing I suppose, in a week. If you're doing quite well you'd go straight to the next tournament or whatever so you wouldn't get back. If you have a bad week or something, lose early, you'd come

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back, only for a couple of days or whatever. And throughout the year, I don't know, probably a couple of months, but only like a few days at a time, or maximum a week, so not long.

What's hard about travelling?

I've been lucky in the sense that I've never had a problem travelling. I felt comfortable spending time on my own, doing stuff. As you travel more and you get older, you find various ways of filling your time, you become an expert at dealing with that. I know a lot of players after a couple of years find it hard, because it is, it's not easy. I mean, I don't want young guys to like look at this to think 'Oh yeah great, tennis players, fantastic, you travel you do all this', [because] it's tough, it's a long slog, and people try and make it look glamorous in certain ways, and at certain tournaments it can be, but the majority of it is hard work, and the travelling I know can get to a lot of players. And I know some players don't play as well abroad as they do [at home] because they're comfortable in their own surroundings, but if you're one of those players you shouldn't be playing tennis. Tennis isn't one of those sports just played in Britain, believe me, you've got to be able to, you've got to play everywhere, and deal with different, cultures, climates, peoples, opinions. So get ready for a lot of changes, on a weekly basis, because some people like conformity, they like things to be the same week in week out, and that's how they perform best, but it's not like that.

Some horrible places.....

A lot of the tournaments I was playing were the grand slam juniors, and the top junior tournaments, and they were all really nice places, and you know, everything was sort of super well looked after and stuff, and then all of a sudden you play the seniors, and some of these satellite tournaments are in places that are not very nice and the conditions are not good, sort of playing conditions and living conditions, everything is not good, and that can get you, that's a bit of a reality check then, having to sort of get through this, and I probably found that a little bit hard for a while. You have to get your head around it and say right well 'I need to put the effort and the work in and get out of these so I can play the tournaments that I do want to play'.

An overview of the full content of the programme is included in the following section, and summarised in Table 4.1.

	Time	Content	Assessment
<b>STAGE I</b> Information and Minimisation of I.O.E.D.	Week 1	Introduction to the Programme. Focus group interview	Assessment 1 (Baseline)
<b>STAGE II</b> R.A.C.K.E.T. Junior-Senior Intervention Programme	Week 2	Introduction to Video Models: Junior and Senior Success	
	Week 3	Lifestyle Adjustments	
	Week 4	Performance Adjustments	
	Week 5	Scheduling: Tournaments and Training	Assessment 2
	Week 6	Setbacks	
	Week 7	Professional Behaviours	
	Week 8	Mental Approach for Transition	
	Week 8	Preparation for Transition: Self-discrepancies	
	Week 10	Review and Goal-Setting for Transition	Assessment 3
<b>STAGE III</b> Social-Validation and Evaluation of the Intervention	Week 11	Interviews	

**Table 4.1: Schedule and content of the R.A.C.K.E.T. programme.**

**Stage 1: Information and Minimisation of I.O.E.D.**

*Week 1: Introduction*

Participants were told only that the programme was designed to help them prepare for the junior-senior transition; but they did not know the specific aims of the study, nor were the words behind the acronym R.A.C.K.E.T. disclosed to the participants. Participants were asked for their individual consent to take part in the study and the requirements were explained, i.e., that they would need to attend for 1.5 hours per week, and that if they missed a session due to injury, illness or participation in a tournament, arrangements

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would be made for them to complete the session at a subsequent time. The participants were also informed that they would be given tasks to complete during the sessions and sometimes after the session for homework. Each participant was assigned a number (to which the researcher was blind), in order to minimise social desirability effects in their responses.

The group of participants then took part in a focus group interview designed to reduce I.O.E.D. effects, as previously explained, before the baseline measures of the dependent variables were collected. The interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim (see Appendix C for interview transcript, pp. 381-393).

## **Stage II: R.A.C.K.E.T. Junior-Senior Intervention Programme**

### *Participant Learning and Reflection*

Providing opportunities for modelling does not guarantee that participants will learn from the experience (Rosenthal & Bandura, 1978). Therefore, after each of the intervention sessions, participants completed a reflection sheet on which they were asked to recall three things which they had learnt from the session. This not only encouraged participants to listen during the session and to think about what they had learnt in the context of their own transition from junior to senior level, but also served as a means for the researcher to check comprehension. According to Bandura, asking the participants to describe what they have learned is an important step in checking their understanding of the information presented and the behaviours modelled during a session. Any omissions or misconceptions can then be corrected by additional displays, discussions or explanation (Bandura, 1989). To this end, each video was also accompanied by group discussion, and/or group or individual tasks to reinforce the key messages contained within the session.

### *Practising and Reinforcement of Behaviours*

To further enhance each participant's preparation for transition and to consolidate their learning, they were each provided with a diary for personal completion between every,

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session which enabled and encouraged them to apply the knowledge and strategies which the video models had imparted.

Since reinforcement of behaviours learned through modelling is an important factor in sustaining the enactment of learned behaviours (Bandura, 1989), the academy coaches, who had daily contact with the players during the academy week, were recruited to support the intervention's aims. After each session, the seven coaches at the academy were provided with a written overview. They were asked, where possible, to reinforce the topic during their coaching sessions and interactions with the participants i.e., to acknowledge and positively to reinforce the display of transition appropriate behaviours which had been covered in the programme. This strategy was adopted in an attempt to build the participants' efficacy in their ability to perform the transition-related behaviour which they had learnt to be important. Verbal persuasion and successful performance of skills are two predictors of self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1989) and thus it was deemed important to encourage the participants to practise the behaviours which they had modelled during the programme and to receive acknowledgement of their efforts and to have these reinforced. To encourage the coaches to do this, they were given a sheet on which to record the number of relevant interactions with each of the participants. This was to be returned to the researcher the following week. Examples of the coach information sheet, and coach reinforcement sheet can be seen in Appendix C (pp. 404-405).

The content of the videos presented a realistic view of life on the tour, the challenge involved in making the transition to senior level and the experiences which the video models had recalled as being important for progress in the world rankings. However, it also adopted a mastery approach, with emphasis placed on hard work to achieve results and on demystifying the process.

### *Week 2: Introduction to Video Models: Junior and Senior Success*

In the first of the video sessions, the participants listened to the video models describe their respective junior and senior careers. This served as an introduction to the senior



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players and an insight of how and when these players made the transition from junior to senior level, as well as their first-hand experiences of the transition. The participants received an overview of the progress the players had made at senior level. The video models were also heard talking about the importance of learning and gaining experience at junior level, as opposed to merely focusing on achieving results.

### *Week 3: Lifestyle Adjustments*

Competing on the senior tour is a lifestyle rather than a job. Participants were told by the video models about their lifestyle and what they would need to adjust to, if they chose to pursue a career in tennis. They also learned of the significant amount of travelling involved and specific concerns, such as diet, were also covered.

### *Week 4: Performance Adjustments*

Video models discussed the differences they perceived between playing on the junior and senior tennis tours, in terms of mental and physical (technical, tactical and fitness) performance requirements. The participants learned of the training regime which would be demanded of them as a senior. These requirements were contrasted in terms of the junior- to-senior transition and of the escalating standard as players advance through the rankings, i.e., what it takes to progress to an elite level.

### *Week 5: Scheduling: Tournaments and Training*

One of the many new responsibilities associated with senior status is the athlete becoming much more involved in the management and planning of the competitive schedules. This session constituted educational input regarding the structure of the senior tour and starting out on the circuit. In addition, the video models described: how they plan their schedules and training blocks, how they decide which tournaments to enter based on current form, location and surface of the tournament, the player's goals, and tournaments which they are eligible for. The participants put together their own imaginary schedule as if they were starting out, with no ranking, on the senior tour.

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### *Week 6: Setbacks*

In the fifth session, the participants heard about the setbacks which they might confront during their careers. The senior players described the injuries and slumps that they had experienced and how they recovered from these setbacks.

### *Week 7: Professional Behaviours*

The development of professional behaviours is a key factor in the maturation of athletes as they progress from junior to senior level, and is critical to the development of a senior-athletic identity. The senior players imparted their knowledge about the importance of behaving professionally and the relationship between level of professionalism and ranking on the senior tour. This included match preparation, off-court behaviour, taking responsibility for oneself and one's performance and consistently reviewing matches. The players developed their own pre- and post-match professional routines on the basis of this information.

### *Week 8: Mental Approach for Transition*

This intervention session consisted of video footage from the video models discussing the ideal mental approach for success at transition, including the relevance of focusing on one's own progress rather than that of fellow competitors.

### *Week 9: Preparation for Transition: Self-Discrepancies*

In this session, the participants learned about the types of preparation the video models had engaged in for their own transition, which included activities both on and off the court such as: gathering information about what it is like to compete at senior level, watching older players and modelling their behaviours and setting goals. Participants engaged in a task designed to encourage them to think about their own preparation for the transition by identifying the differences between their current behaviour and the behaviour that is required to succeed on the senior tour.

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### *Week 10: Review and Goal-Setting for Transition*

A recap of the topics covered in the programme was conducted. Then, based upon the participants' reflections of their own strengths and weaknesses related to senior tennis, and the current and future behaviours which they had identified in the previous session, a goal-setting plan was constructed to facilitate on-going preparation for the transition.

### **Stage III: Social-Validation and Evaluation of the Intervention**

#### *Week 11: Social-Validation*

The final stage of the intervention programme involved a qualitative examination of the outcomes of the programme. Social-validation is often used after the conclusion of an intervention to assess: the extent to which the target skill is important to the target population, if the procedures are effective and acceptable and if the participants are satisfied with the results (Hrycaiko & Martin, 1996). Social validity is typically assessed using questionnaires, and post-intervention interviews. With the current study, the complications encountered in quantitatively measuring the effect of the intervention on the dependent variables, along with the value of participant feedback as to the practical significance of the programme, meant that the use of social validity assessment was crucial.

The social-validation stage was conducted in week 11 and was designed to gain additional data and a more in-depth perspective from the participants about their individual outcomes from the intervention programme. As an introduction and rapport building exercise, participants were initially asked whether they knew the purpose of the study and what they liked and disliked about the programme. The interview then consisted of a series of open- and closed-ended, and survey questions regarding the participant's outcomes as a result of participation in the programme and their evaluation, including in terms of the study procedures and ecological value. For example, participants were asked which parts of the programme were most (and least) useful and to rate their perceived change (via a 7-point Likert type-scale) on the following: i) how prepared they were for transition (i.e., their readiness), ii) their commitment to making

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the transition, iii) their confidence in their ability successfully to cope with the transition (i.e., efficacy for transition), and iv) their knowledge gained over the course of the programme. The language used in the questions was carefully chosen so as to ensure that participants understood the implications. Participants were also asked whether they comprehended what was expected of them and to rate their commitment to the programme and the associated tasks. The final part of the interview enquired about the methods used in the programme, and which of the teaching methods (i.e., videos, coaches, and the programme leader) was most effective in determining their individual outcomes on the dependent variables. They were also asked for their opinions regarding what could be improved in regard to the delivery of the programme. The complete sample of social-validation questions can be seen in Appendix C (p.406).

#### **4.2.5 Data Analysis**

Visual examination of the data was used to examine the effect of the intervention on the variables assessed over the course of the R.A.C.K.E.T. programme. When the sample is too small for statistical analysis, visual inspection of the data is recognised as acceptable (Kratochwill, 1978). With reference to the B design of the current study, Hrycaiko and Martin (1996) recommend that researchers can have greater confidence that the treatment has had an effect on the dependent variables if: i) the effect is replicated across participants, ii) the size of the effect is large compared to the baseline measure and iv) the results are consistent with accepted theory. With regard to the second of these points, Hrycaiko and Martin propose that when judging the size of the effect, one should consider both the contrast in dependent variable measures at baseline and during treatment, and also practical assessment, i.e., the social validity of the change. For example, in sport psychology interventions where performance gains are sought, a change may be small, but nevertheless significant to elite athletes.

Given the nature of the current study (i.e., in representing the first trial of a within-career transition programme, the measures used and the lack of a multiple baseline design), emphasis is placed on the social validity data. Responses to the social-validation questions were transcribed verbatim and organised into categories for discussion.

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### 4.3 RESULTS

The quantitative results indicate that trends across each of the dependent variables were similar for all of the participants (see Figure 4.1). As a result, and given the relatively large sample size for a single-case design ( $n=7$ ), the data for the group will be discussed as a whole, with reference to individual example cases to highlight interesting differences. Due to the problems encountered with instrumentation in this study, emphasis is also placed on the qualitative data i.e., the perceptions of the participants and this is reflected in the results presented.

	Time 1 (Baseline)	Time 2 (Week 6)	Time 3 (Week 11)
<b>Athletic identity</b>	38.57 (4.24)	38.43 (4.28)	38.43 (5.13)
<b>Knowledge</b>	72.96 (17.15)	113.84 (24.06)	122.34 (20.47)
<b>Overall readiness for transition</b>	106.57 (17.14)	108.43 (20.38)	120 (21.94)
<b>Situation</b>	22.71 (3.15)	24.14 (4.98)	27.71 (5.15)
<b>Self</b>	29.0 (7.66)	29.57 (6.70)	32.71 (6.82)
<b>Supports</b>	22.57 (3.69)	20.86 (3.08)	23.0 (3.32)
<b>Strategies</b>	32.29 (6.16)	33.86 (7.80)	36.58 (8.16)

**Table 4.2: Dependent variables: Baseline to Time 3.**

Self-reported athletic identity, knowledge and readiness for transition over the course of the intervention are shown in Table 4.2. Tables 4.3 and 4.4 show the participants' perceptions of their own change over the intervention and their evaluation of the intervention and the teaching methods, as assessed during the social-validation phase.

Post-intervention evaluation	P1*	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	M	S.D.
The information provided in the programme was useful to me	6	6	5	7	7	7	6	6.29	0.76
I feel more prepared than I did before taking part in the programme	6	6	5	6	7	6	7	6.14	0.69
I feel more committed to the junior-senior transition than I was before taking part in the programme	5	6	4	3	6	5.5	6	5.07	1.17
I feel more confident that I can make the transition than I was before taking part in the programme	6	6	4	6	7	6	5	5.71	0.95
I am more knowledgeable about senior level than I was before taking part in the programme	6	6	4	7	7	7	7	6.28	1.11
I have developed skills which will be useful for making the transition	4	6	5	6	6	5	6	5.43	0.79
I was committed to the programme	4	6	3	4	5	5	6	4.71	1.11
I was committed to completing the tasks in the programme	5	6	6	5	6	5	7	5.71	0.76
Mean participant ratings	5.25	6	4.5	5.5	6.38	5.81	6.25		
S.D.	0.89	0	0.93	1.41	0.74	0.84	0.71		

**Table 4.3: Participant rated outcomes and evaluation of the intervention (on 1-7 Likert-type scale; 1 = not at all, 7 = very much so). \*P1 indicates Participant 1**

	Delivery method		
	Coaches	Programme leader	Videos
	Mean (S.D.)	Mean (S.D.)	Mean (S.D.)
Contribution to transition knowledge	4.29 (1.11)	6.29 (0.76)	6.79 (0.39)
Support for transition	4.29 (0.76)	6.14 (0.69)	
Contribution to transition preparation	4.29 (0.95)	6.5 (0.55)	6.14 (1.07)
Contribution to transition efficacy	3.86 (1.21)	5.93 (0.84)	5.86 (0.90)
Contribution to commitment for transition	4.71 (1.11)	6.07 (1.10)	5.71 (0.98)
Mean overall contribution	4.29 (1.02)	6.18 (0.79)	6.13 (1.07)

**Table 4.4: Perceived contribution of teaching methods to transition preparation (on 1-7 Likert-type scale; 1 = not at all, 7 = very much so). (For individual participant ratings please see Appendix C, p.411).**

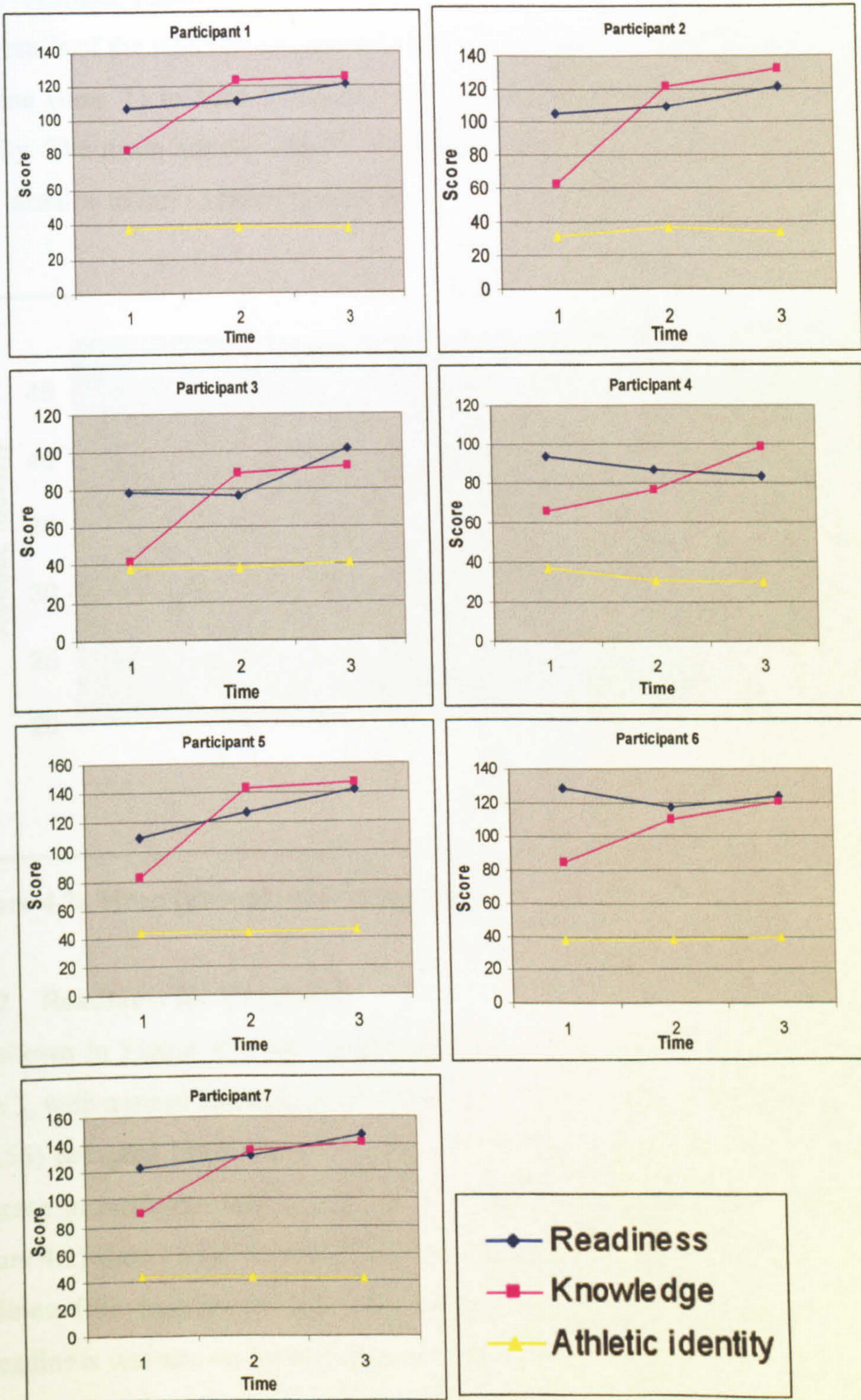


Figure 4.1: Change in dependent variables (readiness for transition, knowledge for transition and athletic identity) for each individual case from baseline (Time 1) to Time 3.



### 4.3.1 Athletic Identity

The results of the intervention show that for the group there was an overall increase from baseline (time 1) to time 3 on all variables measured, with the exception of athletic identity. The mean athletic identity of the group showed a decrease of 0.14 ( $S.D.=3.24$ ) from baseline to time 3 (see Figure 4.2).

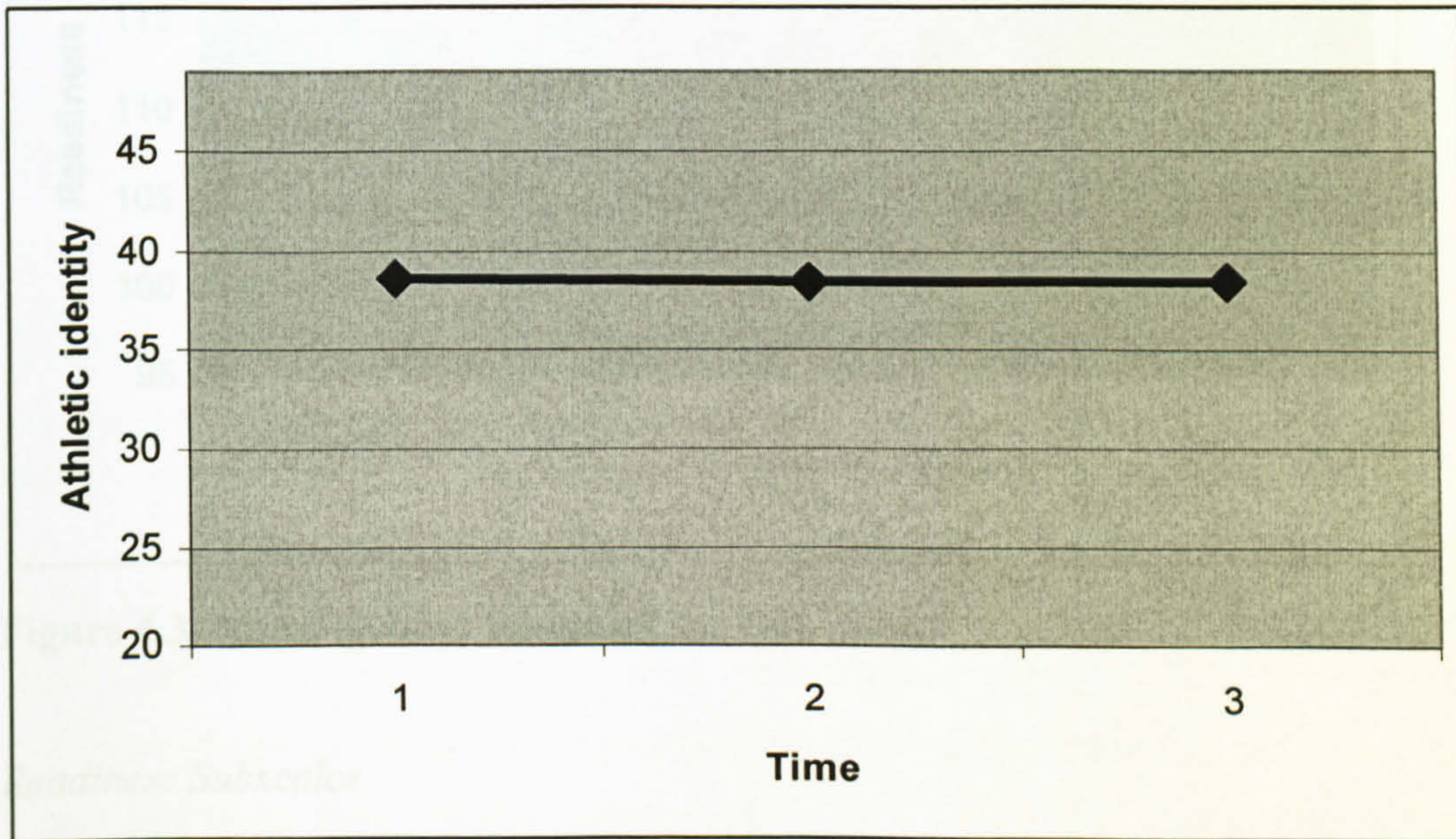
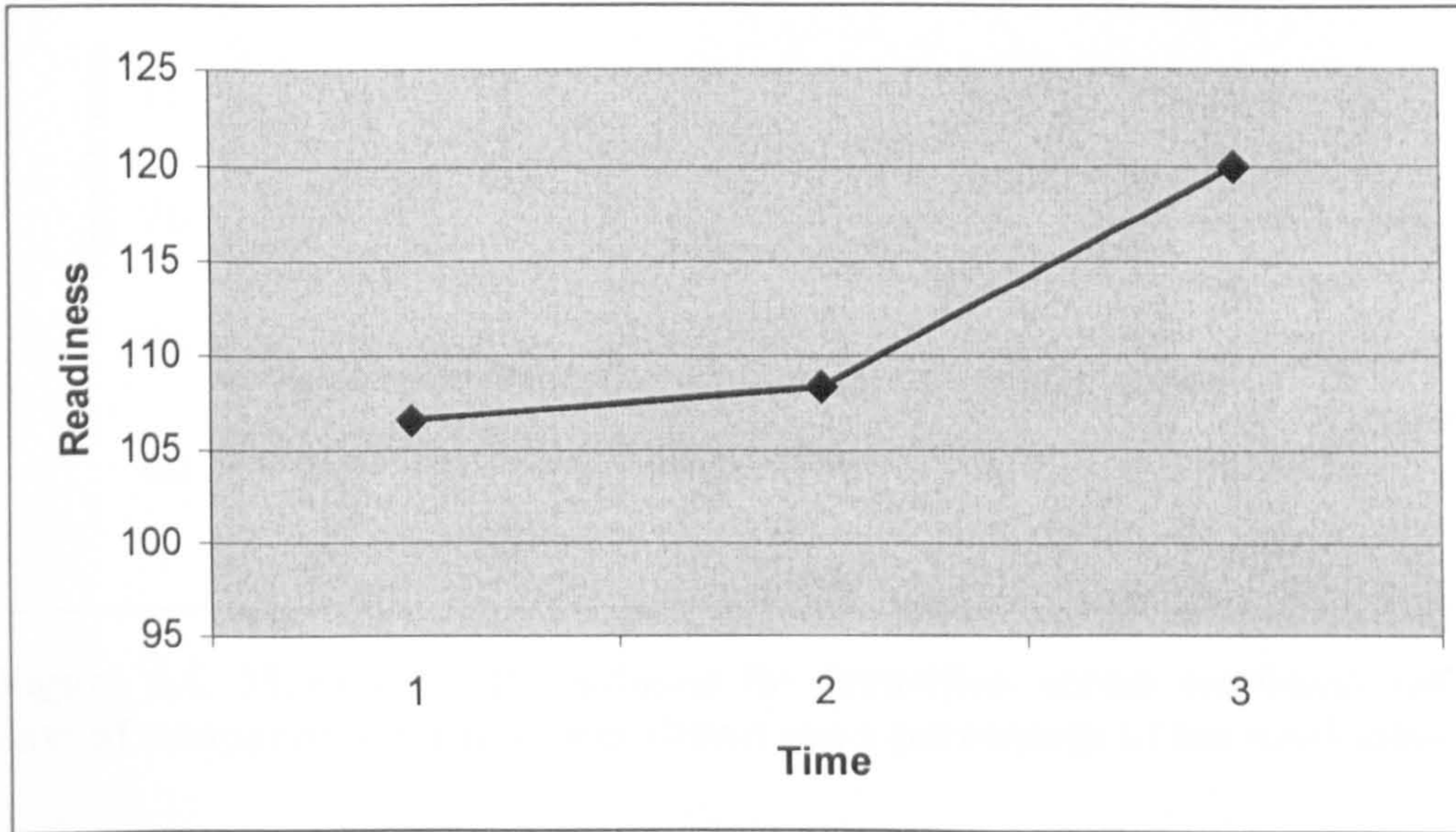


Figure 4.2: Mean (group) athletic identity.

### 4.3.2 Readiness for Transition

As shown in Figure 4.3, the overall readiness of the group increased from baseline to time 3, with a mean increase of 13.43 ( $S.D. = 15.51$ ). A greater increase ( $M = 11.57, S.D. = 8.56$ ) occurred from time 2 to time 3 than from baseline to time 2, where the mean increase in readiness was 1.88 ( $S.D. = 9.79$ ). Examination of the individual cases (see Figure 4.1) shows a similar trend for participants 1, 2, 5 and 7, with an increase in overall readiness from baseline to time 1 and a further increase from time 2 to time 3. A decrease in readiness was shown by participants 3, 4 and 6 from baseline to time 2. The readiness of participants 3 and 6 then increased from time 2 to time 3, with participant 3 showing an overall increase of 23 points from baseline to time 3, and at time 3 the readiness of

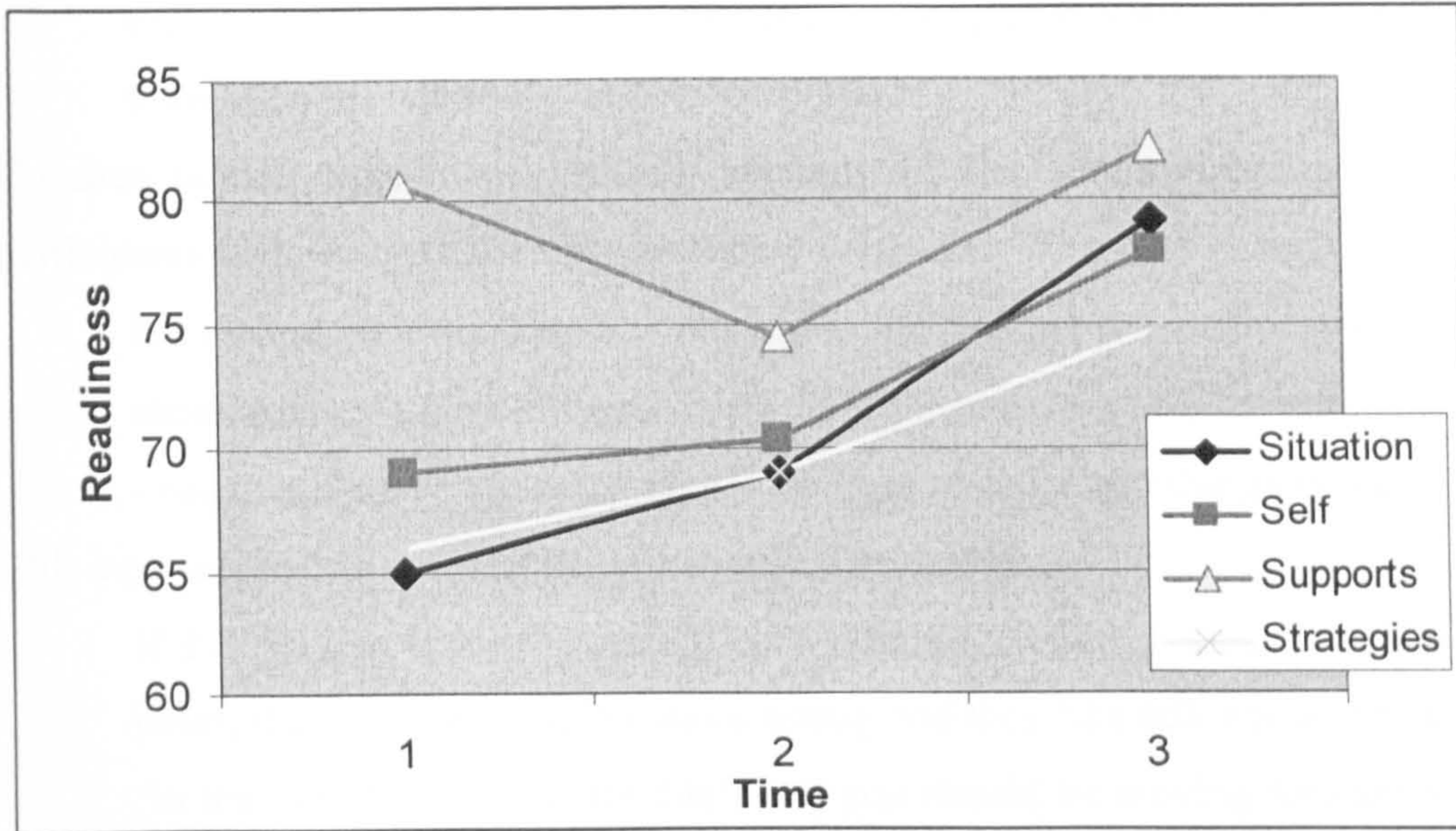
participant 6 was returning towards the level at baseline. Participant 4 showed a decrease of 10 points in overall readiness from baseline to time 3.



**Figure 4.3: Mean (group) readiness for transition.**

#### *Readiness Subscales*

There was an increase from baseline to time 3 on all four of the readiness subscales (see Figure 4.4). From baseline to time 3 the mean increase for the *Situation* subscale was 5.0 (*S.D.*=5.30), for *Self*, the mean increase was 3.71 (*S.D.*=3.40), for *Supports* the mean increase was 0.43 (*S.D.*=2.57) and for *Strategies*, 4.29 (*S.D.*=8.10). As highlighted in Figure 4.4, the group showed a mean increase from baseline to time 2 and time 2 to time 3 on all of the subscales with the exception of *Supports* which showed a mean decrease from baseline to time 2 ( $M=-1.71$ , *S.D.*=2.06). Readers are referred to Appendix C (p.412) for change across the four subscales in individual cases.



**Figure 4.4: Mean (group) readiness for transition across readiness subscales (for ease of comparison, mean scores shown are a percentage of the total subscale score).**

In the social-validation phase, participants felt that taking part in the intervention had left them more prepared for the transition, with a mean rating of 6.14 (*S.D.*=0.69). Each participant rated the improvement in their feelings of readiness at 6 or 7 on the 7 point Likert type scale. Participant 4 commented:

I feel like more, more prepared as in I just know more about things, like the tournaments and the, like the scheduling plans and things like that. I just feel like I know like how to get myself ready [for the transition].

The participants perceived that the increase in their readiness for transition was mainly a result of the information from the videos in the programme and the programme-leader. The coaches also made a contribution, albeit a lesser contribution (see Table 4.4 for relative contributions):

They've probably just said more about my game compared to other peoples' game in the senior level - so it's not just me against the people in my age group. It's about me and then everybody else - and that's helped to sort of make me look at the long term rather than the short term really. But sometimes it's still really, they're still focused on whether you win or lose at one tournament or something -

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or, you know, how you've done against people of your age group rather than thinking, well it doesn't really matter (P3).

Coaches related aspects of training sessions to the senior level and encouraged participants to think about their preparation:

It's again [from the coaches] like enforcing the fact that senior players and [the] senior tours are a lot different from the juniors and that we have to be ready for it - and that if we're going to make it we have to do certain things to make it (P4).

This input applied to on-court as well as off-court details:

If I'm playing a practise match, every time I missed a shot, they like come on court, they tell me what I've done wrong and they like talk about the seniors, like 'in the tour they'll be doing this', [so] you should be moving forward a bit more' (P7).

Participant 3 perceived that, as a result of taking part in the programme, when the coaches allowed players to act independently, that individual responsibility was more likely to be taken:

Sometimes they [the coaches] will just step back and say: 'Well you've got to work it out for yourself' and things like that. So that's made me realise sort of that - during the programme it said about independence - and you can't rely on other people all the time - well, that's made it more so, which is good to be honest.

### 4.3.3 Knowledge for Transition

As a group (see Figure 4.5), participant knowledge increased considerably from baseline (baseline:  $M=72.96$ ,  $S.D.=17.15$ ) to time 2 (time 2:  $M=113.84$ ,  $S.D.=24.06$ ) and time 2 to time 3 (time 3:  $M=122.34$ ,  $S.D.=20.47$ ).

All participants showed an overall increase in knowledge from baseline to time 3 (see Figure 4.1), and the trend shown in Figure 4.5 (with a greater increase in knowledge from baseline to time 2 than time 2 to time 3) is reflected in the individual cases of all participants except participant 4, who showed a greater increase in knowledge from time 2 to time 3 than from baseline to time 2.

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With the exception of participant 3, all participants rated the increase in their knowledge at 6 or 7 on the 1 to 7 scale (as a result of taking part in the programme) during the social-validation phase. Participant 3 rated their increase in knowledge at 4 ( $M = 6.28$ ;  $S.D. = 1.11$ ). However, when asked about the knowledge gained from the programme, the response reflected a significant knowledge gain:

Before I didn't really know that much about it [senior level]. Well, like obviously you know the odd thing - but yeah, I think its, it definitely helped. And I don't know, some people might not know how to go about it and it does help that really - it's just given me more, like a wider breadth of information that I might not have found otherwise, or might not have thought to look about, you know, travel costs or anything like that. But it just showed like that you've got to plan things and like what you need to be from yourself, rather than just let your coach do it for you sort of thing (P3).

Participant 5 also confirmed the discrepancy between their transition-related knowledge pre- and post-intervention:

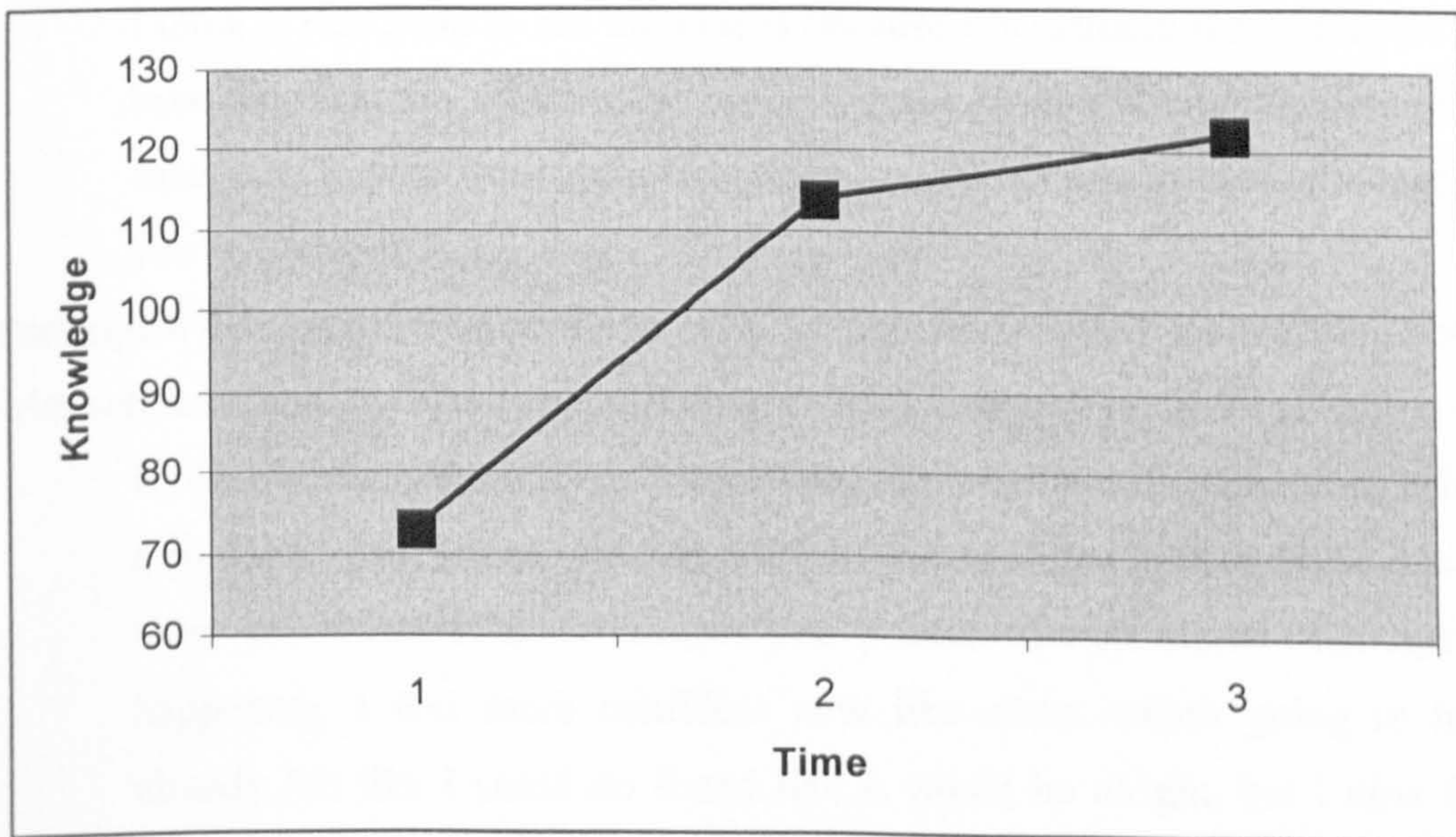
I really didn't have a clue what the senior tour was like at all before I did the programme. I didn't know like any of the tournaments, any of the life-style. I didn't know anything. And now I'm informed and I know how to do it and how people have done it....At the start because I didn't know much about senior tour, I was just thinking 'oh, I know I know everything I need to know, this is going to be a waste of time', and then when we went in there and we watched the videos and we watched the players talking, it was like there's so much more to it and you don't even realise it, [and now] because you've informed us about all the things the senior player has in store for us, I've come out knowing like all the tournaments, all the how to make the transition, all the responsibility, all the social side...[and] because we got to hear from players who have actually made the transition, so it wasn't like they were just giving their opinion - they had actually gone through it and they explained to us like what it was like and all the things they went through and how they did it, and it really helped us to understand

more that this is actually serious and we've actually got to - this is what we're going to have to be going through one day (P5).

Having more knowledge allowed participants to feel more prepared for the transition:

Now I've got like much more information about how the senior players do all the stuff that like junior players don't do at the moment. So by the time I get to the senior level I'll be, I'll like have more information on what's needed to be done so I won't be surprised - [I'm] way more knowledgeable because like pretty much everything you learnt, you didn't really know much, we knew bits about it, but it [the programme] has gone into more detail (P1).

The coaches also contributed somewhat to the participants' knowledge gains (see Table 4.4), as highlighted by participant 5: "They've talked a lot about it - they've never been specific though; it's never been like about me, but they have spoken a lot about it".



**Figure 4.5: Mean (group) knowledge for transition.**

#### 4.3.4 Efficacy for Transition

The social-validation data also suggested that confidence in one's ability to make the transition was increased by participation in the R.A.C.K.E.T. programme. Participants 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6 rated their increase in confidence for the transition at 6 or 7 on the 1 to 7

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scale. The lowest rating, from participant 3 was a confidence increase of 4 ( $M=5.71$ ;  $S.D.=0.95$ ).

They [the video models] just said things that erm - they told you how they made it. And it showed that they were like real people who were like the juniors, and some of them weren't that great. So it showed well, you don't have to be the top, and in most of the time the top people don't make it because they think, you know, they're already there and they're not, so it made you think, well, next time I go into [a] tournament you might not be the number one but it doesn't matter, because at the end of the day you're not going to be in juniors for ever. Whereas where you're going to be in seniors you've got to play like everybody. So I think that make me more confident (P3).

Participant 5 said that learning from the senior players was valuable for building confidence:

I think it was good to see the videos because it's actually senior players who had been through the experience and it's good to see players that have actually successfully gone through the transition so it gives you more confidence for what you're doing (P5).

Participant 4 suggested that confidence for the transition came from realising how to deal with setbacks, and this also fostered a commitment to keep trying:

It just like makes you think that you can deal with things rather than 'what would I do then?' And makes you feel more confident if that happened. So like you'd be more committed to do it because you wouldn't be so scared of things like that happening. I feel more confident now like about what's going to happen...I already felt like I could do it and like it would be alright, but I now feel like I know more about what's going to happen and how to - how to erm, adapt to things (P4).

The development of specific skills and confidence in one's ability to cope with the demands associated with senior tennis was also important:

I know that I could plan my tournaments by myself. I know that I'll be able to also like sort out where I'll be staying and everything and I've been on flights myself, so I can travel on my own (P7).

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#### 4.3.5 Commitment to the Transition

Increases in commitment to making the transition were also reported by all participants ( $M=5.07$ ,  $S.D.=1.17$ ). Participant 4 reported the smallest increase in commitment to making the transition, giving a score of 3 on the 1 to 7 scale. Commenting on this, the participant said:

I feel like a bit more committed because I feel like I know more and know more what's going to happen, but I don't - I still felt committed before, like I, it's not like I suddenly feel 'oh yeah, like it's changed now', because I felt like that before as well. Erm, but it has helped - I just felt more like it [the programme] gave me tips on how to do things rather than like make me feel like I want to do it more (P4).

Participant 5, who rated their increase in commitment to the transition at 6 on the 7-point scale, commented that:

Because I've heard how much players have given up and how much they sacrifice to become - to be where they are at that moment in time so I know that I'm going to have to do that, so it's made me more committed to be what I need to be, [and] as the programme went on we got, because of the information we were finding out, and as the tour seemed to get more and more complicated we were paying more and more attention so, and when we found out how hard it is we were more committed. We were thinking 'God, if we don't get - if we don't buck up our ideas we're not going to do very well are we?' So now we're more committed to doing the correct things and eating the right foods, doing like tournaments; always working on training, things like that (P5).

Participant 2 commented that the coaches fostered commitment to the transition: "Because they're like pushing us and stuff, just making sure that you're focused on like what you need to do to get ahead and stuff".



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#### 4.3.6 Transition-Related Skills

During the R.A.C.K.E.T. programme, participants perceived that they had also developed skills which would help them with the transition from junior to senior level (see Table 4.3). These skills which players felt they had developed were varied and included organisation skills, tournament planning and scheduling, the ability to deal with setbacks, and match preparation.

Participant 3 also felt that reflecting on what she had learnt in the intervention sessions was a valuable lesson in itself:

[I've learnt] to evaluate things - because every session we had to write down the things that we had to, that we'd learned, so probably now after like my matches I'm more prone to think about what sort of I've done in the match, rather than just think, 'oh well I won or I lost', so that's quite good (P3).

Other changes, which the participants reported were the result of taking part in the intervention programme, included increasing independence:

I'm a bit more like independent in choosing the stuff I want to do. Because like if you're going to be a senior player you can't really rely on, too much on, loads of other people. So I'm taking things like into my own account, and doing trying to do more stuff on my own, instead of asking people to do it and stuff (P2).

The ability to think long term, with the transition in mind, was also often cited by the participants:

I'm probably more inclined to play higher tournaments because I realise it's not all about results. And so it doesn't matter if I lose, because I've still got a couple of years before I'll be the age where I can't play juniors any more. So definitely - [I'm going] to try and just go for those tournaments, because it's like out of my comfort zone and things (P3).

However, participant 6 thought that the skills learned would be useful later on: "I think as I get older then I think it will have more of an effect because it will, you will have to realise the realities of it, [so as I get older] I'll use those things - definitely".

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### 4.3.7 Evaluation of the Intervention

The participants, as a group rated the information included in the intervention as very useful (see Table 4.3). On the 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much so), the mean rating for usefulness of the material was 6.29 (*S.D.*=0.76), with each of the participants rating it at 6 or 7. The participants especially appreciated the opportunity to hear first hand experiences from senior players, for example, participant 5 commented:

I thought that erm, hearing like people telling us how they went through it, and hearing how different people went through it differently...I thought the learning about travelling and tournaments and ways of getting onto the tour, because [before] I just thought oh, it's not going to be that hard, there's not that much to it....And to learn the lifestyle of the other players is really good because it's completely different from juniors as well; like you could be in different countries every other week and it's nice to know what you're going to have to put up with when you're older like; the responsibility and all that kind of stuff.

Opinions on the most valuable part of the intervention varied between participants, but all participants agreed that the concept of a junior-senior transition programme for similar players was a good one, since it would allow athletes in transition to focus on their performance rather than having to also worry about navigating the intricacies of the senior tour. Participant 5 now appreciated the urgency in starting to prepare for the transition, rather than waiting for it to happen:

Before going to this programme I was quite naïve about the transition. I was thinking, 'yeah, it's three years away, who cares'; you know, when actually I need to be starting to prepare for the transition now, like in my responsibility, my commitment, my preparation; all these things.

Participants evaluated the intervention positively and saw value in the use of videos and senior players to educate them about the transition. They also suggested that having the information direct from senior players was preferable to hearing it second hand through another source:

It wasn't just like saying, 'oh well, this person did that', it's rather they're actually telling you that they did it, so it's like you getting it first hand - because like sometimes you might not want to go up to the people to ask them, and then

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they're like talking about it just so you don't have to ask them because you know they've said it sort of thing. They were talking like in real life, so you saw the people saying it themselves, so you're probably more inclined to believe it because they're saying it so why would they lie, and also you knew that it couldn't be made up or anything because they were saying it (P3).

Participants were asked how the programme could be improved, with the only criticisms made concerning the minority of female video models (only 1 of the role models was female), and the length of some of the videos (being too long). Participants would also have liked to speak to senior players directly, although they appreciated that this would be difficult to arrange, and that the video-interviews were the best alternative. Self-rated commitment to the programme and programme tasks (see Table 4.3) was high (commitment to the programme:  $M=4.71$ ,  $S.D.=1.11$ ; commitment to programme tasks:  $M=5.71$ ,  $S.D.=0.76$ ).

#### *Contribution of Coaches to Change in Dependent Variables*

Table 4.4 details that: participants perceived the majority of change in the dependent variable resulted from the content of the videos and from information and support provided by the programme leader. However, a contribution from the coaches was also acknowledged by each of the players. Two of the participants (1 and 3) recognised an increase in the information about the senior level forthcoming from the coaches during the intervention, compared with before the intervention: "Yeah, [they've] talked a bit more, they talk about more the professional players, how they're doing on the tours and how they work and everything" (P1).

One participant was unsure whether there had been a change in the information provided by the coaches (participant 4), and the remainder of the participants perceived no change. In the majority of cases, participants thought that the coaches already referred to the senior tour as a matter of course, and did not perceive that this had changed during the intervention:

I think it's pretty similar actually to what they did before. Because [the head coach] normally talks about the senior tour quite a bit anyway, and I don't think -

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it hasn't really changed much I don't think, he still does it, which I guess was good before as well (P2).

Participants were also asked whether there were any other factors which, or people who, contributed to their change during the intervention. Sources identified were not numerous, but those cited included parents and additional coaches outside of the academy programme and playing in senior tournaments. For example: "Mum just made sure I had done the stuff in the R.A.C.K.E.T. programme, asking me when I get home what I've learned and stuff" (P3). Playing senior tournaments allowed participant 5 to experience first hand some of the differences between the junior and senior tennis tours:

I've played quite a few senior tournaments and that helped me to set the standard of tennis. You get to see how the senior players play and how they act on court and how they've prepared for the matches, how they warm up, is quite a lot different to juniors. So you see what you're aiming for when you're older and what, what the standard is; what standard you have to be at to be competing with them (P5).

#### **4.4 DISCUSSION**

The transition programme designed in the current study has been formulated to optimise the performance of young athletes by assisting in their preparation for the junior-to-senior transition. This work represents a contribution to a hitherto somewhat neglected but important area of athlete development and a useful foundation for future research. It has been undertaken in the expectation that, by providing aspirant athletes with insight of the transition process, including through the eyes of now senior athletes who preceded them, the participants may achieve a suitable state of readiness and can therefore anticipate the process with a feeling of efficacy.

The results of this particular study suggest that a programme of this kind, underpinned by the principles of the LDI enhancement approach (Danish et al., 1993; 1995) and reflecting the research findings drawn from the earlier studies within the current thesis, can optimise navigation of the transition process. More specifically, the intervention aims

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to build self-efficacy for the transition through enabling participants: to acquire knowledge of the process, to understand the practical ramifications for them and for those around them and to sample the culture and environment associated with senior status and in so doing to begin to achieve the desired state of readiness, as identified in the earlier studies of this thesis.

The aforementioned claim can be justified, because the group displayed (or reported) an increase on all of the dependent variables from baseline to conclusion of the intervention, except for athletic identity, in which there was no noteworthy change. These results affirm the potential value of such an enhancement intervention in preparing athletes for the junior-to-senior transition and optimising outcomes. Further, this interpretation is reflected in the social-validation data, with these demonstrating that the participants attested to the value of the intervention on each of the dimensions.

Danish and colleagues propose that an enhancement intervention should aim to prepare athletes for an upcoming transition through the teaching of relevant skills, the imparting of appropriate knowledge and establishing self-efficacy for the transition. This empowerment process necessitates a comprehensive cultural and environmental familiarisation of the athletes in anticipation of the change, based around a plan for transition, including goal setting targeted on relevant behaviours and skills. This should, in addition to dissolving misapprehensions and fears, help to foster the vision of an exciting challenge; a challenge which can be overcome because it is comprehensible, expected and therefore not threatening (Danish et al., 1993, 1995; Schlossberg, 1981).

The current study reflected these imperatives and both the quantitative and the social-validation data imply that the participants indeed felt more confident, prepared for and knowledgeable about the transition as a consequence. Beyond the specific dependent variables, there was also a perception by the participants, in evaluating the programme, that it had been generally useful to them, and that they had developed skills which they could utilise in the future. Commitment to the programme and to making the transition was the factor upon which participants rated themselves lowest. Whilst these scores are

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not low in absolute terms, these factors (along with knowledge) were those on which there was also most variation in participants' feedback. That said, these are the characteristics for which individual differences are to be expected. Research in clinical psychology has recently revealed that motivation for participation in intervention is an important issue, since it is believed to have an effect on the individual's outcomes for any programme of intervention (Allart-van Dam, Hosman, & Keijsers, 2004). However, the fact that only one participant failed to complete the intervention (a 12.5% dropout rate) is probably a more accurate indication of the ultimate commitment of the participants, and of course the researcher's efforts to ensure that any participants who missed sessions due to injury, illness or tournament participation were kept up-to-date.

Commitment to the transition is likely to have been affected both by pre-programme motivation to achieve this objective and perhaps, for some participants, the realisation that the transition would be more arduous than they had expected. Upon making this discovery during the programme, it is possible that the participants concerned may have begun to (re)consider their chosen career path. However, given that many athletes prematurely commit to a career in their sport without considering other options (Brewer et al., 2000), a programme such as this, which seeks to reflect the reality of life as a senior athlete, might help to prevent or reduce the likelihood of such a foreclosed identity. Given the evidence (e.g., Brewer, 1993, Mussweiler, Gabriel, & Bodenhausen, 2000; and the current thesis) suggesting that a narrow identity may be negative for adjustment to setbacks and forced social comparisons, this is an important consideration. A reduced commitment to the transition, may also have had a concomitant effect on commitment to the programme, as the motivation to achieve transition began to fade.

That no change in identity was found, suggests that the participants' commitment to their role as an athlete remained static. Although an increased identification with the role of athlete would be anticipated at the junior-to-senior transition (on the basis of the extant literature [e.g., Brewer et al., 2000] and the results of Studies One and Two of this thesis), the participants in the current intervention programme were not actually undergoing the transition at the time of the intervention, but were merely preparing for it. Whilst it is

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expected that the programme might prompt them to re-evaluate their commitment to a career in the sport (as suggested hitherto), it was perhaps too early in the transition process to discern any substantial shift in athletic identity related to the forthcoming elevation to senior status. Indeed, theory and research suggest that a modification in the identity hierarchy, i.e., an identity becoming more or less salient, is likely to occur when there is an alteration in the circumstances which relate to that identity, such as a modification in relevant relationships and behaviour (Cassidy & Trew, 2004; Schlossberg, 1981; Wells & Stryker, 1988). However, one would not anticipate any change in the salience of athletic identity at this stage of the athletes' careers, because during a preparatory transition programme (as opposed to the process itself) relationships are likely to have remained stable (given the lack of real-life contact with senior athletes), and the athletes were not yet required to (and were only just learning of the need to) adapt their behaviour.

Examination of the individual results of the participants suggests that there may nevertheless, be an association between the degree of commitment to making the transition and identification with the athlete role. Participant 4, who reported the lowest commitment to the transition after taking part in the programme, also demonstrated the greatest movement on the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale, with a 7-point decrease in the strength of athletic identity over the course of the intervention. It is possible that this individual's experience of the programme led to equivocation regarding their ambition to achieve a career in tennis. Perhaps a more realistic appraisal of the performance and lifestyle demands, including the availability of coping resources/strategies emerged from this process, which reflected in a reduced commitment to the role of tennis player. Whilst this athlete rated the transition programme as useful overall, it perhaps generated an unexpected (and negative) reflection upon readiness and commitment. This athlete's profile therefore underlines the importance of evaluating the individual's status and circumstances, with the support provided tailored to meet the needs identified as a consequence.

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Readiness for the junior-to-senior transition has been defined in this thesis as the perception that one is able to cope with the demands of the transition. In the current study, there was good evidence for an increase in readiness having occurred over the duration of the transition, based on the results from the readiness scale adapted from the Transition Coping Questionnaire (Schlossberg, 1993). The group's readiness increased on all of the four subscales (Situation, Self, Supports and Strategies) over the course of the intervention. However, interestingly, scores on the Supports subscale decreased from baseline to time 1, before returning to and then exceeding the baseline score at time 3. It is unclear why this pattern of results emerged. Questions on this subscale relate to support from peers and particularly from coaches, for the transition. It is possible that, whilst they were receiving information about the senior tour from their coaches, the participants discerned an accusatory tone. Coaches were asked only to reinforce the messages from the current week's intervention session, but the participants reported (in the social-validation phase) that coaches pointed out the differences between the behaviour or skills which they, as junior players, had demonstrated, and those of the players on the senior tour (i.e., this is how you are, and this is how you should be). According to discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987), the expectations one perceives significant others have of the self can result in psychologically distressing emotions when it is apparent that this 'ought' self is not met. As a consequence, the participants may have perceived the coaches to be critical rather than autonomy supportive (as recommended by Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Alternatively, it may be that, with the increase in knowledge of the demands of the transition (which was most marked from baseline to time 2, when there was a concurrent decrease on the Supports subscale), the participants felt overwhelmed by the complexities of what they might face and perceived that there was not enough support available to help them to make the transition successfully. Whilst this aspect requires further investigation, the latter explanation seems less probable since there was no concomitant decrease in the other areas of readiness (e.g., perception of the situation), which one might expect, if the participants felt overwhelmed by and unable to cope with the transition.



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Yet, far from being overwhelmed as a consequence of the intervention programme, the results on the Situation (i.e., how they see the transition that they are facing), Self (i.e., personal characteristics that they bring to the transition), and Coping Strategies (i.e., the skills they possess to cope with the transition) subscales, all reveal that the intervention programme had a positive impact on preparation for transition, as predicted by Schlossberg and colleagues (Schlossberg, 1993; Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). These results indicate that the participants felt increasingly in control of navigating this transition and that the outcome would be positive and not cause undue amounts of stress. They also demonstrate that the participants were evaluating the ways in which they might apply themselves in preparation for the transition, and also that they were developing skills and coping strategies which they perceived would help them in this respect. Thus, it seems that the combination of education via role models and the teaching and practising of transition-related skills was effective in bringing about readiness in these participants. The data from the social-validation phase also added weight to the results in regard to readiness. Looking to the future, the participants reported that they felt more able to prepare effectively for the transition and this ability was based, to a significant extent, on the information with which they had been provided. The findings of this study therefore lend support to those of Studies One and Two of this thesis in emphasising just how important the development of readiness clearly is in anticipation of the junior-to-senior transition.

Turning to the methods of delivery it was, perhaps unsurprisingly (given their dominant role), the information provided via the videos and the support of the programme leader, which were perceived to be the most influential of the methods used in this intervention, with considerable agreement displayed between participants on this point. The contribution of the coaches was thought to be of lesser impact, although the ratings ascribed to their input indicate that it was nonetheless a valuable addition. It was noteworthy that, of all the media employed, the videos featuring senior athletes were judged by the participants to deliver the greatest knowledge gain in regard to the transition.

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This feedback provides further evidence, on top of the results of this thesis thus far, of the value of providing such informational support to junior athletes, constructed around input from senior role models. In relating their own experiences and advice to younger athletes preparing for within-career transition, the role models are, as noted by one of the participants, providing information and insight not typically available to junior athletes. Further, even if those approaching transition were minded to seek such knowledge, the logistics of many elite sports, including tennis, means that this would tend to be rather difficult. Suitable role models may often be remote figures and prove to be inaccessible. But perhaps even more tellingly, one of the participants intimated that they may not have looked for such information because, consistent with the Illusion of Explanatory Depth hypothesis (Keil, 2003; Stafford, 2007), there was a prevailing and possibly widespread misconception that the participants knew everything that there was to know.

In their evaluation of the intervention programme, the participants added a final and key reflection. They assigned high credibility to the learning models which, it was reported, made the information provided trustworthy (Bandura, 1997). Not only did the role models make the aspirant athletes feel (on the basis of their stories) that becoming a senior tennis player was possible, even if one had not enjoyed a wholly glittering junior career, but also the provision of information and insight into the new environment, in combination with a newly burgeoning sense of readiness, significantly boosted the participants' self-efficacy in the manner predicted by Bandura and colleagues. More specifically, observational learning (seeing how someone else had gone through the transition), gave the participants confidence that it was an achievable target, and that they could also manage the process (Bandura 1965, 1997; Rosenthal & Bandura, 1978). Finally, consistent with the LDI approach (Danish et al., 1993, 1995), the programme removed barriers to preparation. For example, participants were prompted to contemplate their existing groundwork for the transition and the time they still had available until they would need to make the step. Indeed, it has been suggested that the higher the individual's perceived efficacy to fulfill occupational roles, the better they prepare themselves for their career and the greater their staying power in challenging career pursuits (Bandura et al., 2001), with clear parallels with the situation under review here.

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Building efficacy for transition should therefore be a primary goal at this stage of a junior-athlete's career. Self-efficacy is considered to be critical for success given it is linked to motivation, persistence, and self-regulation (Maddux & Gosselin, 2003). Indeed, according to Danish et al. (1993, 1995) and the LDI approach, the identification of performance parameters, the setting and monitoring of goals during this programme, coupled with knowledge gained, should instil a sense of ownership and control over the transition and a feeling of self-efficacy, and the results reflect this. Given that the participants identified with the learning models presented and found the material to be credible, self-efficacy for transition should have been increased (Bandura, 1978: Rosenthal & Bandura, 1978).

#### **4.4.1 Summary and Recommendations**

In the light of the current research findings, the provision of such transition intervention programmes is important, not just for the transition out of sport, but also for optimising the within-career transition process up to elite level. In professional and Olympic sports, preparation for life after sport is not seen as a good use of scarce resources (Anderson & Morris, 2000). However, time spent during junior participation to maximise an athlete's preparation for senior status, prompting the consideration of career paths and to smooth the transition process, surely is worthwhile. Given that successful experience with previous transition is predictive of later transition success (Schlossberg, et al., 1995), some of the skills which junior athletes develop through an LDI approach for within-career transition may also benefit the athlete when they later face retirement from sport. Indeed, the skills learnt at early transition are likely to have relevance to the many hurdles, goals and sub-transitions which the aspirant elite athlete will confront during their sporting career and quite possibly after this draws to a close.

Whilst the long-term benefits of the programme described are unclear, and would require further research attention, the transition-enhancement approach used here was successful in helping the athletes to feel empowered, to give them a sense of ownership and control over the process and to help them to develop skills which will be useful when

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encountering the junior-to-senior transition. Indeed, given that the associated perceptions of autonomy are vital for identity development (Ryan & Deci, 2003), this augers well for the relatively seamless adoption of the senior athlete role. With this in mind, each participant left the programme with goals set for continuing preparation, which, according to the LDI approach (Danish et al., 1993, 1995), should also enhance that sense of autonomy moving forward.

The participant athletes did not, at inception of the programme, view the transition as a threat; however they left it with a much deeper, holistic understanding and with a commitment to prepare themselves on the basis of their new found knowledge. By enlightening these athletes, they were stimulated to view the forthcoming transition as an on-time and expected event (Schlossberg, 1981) and, the results suggest, that upon encountering the junior-to senior transition, they should feel a readiness for the process. Whilst the participants were, to begin with, naïve as to the particular demands of the transition, the knowledge which they absorbed through the programme, together with goal-setting and development of relevant skills helped them to develop a more considered and therefore realistic appreciation of the challenge, as well as to perceive the transition as a more manageable process.

The use of mentoring as a critical component of the current transition programme was inspired by a number of factors. Principally, the results of this thesis, but also the potential value ascribed to this technique by Danish et al. (1993), Cockerill & Edge (1998), and the employment of this approach in retirement related programmes such as CAPA and the COA's Athlete Services transition programme. Therefore, in addition to the proven application in retirement planning, and in more routine occupational domains (Perna et al., 1996), the current study attests to the technique's value to junior athletes preparing for senior participation. Developing a well informed perspective upon the roles and behaviours required at senior level is a key foundation for the building of an athletic identity (Ryan & Deci, 2003). Developing a familiarisation with the senior tour is also, on the basis of the results of Studies One and Two, worthwhile. Nevertheless, any transition programme must also be mindful of the need to develop a balanced identity.

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Whilst feelings of familiarisation and relatedness may have been greater through the use of real-life mentors, the use of symbolic models is deemed acceptable (Bandura, 1989). Therefore, although this was a valuable first step in transition research, future intervention programmes and initiatives by national governing bodies, could go beyond the current programme in offering real-life mentoring of promising junior athletes. An examination of any potential additional benefits of real-life as opposed to symbolic models would prove valuable.

### *Conclusion*

In summary, a programme such as R.A.C.K.E.T. which aims to promote readiness for the junior-to-senior transition deserves further research attention and testing. The current study suggests that outcomes are potentially positive for junior athletes, in terms of developing the coping strategies necessary for a transition and for providing a seamless path from junior to senior level. The programme was well received by the participants, and their evaluation of its utility attests to its value, which, according to Hrycaiko and Martin (1996) is key if sport psychology is adequately to serve its consumers.

Transition preparation must begin at an early stage, prior to the change, and should include the provision of informational support via current senior athletes, in order that the behaviours associated with a senior athletic identity may be identified and the junior athletes may begin to behave in a manner consistent with their prospective status. Furthermore, as Kernis and Goldman (2003) describe, self-concept is influenced by behaviour, which can make aspects of the self-concept more or less salient. They also note that once the self-concept is formed, individuals will strive to sustain this. Therefore, in order to minimise the potential for disruption, the behaviours adopted prior to transition should, for optimal progression, be those deemed helpful at a senior level.

Future research should address whether real-life mentors are more beneficial to the preparation of athletes for transition. However, where real-life mentors are unavailable or inaccessible, the current programme of research suggests that symbolic models can also

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have a positive effect. Further, coaches should endeavour to ensure that their relationships with their athletes are facilitative of the building of a senior athletic identity through the provision of information regarding this role, as well as the fulfilment of the athlete's autonomy, competence and relatedness needs. Through adhering to these recommendations, those in support of junior athletes will be helping them to structure their environment in ways which will resemble the post-transition environment, which will produce readiness for transition and cause minimum disruption in the self (Serpe & Stryker, 1987).

### *Limitations*

One potential limitation of this study was the dual-role of the primary researcher and programme leader, who had worked as the sport psychologist for the tennis academy at which the intervention took place, for the previous two years. Whilst the participants were familiar (and therefore comfortable) with the presence of the researcher, this may be seen as a limitation. This is because social desirability response bias effects may be enhanced by the researcher's present relationship with the participants and the position of authority which this represents. Participants were, therefore, reassured during data collection, that the primary researcher would receive their results coded with an un-attributable number and not a name, and that they should respond with honesty and feel comfortable in doing so. However, the identity of participants could not be protected during the social-validation phase and therefore the qualitative data may be subject to such biases. Nevertheless, without regard to the qualitative data, the quantitative data suggest a positive impact of the transition programme. Also, six of the seven participants reported that they would prefer to have a programme leader with whom they were familiar, rather than someone they did not know, and thus for delivery purposes, the familiarity of the programme leader was beneficial.

A second limitation of the current study is its lack of assessment of residual effects. It is therefore not clear whether the positive gains in terms of knowledge, readiness and efficacy for transition would translate into an adaptation of behaviour and development of identity. There is therefore a need for research to examine whether the benefits suggested

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in this preliminary study are sustained, once an athlete actually reaches the junior-senior transition at some stage in the future.

Thirdly, whilst the contribution of the current study was quantified in terms of the perceived value of the intervention, as determined by the participants (Hrycaiko & Martin, 1996), it would add to understanding if future research could evaluate such interventions longitudinally, through a between-subjects design in order to examine their eventual coping with transition in comparison to a non-intervention control group. In order to do this, future research should address the measurement issues encountered in the current study by developing a psychometrically valid assessment of readiness for within-career transition. Measures, such as the Transition Coping Questionnaire (Schlossberg, 1993) have been used to assess coping with retirement in sport (e.g., Lavalley, 2005), but its items are not appropriate for within-career transition. Whilst in the current study the participant's assessments in the social-validation stage matched the results from the quantitative assessment, the lack of a psychometrically valid measure for the dependent variables adds an additional limitation.

The use of a larger sample would also allow the testing of outcomes using statistical analysis rather than examination of descriptive statistics. The implementation of such a design would also lend additional credibility to this early study, where results have been derived from a single-case design without multiple-baseline assessments, and with an emphasis on social validation (Hrycaiko & Martin, 1996). In consequence, the possibility, albeit remote, that the increase in the dependent variables seen in the current study was due to other variables, as opposed to the administration of the intervention, cannot be entirely excluded.

Finally, the time frame of the current research programme precluded the use of the analysis from the second study of this thesis in the design of the R.A.C.K.E.T. programme. Where the time scale would have allowed the completion of the longitudinal case study, it would perhaps have been appropriate to include, for example, a greater role for the coaches in the preparation of the athletes, and to provide education to coaches

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regarding the important role of their relationship with their athletes at the junior-to-senior transition. These also represent important future research directions.

Despite these weaknesses and the need for further research to move beyond this preliminary investigation, the current study remains the first (to the researcher's knowledge) to specifically create and evaluate a career transition programme designed to prepare athletes for the junior-to-senior transition. Drawing upon the results of this thesis, the study represents a further stage in a continuous, or concatenated research effort; a methodology, according to (Stebbins, 1992, 2006), which provides the greatest contribution to research and applied contexts.



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# CHAPTER FIVE

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The term 'Transition' was defined in Chapter One of this thesis as an event that causes a degree of change exceeding that typically experienced in everyday life (Sharf, 1997); one that is likely to cause "a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and require a corresponding change in one's behaviour and relationships" (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 5). The two studies which form the initial part of the current thesis produced results which support and extend these definitions. The stories of the athletes, who provided a personal perspective on their journeys through transition, evidenced an evolution in self-identity and self-concept (i.e., assumptions about oneself) and changes in relationships, which exceeded those faced in everyday life. This variation can be observed, both in the nature and the quality of existing relationships and in the formation of and the identification with a new peer group.

The significant modification in behaviour necessary to meet the requirements of the new environment was another facet of the change represented by the transition from junior to senior status. The Model of Junior-to-Senior Transition (presented in Chapter Three and re-presented in Figure 5.1, below) which has emerged from the programme of research reflects this disruption. Whilst the athletes attempted to generate stability throughout the process of transition (as predicted by identity control theory; Burke, 2006), there remained a significant period of change.

It is important, at the outset of this final chapter, to revisit the context within which this research programme was undertaken. Hitherto, the available relevant literature has only touched upon within-career athletic transition. Much background knowledge has been borrowed from mainstream psychology, such as the transition framework proposed by Schlossberg and colleagues (Schlossberg, 1981, 2003; Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman,

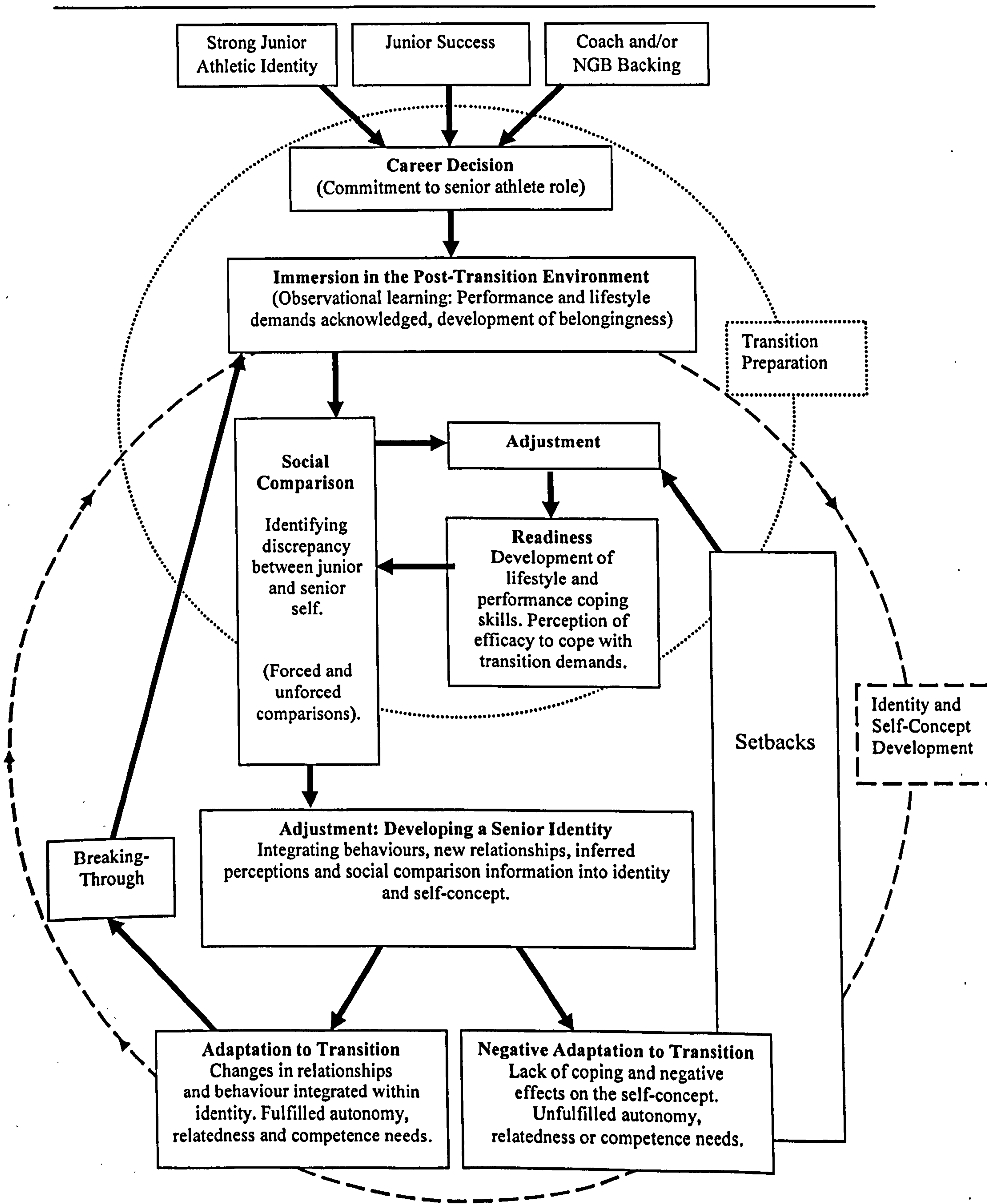
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1995), as well as descriptive models of athlete development which, whilst valuable in themselves, only really signpost the transitions which athletes are likely to confront without offering analysis, insight or prescriptions for optimising the process. Whilst the literature in the general area of athletic transition has certainly increased in recent years (Lavallee, Wylleman, & Sinclair, 2000), this has focused principally on retirement. Although some useful parallels between career termination and within-career transitions can be drawn, the absence of specific research signifies that this important area of talent development has been somewhat neglected (Wylleman, Lavallee, & Alfermann, 1999).

With talent often lost at the transition to senior level (Salmela, Young, & Kallio, 2000; Tarbotton, 2001), the knowledge arising from the current research programme should, not only help to fill a void by providing a comprehensive guide to the experiences of athletes confronting the junior-to-senior transition, but also offer governing bodies, coaches, sport psychologists and athletes a practical approach to mitigating the impact and the potential for premature loss of talent. With such an objective in mind, this research endeavour culminated in the design of a developmental programme, created to prepare young aspirant athletes for the junior-to-senior transition, which, to the researcher's knowledge, constitutes the first attempt at such a programme.

The paucity of existing relevant literature on within-career transition was a factor influential in opting for a concatenated programme of research (Stebbins, 1992, 2006), which has involved the integration of two largely qualitative studies followed by a transition intervention. The initial two studies were structured around an interpretive framework using grounded theory methodology. This framework is suitable for an area in which there is little understanding, and which allows for the building of a theory to explain the experience of athletes, through the process of junior-senior transition.

Drawing this thesis to a close, this chapter provides an overall discussion of its findings, highlighting the advancements and contributions made, as well as links to the relevant background literature explored in Chapter One. Finally, the implications of the conclusions drawn will be summarised, and potential future research directions identified.



**Figure 5.1: A Model of Junior-to-Senior Transition.**

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## **5.2 Advancements Made by the Thesis**

### **5.2.1 Advancement One: A Model of Junior-to-Senior Transition**

The two studies which constitute the initial part of this current thesis resulted in a Model of Junior-to-Senior Transition (see Figure 5.1), which charts the experiences of an athlete undergoing a period of profound development, during the junior-to-senior transition process. It is appropriate, at this point, to reprise the foundations and the key components of this model, in order to emphasise the enhancements to our understanding which this represents.

The results of this thesis indicate that the transition period is one in which the individual, upon making the initial commitment to the athlete role and also to their attempting the junior-senior transition, engages in a phase of preparation, or immersion, at which time they (ideally) glean all there is to know about the post-transition environment, through observational learning and through the development of contacts at the higher level. This intensity of focus and rapid familiarisation enables the athletes to develop social connections and a sense of belongingness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). In addition, through social comparison with senior athletes, they identify the discrepancies between present patterns of behaviour and those they will need to internalise, in order to achieve readiness to compete on the senior tour and to develop a senior athletic identity and self-concept related to that identity (Ryan & Deci, 2003; Tice & Wallace, 2003). These social comparisons, which feature in both the pre-transition and within-transition phases, typically involve the selection of role models who represent possible future selves and who provide a guide to self-enhancement (Seaton, Marsh, Dumas, Haguët, Monteil, Régner et al., 2008).

Those athletes who engage in transition preparation prior to their transition to senior level, will engender in themselves a set of coping skills which make navigation of the transition more straightforward and less disruptive. For example, by adopting the professional behaviours displayed by successful senior athletes, they learn how to manage their performance and lifestyle, in ways which facilitate focus and performance during competition. In doing so prior to the transition, they also create for themselves a

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scenario comprised of stability; of minimal change between the pre- and post-transition environments (Burke, 2006; Schlossberg, 1981), and a feeling of readiness.

There are a number of elements that assist in the internalisation of the roles and behaviours, which constitute senior athletic identity, and which optimise the process. These include: the development of feelings of relatedness through communication with and the building of relationships with current senior players, role models and coaches, increasing autonomy, reflecting the athlete's burgeoning independence as well as through the rebalancing of the coach-athlete relationship, and perceptions of competence through vicarious learning and verbal persuasion. In addition, the fulfilment of these psychological needs will foster self-determined forms of motivation, which also benefit performance (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2003).

After the pre-transition preparation phase, and the point of transition from junior to senior level, the process of adjustment and integration will continue within an ongoing phase of identity and self-concept development, as represented in Figure 5.1. Post transition, athletes will inevitably persist in drawing social comparisons with those around them, learning from the roles and behaviours demonstrated by others and also making inferred perceptions as to their competence to fulfil those roles, in contrast with their new peer group. Where social comparisons are forced and athletes are unable to differentiate themselves from the frames of reference around them, there can be a negative effect on the self-concept (Mussweiler, Gabriel, & Bodenhausen, 2000) which, ultimately may impede progress and therefore require a re-adjustment in the mental approach of the athlete. Alternatively, where comparisons are sought for self-enhancement purposes and/or where athletes see comparison targets as possible future selves, the information derived as a consequence can be positive for the self-concept (Seaton et al., 2008) and for performance. The information thereby generated is then a motivating agent, encouraging the athlete to learn and develop. The resultant impetus, enhances the likelihood of a break-through to the next level of competition. This especially where the psychological needs (for autonomy, competence and relatedness), are fulfilled and therefore underpin

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self-determined motivation. Along with the positive influence of self-concept, this is facilitative of performance (Marsh & Perry, 2005; Vallerand & Rousseau, 2001).

Conversely, where athletes experience negative social comparisons and/or unfulfilled psychological needs, performance and progress can suffer, returning the athlete to the 'adjustment phase' in which they must rebuild their readiness, self-concept and identity in order to cope with the sub-transition which they currently face.

### **5.2.2 Advancement Two: The Development of a Within-Career Transition Preparation Programme**

Whilst the Model of Junior-to-Senior Transition described above and detailed in Figure 5.1 represents the most comprehensive contribution to the within-career transition literature for some time, a concatenated programme of research would be incomplete without moving towards an applied contribution (Stebbins, 1992, 2006). Given that the transfer of talent from junior national standard to senior competition of any level, has been shown in previous research to be less than 25% (Tarbotton, 2001) and that Bernie and O'Connor reported that athletes, and those supporting them have called for greater support and education from governing bodies, with structures that facilitate progress at this transition (Bennie & O'Connor, 2004), the final study of this thesis is both timely and pertinent. Earlier transition support programmes have very largely been focused on the retirement transition, and thus the R.A.C.K.E.T. programme, which was designed, trialled and evaluated in the third study of this thesis, also represents a significant advancement. The results of the first two studies endorse Bernie and O'Connor in their call for greater support to be forthcoming, and their recommendations have been reflected in the design and the initial trial of the R.A.C.K.E.T. programme.

The positive evaluations of the participants in response to the programme trial, along with their self-reported improvements in readiness, knowledge and efficacy for transition represent clear evidence that preparation for the junior-senior transition is worthwhile, and that more should be done to educate those involved in supporting athletes through this difficult transition in sport. The employment of this technique, by replicating the

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R.A.C.K.E.T. programme or by creating similar programmes, should therefore be more widespread.

### **5.2.3 Advancement Three: Extensions of the Existing Literature**

In this context, it is important to discuss the current research in relation to the existing literature. Whilst the latter provides little detailed understanding of the junior-to-senior transition or indeed the experience of within-career transition, there are certain areas in which the results of this thesis occupy common ground, particularly with the existing life-transition, and athlete development literature.

In comparing the Model of Junior-to-Senior transition with the transition framework proposed by Schlossberg et al. (1995), it is apparent that the current research advances understanding in several key areas. Firstly, in providing an appreciation of the experience of athletes in particular, as they navigate the transition, and the related development of the self, the model of transition produced through this research programme answers the call for more specificity in the research understanding of athletic career transitions (e.g. Swain, 1991). Whilst Schlossberg et al. suggest several key variables which, they propose, are significant for adjustment to life-transition, their framework is predominantly a *description* of factors which the individual will find facilitative or debilitating at transition. Certain of these characteristics, e.g. role change, timing and support systems, have been shown, through this research, to be involved in adaptation to athletic transition to senior level. However, the model of junior to senior transition moves beyond the transition framework, by not only incorporating these factors, but also by elucidating the developmental *process* which athletes will navigate in making this particular transition.

#### *Athlete Development*

The handful of studies which *have* previously examined within-career transition in sport have recognised performance and life-style demands which also have resonance for the junior-to-senior transition process and which have the potential to inhibit progress. For example, Hanks and Morris (2001), Giacobbi, Lynn, Wetherington, Jenkins, Bodendorf

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and Langley (2004), and Bruner, Munroe-Chandler and Spink (2008) have all found that sources of stress at transition relate to a combination of on- and off- pitch demands which require adjustment. Also Giacobbi et al. identified the importance of mentoring from older students at transition, as was adopted in the final study here. Whilst these studies add to our broad understanding of the potential stresses faced by athletes at within-career transition and they support, or are supported by, the current research, there should now be a move away from such descriptive research towards a deeper understanding of transition processes, as was the aim of the current research.

The results presented in Studies One and Two of this thesis are broadly consistent with models of athlete development, such as the work of Wylleman and Lavallee (2004), whose grounding is in the talent development literature (e.g., Bloom, 1985). The final category in Bloom's taxonomy of talent development (the later years), can be represented as a striving for the development of 'expert' status. Arguably, this particular ambition is very much reflected in the ongoing struggle of young athletes confronting the junior-to-senior transition. This theme, of a continuing quest for excellence is especially relevant because, far from being an isolated event in which one moves to a higher level of competition, this research programme has shown that transition is more properly defined as a cycle of learning and development in pursuit of the elite status associated with, for example, a top ten or even a number one world ranking. The current research has helped more fully to explicate the processes involved in this striving for excellence in sport. What is clear, as a consequence, is that the development of talent at the junior-to-senior transition involves optimising the interaction between the individual and the environment (Carlson, 1988). It is the complexity of this process that has led many researchers, including Wylleman and Lavallee to adopt an holistic approach to athlete development which focuses beyond athletic areas, situating the athlete at each point in their career in the context of their concurrent athletic or non-athletic developmental tasks (Wylleman, De Knop, Ewing, & Cumming, 1999). Wylleman and Lavallee argue that an individual's athletic development will be influenced by, and have an influence on, psychological, psychosocial and academic/vocational development, and this is highlighted in their developmental model of transitions (see Figure 1.2).



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An examination of the results of this thesis in relation to the interactive process of development which Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) propose is instructive. For example, the notion that identity formation is a significant developmental task at the psychological level was borne out in this thesis. The developmental literature suggests that this should be a major undertaking of adolescence and the usually synchronous athletic development stage. The junior-to-senior transition is represented in the model as broadly equivalent to the transition from development to mastery. The contention that identity development is implicit in the junior-to-senior transition is potentially justified, in that the adolescent years (and early twenties) when the transition from junior-to-senior level is likely to occur, are typically the period for the exploration of possible roles and behaviours related to one's identity (Erikson, 1959; Shulman & Ben-Artzi, 2003). The specific manner in which this thesis has advanced the existing understanding of the junior-senior transition as it relates to the psychological, psychosocial and academic/vocational development is informative and will now be discussed in more detail:

*Psychological Development: Identity*

The development of identity through sport, and the importance of athletic identity at the transition out of sport are both well documented in the sport psychology literature (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Petitpas, 2000; Miller & Kerr, 2002). Similarly, the results of this thesis show that this has relevance at the junior-to-senior transition. Many elite athletes compromise their personal development in order to pursue performance excellence, and the results here support the prognosis which is found in existing literature: participation in sport to a high level can result in a narrow identity defined predominantly by the athlete role (Miller & Kerr, 2002). This narrow identity is not only a risk factor at premature retirement or performance slumps (Brewer et al., 2000), but also, according to the results of this thesis, at the junior-to-senior transition when the change in one's frame of reference for social comparison (e.g., Marsh, 1984) requires a rounded identity for positive differentiation (Mussweiler et al., 2008).

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Athletic identity increases in salience within the athlete's identity hierarchy over time, in co-ordination with progress through the junior-to-senior transition. The results of Studies One and Two suggest that this process begins *prior* to the transition, with the gathering of information relating to the roles and behaviours of a senior identity. An athlete whose behaviours still represent the identity of a junior, will find their progress delayed and the salience of their identity within their identity hierarchy will remain stable (Serpe & Stryker, 1987). The current research suggests that the synchronisation of an athlete's transition with their state of readiness, in terms of the adoption of the roles of a senior identity, is important. If the junior-to-senior transition is planned for and appropriate behaviours developed prior to the transition, then not only will the athlete perceive a sense of control and self-efficacy over the process (Danish et al., 1993), but it will also be an expected event (Schlossberg, 1981). These efficacy beliefs are likely to benefit transition progress, because of their association with success, motivation, preparation and persistence in the face of challenge (Bandura, 1986, 1997, 1989; Bandura, Barbarabelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001; Maddux & Gosselin, 2003).

Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) predict a significant interaction between developmental tasks at the athletic, psychological, psychosocial and academic levels and the current research supports this contention, particularly in relation to psychological and social development. The identity development of the participants in Studies One and Two of this thesis was restricted to their athletic identity. It is relevant that an athlete who is forced, perhaps by circumstances such as encountered in these studies, to postpone their identity exploration may be at risk of identity foreclosure (i.e., premature commitment to an identity; Marcia, Waterman, Matteson, Archer, & Orlofsky, 1993). Identity foreclosure exists amongst high-level athletes and student athletes (e.g., Miller & Kerr, 2002; Murphy, Petitpas, & Brewer, 1996), and whilst the results of Study Two suggest that coaching teams are conscious of this potential downside, it also demonstrated that countering this is far from straightforward. Indeed, the case study in question demonstrated evidence of a restricted identity, notwithstanding awareness of the prevalence and implications of this risk. In a study of student-athletes, Miller and Kerr

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(2003) found that the social dimensions of the students' identities were increasingly, over time, defined by their athletic role, with disrupted social development evident, in addition to lack of career, lifestyle and role exploration. For athletes at the junior-to-senior transition, the results of the current research suggest an even greater likelihood of restricted identity development, especially once the young athletes' academic identities are lost on completion of their academic qualifications. Indeed, identity theory states that identity is multidimensional, and therefore an individual holds as many identities as they do roles in society. As already alluded to, those identities are organised in a hierarchy (Stryker & Burke, 2000), but for many elite athletes, the athletic role dominates this hierarchy to the exclusion of others (Miller & Kerr, 2002). In sports such as tennis, where the competitive environment involves travelling for ten to eleven months of the year in a small social circle with restricted opportunities for other activities, it appears that a narrowing of identity is almost inevitable.

Accepting that a restricted self-identity is, to some extent, inescapable once the athlete has reached the junior-to-senior transition, Study Three of this thesis suggests that young athletes should be encouraged to consider their career choices prior to the transition. Given that many athletes prematurely commit to a career in their sport without considering other options, and therefore represent a risk for premature retirement (Brewer et al., 2000), a transition preparation programme such as R.A.C.K.E.T., which reflects the reality of life as a senior athlete, might prompt athletes to consider their career options more carefully. The objective then being, that only those athletes who are fully committed to the transition continue to channel their identity towards senior level participation. In this way, sport can perhaps reduce the number of athletes who pursue the path to senior status only to be unsuccessful and experience difficulties adjusting their identity at a later stage. Notwithstanding the aforementioned, a rounded identity (i.e., whereby the individual's identity is not exclusively based upon commitment to the athlete role) should ultimately be the goal for all athletes, given the research which demonstrates it as a risk factor for distress at retirement (e.g., Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000).

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### *Psychological Development: Self-Concept*

Unlike self-identity, the theory of self-concept has not been widely applied to transition in sport. Yet, there is considerable evidence from the current research to suggest that self concept is relevant and evolves significantly over the junior-to-senior transition. Consequently, in addition to advancing the understanding of the development of an athlete's self-perceptions through transition, this brings in to consideration a large body of academic research relating to transitions more generally, all of which supplement that specifically related to transition in sport.

Social factors play a large role in this context. This is because it is those perceptions, which make up the self-concept, and which are influenced by the inferred evaluations of significant others (both positive and negative), which this research suggests, feature as the athlete adopts the roles associated with a senior athletic identity (Ng & Feldman, 2007; Tice & Wallace, 2003). Thus the athlete's self-evaluations whilst in transition are significantly influenced by what they infer others to think of them and whether they believe that their identity as a senior athlete has been accepted. Of course, this process is an ongoing phenomenon (i.e., it occurs whether an individual is undergoing significant transition or not; Tice & Wallace, 2003), however the circumstances of transition and in particular the new competitive environment and frame of reference, seem to sensitise the athlete to such inferred-appraisals and therefore to exacerbate the psychological consequences. The current research therefore suggests that the nature of the junior-to-senior transition, constitutes a worthwhile context within which to study the influences of social factors on the psychological development of the self and therefore this is worthy of further attention.

On the basis of the current findings, it appears that the potential for negative effects from social comparison at the transition to senior level, requires a precautionary response involving transition preparation. Where athletes are provided with opportunities pre-transition, to compare the self with current senior athletes in a non-threatening environment, they should as a consequence be able to engage in comparisons which are facilitative of productive self-evaluation and can motivate them to develop the roles and

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behaviours necessary for success at senior level (i.e., a senior identity), without their self-concept being negatively affected (Seaton et al., 2008). However, upon transiting to senior level, athletes might be affected by forced social comparisons which highlight self discrepancies and can be damaging to the self-concept. To the researcher's knowledge, this is the first time that the Big Fish Little Pond Effect (BFLPE; Marsh, 1994; Marsh, Chessor, Craven, & Roche, 1995) has been directly linked to the junior-senior transition in the sport psychology literature. It has however, been extensively studied by Marsh and colleagues at the transition to academically selective schools. Further research is required to validate this claim, but the results of this thesis suggest that upon stepping up to each level within the junior-to-senior transition there may be a BFLPE, since at each incidence, the frame of reference for the athlete shifts to a new (more competent) one, as is the case upon transition to an academically selective school or selective physical education class (Chanal, Marsh, Sarrazin, & Bois, 2005; Marsh & Hau, 2003).

Whilst Chanal et al. (2005) found, in the context of their selective physical education programme, that the effect of the BFLPE increased over time, and the self-concept became, at the same time, more negative, the results of the first two studies of this thesis suggest that once a break-through is made at the junior-to-senior transition, the self-concept becomes more positive again (i.e., the athlete reverts to feeling like a 'bigger' fish). When considering possible explanations for this phenomenon, it is possible that at the transition to senior level, making a competitive break-through (i.e., achieving a notable degree of success within the new environment) has an effect on the athlete's self-esteem, enabling them to more easily differentiate themselves when encountering forced upward comparisons (Mussweiler et al., 2000). Alternatively, it may be reasoned that making progress and achieving success at transition means that there are fewer relevant 'others' with whom to make upwards comparisons, and therefore social comparisons become more favourable. However, it seems sensible to infer that, if this was the case, the BFLPE research in selective education environments would have exposed such a possibility (e.g., Chanal et al., 2005; Marsh, Kong, & Hau, 2000).

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The final possible explanation of this effect relates to personal and social identities. Whilst Marsh et al. (2000) proposed that the declining self-concept of their participants was due to the net balance of a strong and negative comparison effect and a weakening positive social assimilation effect (or reflected glory effect; triggered through selection to a talented peer group), the reverse may be true at the junior-to-senior transition. As explained in Studies One and Two, the effect of social comparison (and the BFLPE) may be greater where personal identity is salient as opposed to a group, or social identity (Margas, Fontayne, & Brunel, 2006; Schmitt, Branscombe, Silvia, Garcia, & Spears, 2006), and thus when a positive social assimilation effect wears off, the impact of the BFLPE is more marked. It is therefore speculated that, at transition to senior level, there is an interaction of events. In the BFLPE studies in education, the effect of social comparison at transition has been investigated with individuals who are *selected* into a group. Athletes who are transiting to senior level (in the individual sports being studied in this context) are not selected into a class or a team, but rather are working to earn their identity in a prestigious group (e.g., the top 100 of the tennis tour). In fact, the athletes in the current research initially reported feeling a diminished sense of belongingness, akin to a reduced group affiliation having left the junior ranks, and they demonstrated a desire to feel accepted by their new, senior status peers. Over time, a sense of relatedness develops and the social identity that this association generates may therefore moderate the BFLPE. Whilst further research is required in order to test this hypothesis and also to determine whether the protective effect of social identity can be maintained in the longer term, it appears that in certain contexts, identification with a high performing group may not be negative for the individual, if the social identity is rendered salient (Margas et al., 2006; Schmitt et al., 2006). In addition, this all serves to re-emphasise the importance of the development of relatedness in relation to individuals in the post-transition environment *prior* to the junior-to-senior transition, since, as stated by Rees (2007), belonging to a supportive network can be positive for self-concept.

### *Social Development*

The above discussion of the psychological factors affecting the junior-to-senior transition re-emphasises the interplay between different areas of development involved, with

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athletic factors influencing psychological and social development and vice versa, as proposed in Wylleman and Lavallee's (2004) developmental model and highlighted in Chapter One of this thesis. As already identified in the literature, an athlete's social world will be defined increasingly by the athletic environment which dominates his/her life, and the athlete's identity will become increasingly sport-dependent. This narrowing of identity and social circle can also affect development at the athletic level, since athletes who report a lack of friends and/or time to be with friends outside of sport are more prone to experiencing burnout, and sometimes ultimately drop-out from competitive sport (Gould, 1996). Whilst the athletes in the current research did not report any such consequences, they did note the significant social restriction inherent in their participation, particularly when involved in sports which require extensive travelling. However, the most noteworthy of the contributions this thesis makes to the understanding of the athlete's social world at the junior-to-senior transition, is a more precise understanding of the roles played by significant others at this transition.

Whilst Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) detailed the sources of social support relevant at each stage in their developmental model (see Figure 1.2), they did not specify the functions of particular social agents (for example of parents, coaches, peers) at different within-career transitions. This is important, because studies have indicated that the quality of a young athlete's relationships with their parents and their coach can predict, to some extent, whether they will reach elite national level (Vanden Auweele, 1988, 1992; Wylleman, De Knop, & Sillen, 1998). Consistent with this finding, the results of this thesis suggest that at the transition to senior level, the coach-athlete relationship is, as represented by Wylleman and Lavallee, of importance. Parents of the athletes at this stage of their career were observed playing a peripheral, supporting role, providing emotional and esteem support rather than tangible or informational support. This also is in conformity with Wylleman and Lavallee's model, which predicts that the parents play a less significant role at this stage compared to earlier in the athlete's career.

A key finding of the current programme of research, was the major part the coach-athlete relationship played in the social world inhabited by the athletes. Reaching beyond merely

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the provision of informational and coaching support, the athlete's relationship with their coach was also that of a friend, inspired by a mutual caring and concern which served partially to fill the void created by the difficulty of establishing and maintaining alternative close relationships. The quality of the coaching relationship was therefore, in support of previous research (e.g., Carlson, 1988; Jowett & Meek, 2000a), vitally important to the athlete's development. Where the current research contributes beyond existing related literature, is through demonstrating that the coach-athlete relationship also serves as a source of continuity, which helps to maintain stability of the self (Burke, 2006) at a time of change, thus making the transition less disruptive. Also (ideally), the coach-athlete relationship plays a significant role in fulfilling the athlete's relational needs, which is important for self-determined motivation (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003), but which also (as explained in Study Two), given an often severely curtailed social circle, is especially valued by the athletes. Therefore, it is imperative that the coach-athlete relationship is of a quality which can generate feelings of relatedness, and an holistic caring and concern (Jowett, 2005; Jowett & Meek, 2000a; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003).

The properties of the coach-athlete relationship recognised by Jowett (e.g., Jowett, 2005), and discussed in Study Two of this thesis (i.e., closeness, commitment, complementarity and co-orientation), appear to come to the fore at the junior-senior transition. With the increasing maturity of the athlete, there can be a more balanced, closer and often more committed relationship, and thus the dynamic in the coach-athlete relationship shifts, towards greater equality (Bloom, 1985). Similarly, the current research supports the prevailing opinion in the transition literature, which indicates that those athletes whose coaches demonstrate positive coaching behaviours are less likely to dropout and more likely to stay in their sport, than those who perceive their coaches to be less positive, and less athlete-centred in their behaviour (Kerr & Dacshyn, 2000). This is also in line with Mageau and Vallerand's (2003) recommendations that coaches be autonomy supportive, but not passive. The results of Study One of this thesis clearly demonstrate that an athlete left to his/her own devices can feel lost; failing to develop readiness, associating with inappropriate role models and consequently experiencing delayed progress at transition.



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### *Social Development: The Peer Group*

Research regarding the role of peers at within-career transition is lacking. However, on the basis of the developmental model of transition (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004), one would not expect the peer group to play a significant role at the transition to senior level. However, the results of this thesis add much to the understanding of the contribution made by important others at this stage, since, contrary to expectations, peers were a vital support for transition preparation and relatedness needs. Smith (2003) recognises that peers can indeed influence the development of a young athlete's self-identity, including identification with the athlete role. Further, and as already implied, the current research supports this interpretation at the junior-to-senior transition in an athlete's career. The time of transition is one when athletes learn the roles associated with a senior athletic identity from their new peer group. Furthermore, peers have an influence, through inferred appraisals, on the self-concept (Tice & Wallace, 2003), and finally, as already alluded to, the peer group, individually and collectively, plays an important role as a source of social comparison information via which athletes judge their own ability, as well as garnering a perspective (from older peers) on their ideal, or future self (Festinger, 1954; Seaton et al., 2008).

### *Academic/Vocational Development*

Whilst Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) include academic and vocational development within their model, the current research suggests that in practice, for many athletes at the junior-to-senior transition, this phase of development is neglected. Keen to leave education to focus on their sport, the athletes in the present research found life without academic work easier to balance. They valued the extra time they could extend to their sport on completion of their schooling, often having left without higher qualifications. Evidence suggests that an exclusive focus on sport can have a negative impact on an athlete's high-school performance (Hauser & Lueptow, 1976). Indeed, the athletes in the current research would, if their sporting careers fail, often have little in the way of academic or vocational qualifications (or experience) to fall back upon, evidencing their restricted identities.

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In conclusion, whilst the developmental model proposed by Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) offers only generalised predictions regarding the psychological and psychosocial development of athletes at the junior-to-senior transition, it nevertheless provides a useful framework within which to analyse the results of the current research programme and to consider the developmental tasks being undertaken by an athlete at this juncture. The results of the current thesis bring additional depth to the understanding of the inter-relationships between the different areas of development in Wylleman and Lavallee's model, through highlighting more distinctively, the roles played by two significant sources of social support at this transition. Not only has the understanding of the specific roles of the peer group and the coach been advanced through this research, but in addition, their role in the psychological development of identity and self-concept has been brought to light.

#### **5.2.4 Advancement Four: Highlighting Parallels with the Sport Retirement Literature**

The significant body of research which has examined the retirement transition explores themes which have parallels to the investigation of junior to senior transition, despite the difference in context. Perhaps the most significant of the commonalities is the advantage to be derived from forward planning for transition. At retirement, planning has been seen to provide athletes with a degree of readiness for and a perception of ownership and control over the anticipated change (e.g., Alfermann, Stambulova & Zemaityte, 2004). This desirable profile at transition is, in turn, associated with a more straightforward experience (Stambulova, 1994). Unsurprisingly, these findings are entirely echoed here, with readiness for transition being of major importance to the athlete's ability to cope with the transition demands. Whilst unplanned retirement can have negative psychological effects, such as reduced self-esteem, anger, anxiety or depression (Alfermann & Gross, 1997; Crook & Robertson, 1991), a lack of readiness for or indeed a premature transition from junior-to-senior level is, according to the current research, likely to result in an escalation in stress level, inability to cope with the demands of the transition, delayed progress, negative effects on the self-concept, and possibly drop-out from the sport.

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Identity is another factor which has been extensively associated with adaptation to retirement from sport (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994) and which, as already mentioned, is important at the junior-to-senior transition. Whilst a highly committed identity can be negative for adaptation to transition out of sport (Grove, Lavallee, & Gordon, 1997), it appears to be a double-edged sword at the transition from junior-to-senior level. This research suggests that an increasingly salient athletic identity is associated with transition success in terms of progress, since adopting the roles and behaviours of a senior athlete will bring about readiness for the transition. However, the results also indicate that, at times of difficulty, or when prompted to compare oneself with one's fellow competitors, a narrow identity can make social comparisons more damaging for the self-concept, because the athlete cannot differentiate themselves from their athletic role (Mussweiler et al., 2000). Research has previously shown that a restricted identity is negative at times of setbacks (e.g., Brewer, 1993), and it seems therefore that a committed and salient athletic identity is both positive and negative at different times for an athlete. It is unclear how this dichotomy can be resolved. Several researchers recommend, particularly in preparation for the retirement transition, that an identity which is not exclusively based on the individual's role as an athlete should be encouraged (e.g., Sinclair & Orlick 1993). This recommendation is echoed by this researcher in respect of the young athletes approaching the junior-to-senior transition, on the basis that an exclusive athletic identity can prove damaging psychologically (i.e., to the self-concept). However, the stories of the athletes in the current research show just how difficult a task the development of a non-exclusive identity can be, when the demands of the sport dictate that for success, one's identity must, in effect, be wholly represented by sport participation.

### *Career Transition Intervention*

On the basis that planning and preparation has been deemed so important for adaptation to the retirement transition (e.g., Crook & Robertson 1991; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990), the significant resources directed by governing bodies and national organisations towards the design and development of programmes aimed at preparing athletes for retirement (e.g., the Athlete Career and Education programme in Australia) is justified. These

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programmes have been created to instil a feeling of ownership and control over the transition, to minimise exclusive commitment to an athletic identity, to foster a sense of self-efficacy and to reduce the impact of the loss of the athlete role (Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1993, 1995). In the literature review in Chapter One, it was suggested that similar transition programmes might be useful at the junior-to-senior transition. Stambulova (2000) suggested that an inability to adjust to the demands of a new athletic career level, may lead to a decrease in self-esteem, emotional discomfort and heightened sensitivity to failure. Indeed the results of Studies One and Two support both of the aforementioned contentions; an inability to cope with the transition can be detrimental for an athlete, both personally and athletically, and the results have demonstrated that the junior-to-senior transition should be anticipated and prepared for. Those athletes who are unprepared and who approach the transition without the necessary coping skills are less likely to make progress, more likely to identify a discrepancy between their actual and ideal or ought selves which may then result in emotional discomfort and reduced self-esteem (Higgins, 1987), and/or an increased susceptibility to the effects of negative social comparison on the self-concept.

The results of this thesis emphasise that optimal preparation for the junior-to-senior transition begins early and involves the interplay of a number of different factors. Consistent with Wylleman and Lavallee's (2004) developmental model, in order to transition to the next level, an athlete must develop at a number of inter-relating levels. This dynamic process extends beyond the physical and mental conditioning for the performance demands of senior competition. One of the key sources of readiness is knowledge of the demands at transition. Without this knowledge, athletes cannot begin to adapt their game, or their behaviours, identities and self-concepts to develop readiness for the transition. Crucial to this process of readiness development is the provision of role models, who act not only as key sources of informational support, but also serve, to some extent, to fulfil athletes' needs for relatedness in the new environment, and to provide some sense of stability in relationships over the transition. The modelling of, receipt of information and guidance from, more senior athletes and to a lesser extent from coaches, is critical to an athlete's progression through the transition, and particularly in the

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preparatory phase. This should therefore be a key component of junior development programmes for potential elite athletes.

According to the results of the intervention in Study Three of this thesis, junior athletes value an enhancement programme which commences prior to the transition to senior level. This is consistent, not only with the results of Studies One and Two, but also with research at the retirement transition in sport. When suitable preparation has occurred, the career termination experience typically has been perceived as smoother than when preparation is neglected (Crook & Robertson 1991; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). The contribution made by Study Three of this thesis is an enhancement intervention based on the life-development framework (Danish et al., 1993) which serves to build self-efficacy and readiness for the transition and to generate stability for the athlete by encouraging athletes to structure their pre-transition environment in ways that will reduce disruption. This type of programme is increasingly valuable given the pressure which is placed on young athletes in their pursuit of elite status. Individuals with high self-efficacy beliefs show more active coping behavior and tend to view situations as challenges rather than threats, and consequently experience less stress (Bandura, 1986, 1997). Given the evidence suggesting that individuals with a high sense of personal competence are also less likely to drop out of an occupational field (e.g., Saks, 1995), it makes sense to prepare athletes for the junior-to-senior transition in order that potential drop-out can be minimised and talent transferred from junior to senior level. Finally, a programme which encourages athletes to consider their career options before they attempt the transition and elevates the salience of their athletic identity, may help to reduce the number of athletes who prematurely drop out of senior sport with a narrowly defined, or foreclosed identity.

Despite junior athletes representing the future of their sport, little attention has been paid to promoting their successful within-career transition, and the final study of this thesis therefore represents a valuable contribution. Until now, the support of junior athletes has typically been left to those in their immediate social circle, who are untutored in this respect themselves and likely, as a consequence, to be unskilled. Even with the best of intentions, basing interpretation of what a young athlete needs solely on intuition is

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unlikely to optimise progression (Rees, 2007). Clearly this experience could potentially apply to the junior-to-senior transition, which, as the current research details, involves a complex interaction of situational and personal factors that need to be carefully managed to ensure successful navigation. Therefore, as Rees suggests, the correct support (from family friends, coaches and sport psychologists) must be matched to the needs of the situation (and the individual).

### **5.3 Implications of the Current Research**

This thesis offers a unique perspective on the transition experience of athletes moving from junior to senior level. The results provide a deeper understanding of this transition than has previously been available and several advancements to the current literature. As such, the new knowledge may usefully be employed to enhance the preparation of young athletes confronting transition, with a view to optimising their progression and mitigating potential talent loss.

Whilst further research, building on the work represented here is necessary in order fully to develop grounded theory (Stebbins, 2006), it is possible at this stage to draw specific conclusions and to make certain recommendations. These provide guidance for coaches and support personnel, enable the identification of appropriate role models for young athletes undergoing transition and facilitate the management of identity and self-concept. In addition, recommendations for intervention at the junior-senior transition are presented which recognise that transition is a process and not an event. These insights should prove of value to governing bodies, coaches and sport psychologists. However, it should also be noted that, within the interpretive framework of this research, recommendations may only apply to athletes experiencing transition in a similar context to those participating in this research.

#### **5.3.1 Recommendations for Coaches**

The results of this thesis suggest that the coach is likely to play the principal supporting role at the time of this transition. Whilst parents may have been more influential earlier in the athlete's career (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004), this research shows that those

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contemplating the junior-to-senior transition will probably turn to their coach for technical advice and relevant knowledge. Coaches therefore play a vital role, not least through ensuring that the timing of the transition is synchronised with the athlete's readiness. A full commitment to senior competition before the athlete is ready, may result in negative effects on the self-concept and delayed progress.

In practice, athletes should gradually be exposed to the senior circuit whilst still competing at the junior level. They should be given the opportunity and indeed encouraged to observe and make contact with more senior athletes. But a cautionary note is also appropriate. The benefits of learning from and modelling more senior athletes, should be weighed against the potentially negative effects of a shift in the frame of reference on the self-concept (Chanal et al., 1995). Therefore a balance should be sought, in which the athlete's frame of reference is not entirely constituted by senior competitors, until such time as the athlete has developed a readiness for the transition (i.e., there is a familiarisation with, a sense of belonging in, and an ability to cope with the demands of the new environment) or, where role models are sufficiently distant from the athlete so as to pose no threat to self-evaluation (Festinger, 1954). This signposts a need for proactive management on the part of coaches and sport psychologists in the preparation of their athletes.

The current research findings indicate that coaches can be the source of essential informational support at this pre-transition phase. Many do fulfil this requirement, although these findings also reveal that, unprompted, junior athletes may not recognise the need to acquire the knowledge which is necessary to navigate their transition successfully and to maximise their potential. This is due to a misconception, common amongst them, that they are already aware of all there is to know in this respect (Keil, 2003; Stafford, 2007).

In addition, the style of delivery is, once again, a crucial concern. The results of Study Three indicate that coaches should be alert to the risk of their being perceived to adopt a controlling feedback style when communicating, or possibly even an accusatory tone.

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The existing literature suggests that such sensitivity is crucial if they wish to safeguard the athlete's motivation and make them feel efficacious (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Overall, coaches should adopt an autonomy-supportive style within a democratic culture, where the athlete is allowed to play a significant role in the decisions regarding their own transition. In particular, the first study of this thesis highlighted the importance of the athlete playing a decisive role in the timing of transition. Finally, the results of Study Two demonstrate that the coach should show empathy for the athlete's feelings as well as providing non-controlling competence feedback (Hollembek & Amorose, 2005; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003).

The dynamics of the coach-athlete relationship are of paramount importance, not least in terms of the coach managing a subtly changing power shift, as the young athlete matures and migrates towards senior status and autonomy. The findings of the second study confirm that, whilst the coach should encourage and provide opportunities for autonomy, a passive manner should be avoided. Left too much to their own devices at this stage of their career, athletes are unlikely to progress at the transition. Given the stage of life often associated with this transition (i.e., one of increasing independence from parents and identification with the peer group; e.g., Eccles, 1999), athletes potentially could be distracted by social pressures, as in the case of Markus in Study One of this thesis. Without sufficient guidance, young athletes will certainly feel more autonomous, but they will quite probably suffer in the form of a lack of relatedness, due to their coach's seeming indifference and a lack of opportunity for competence experiences. The coach must therefore aim to deliver structure within a democratic relationship, based on the demonstration of holistic care and concern for the athlete as an individual. Similarly, an over-controlling style is also unhelpful in the coach-athlete relationship and for motivation (Hollembek & Amorose, 2005; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). The current research emphasises that the necessary autonomy-supportive behaviour should begin early (i.e., pre-transition) in order to encourage athletes preparing for transition to develop their senior athletic identity. Indeed, the fulfillment of the need for autonomy, relatedness and competence will more likely promote the internalisation of a self-determined, stable commitment to a senior-athletic identity (Ryan & Deci, 2003).



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Relevant additional recommendations for coaches, are made in the *Managing Identity and Self-Concept* section (5.3.3).

### **5.3.2 Identification of Appropriate Role Models**

The use of mentors as part of the transition preparation programme in this research, was inspired by the significant informational support role played by the peer group for the athletes in Studies One and Two. The knowledge which senior peers can provide, as to the roles and behaviours required at senior level is important in identity development (Ryan & Deci, 2003), and facilitates a familiarisation with the post-transition environment. Contact with the athletes and personnel who populate this post-transition environment, complements the coach-athlete relationship in promoting feelings of relatedness and the early adoption of relevant behaviours. Again, this fosters identity formation appropriate to the role concerned (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2003), and therefore readiness for the transition. Research indicates that the fulfilment of relatedness also has a positive impact on self-determined motivation and this factor, along with the building of a strong athletic identity, can be positive for performance (Danish, 1983; Vallerand & Rousseau, 2001; Werthner & Orlick, 1986); making the use of mentors at transition (who foster feelings of relatedness) even more worthwhile.

The results of this research therefore indicate that the comprehension of and the adoption of new roles, together with the fostering of new peer relationships (which relate to the senior athletic identity) pre-transition, are associated with an increase in the salience of the senior athletic identity for the athlete over time. This understanding is crucial if the identity is to be built (Ryan & Deci, 2003), and observational learning (Bandura, 1965) is imperative to this process. Thus, for athletes to learn the roles associated with a senior athletic identity, they need pre-transition stimuli, structured carefully to avoid the pitfalls identified. Even those junior participants who have enforced absences through injury should, wherever possible, be provided with opportunities to learn from senior athletes in order to develop readiness for transition. According to Bandura (1989), athletes are likely to model the behaviours of role models for whom they have seen positive outcomes, since people partly guide their actions by observed consequences, which enables them to

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profit vicariously from the successes and equally the lessons of mistakes, experienced by others. The results of Studies One and Two suggest that junior athletes will typically model behaviours which are seen to have assisted a senior athlete in succeeding and avoid those they have witnessed contributing to failure. However, Bandura also notes that this effect is mediated by the perceived similarity between the self and the individual being modelled, which affects whether one believes that a similar course of action will generate a similar outcome. It is also affected by one's efficacy, or belief about one's capacity to achieve similar levels of performance (Bandura, 1986), and thus role models should be proffered who not only model appropriate behaviours and successful outcomes, but also are sufficiently similar to the athlete being conditioned in this way.

Less positively, the results of Study One of this thesis do suggest that young athletes can model unhelpful behaviours. As noted, the learner attends to the consequences of the observed behaviour, and therefore, athletes who value the outcomes associated with certain conduct should find themselves motivated to learn and model the behaviours consistent with their priorities (Bandura, 1965, 1989; Rosenberg & Bandura, 1978). In some cases, where an athlete's priorities (e.g., for social affiliation) are not in line with their athletic goals, role models and behaviours inappropriate to athletic progress may be adopted, particularly at the lower levels of the senior tour where such models are likely to be more prevalent. The use of symbolic models, the current research suggests, can provide useful information within a controlled environment and therefore offers some advantages. Where real life models are used pre-transition, and also upon the actual transition to senior level, those managing this process should ensure that, as a prerequisite, the recipients have been educated as to the consequences of certain types of behaviour. Furthermore, their own values should be assessed before exposure to such models, because an athlete who places a positive value on the consequences of inappropriate behaviours is likely to lack readiness for the change.

### **5.3.3 Managing Identity and Self-Concept**

Governing bodies, families and coaches should aim to provide stability in the environment of athletes, as they approach, undertake and adapt to transition, in order to

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minimise the disruption faced and the adaptation required by the athlete. Identity theory predicts that the salience of a particular identity within the identity hierarchy will be sustained throughout a transition, when it is possible for the individual successfully to restructure their new social environment in ways which resemble the old (Serpe & Stryker, 1987). Athletes should therefore be encouraged to develop contacts and friendships at senior level prior to the transition and may find it appropriate to maintain a particular coach-athlete relationship throughout the transition process. As already noted, athletes should be provided with opportunities to learn and to adopt the roles and behaviours associated with a senior identity in preparation for the transition (i.e., athletes should ideally begin to structure their post-transition environment before leaving the pre-transition environment behind and fully committing to the new). Equally, governing bodies should structure their support for elite junior athletes, where practicable, to mirror that designed for senior athletes, in order that a degree of continuity is apparent.

Upon moving to senior level, there will be a shift in the athlete's frame of reference against which they evaluate their own ability. This can have a negative impact on the self-concept, since they now find themselves surrounded by more capable peers. However, just because social comparison can potentially be negative for self-concept at the junior-to-senior transition, is not to say that athletes should avoid social comparison altogether. On the contrary, the social comparison process, according to the current research, provides a useful mechanism by which athletes can, first of all, develop an understanding of the roles and behaviours important for a senior athletic identity, and second of all, the means to interpret the discrepancy between their actual behaviours and those necessary on the senior tour. With this in mind, Mussweiler and colleagues predict that comparisons will be sought with individuals similar to the self in order to provide a persuasive guide to self-evaluation (Mussweiler et al., 2000). Such information can also serve as a possible example of a future self (Seaton et al., 2008). Therefore, role models who are similar to the self should be sought by athletes prior to the transition, in order that they can learn about the senior tour and identify any incongruity between their current and ideal future self.

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The identification of such dissonance can be facilitative of identity development at transition. Where there is a perceived discrepancy between the identity one holds for oneself and that derived from the inferred appraisals of others, a change will be motivated, either in behaviour, to adapt to the situation and maintain one's identity, or the discrepancy may slowly bring about a change in identity (Burke, 2006). The results of the current programme of research suggest that athletes who are successful at transition, adapt their behaviour and their identity to meet the associated demands over time. In contrast, those who are unable to do so, may drop out of the sport or experience a delay at transition.

On the basis of the current research and also the implications identified by Chanal et al. (2005), to the effect that some individuals will be more sensitive to a change in the frame of reference than others, recommendations can be made to reduce the impact of this phenomenon at the junior-to-senior transition. Strategies which might be useful to coaches and sport psychology practitioners in preparing athletes for within-career transition in sport are included within the following:

- Athletes who are focused on personal mastery rather than normative reference and ego-goals may be less negatively affected by a change in their frame of reference. In the second study of the current thesis, the coach and sport psychologist worked with the participant to maintain a focus on his own development, rather than on comparisons to others. As a result, for the major part of his transition the athlete was able to sustain this disciplined approach and therefore to avoid any negative effects from social comparison.
- Athletes should be encouraged to set realistic goals which are of particular interest to them, thereby reducing social comparison. Where they can pursue and attain personal goals (e.g., achieving a personal best performance), athletes should, as a consequence, be able to maintain a positive self-concept, even if contemporaries are operating at a higher level. At the transition to elite status, the athlete is most likely to be competing in a pool where some participants are setting higher standards. Therefore, unfavourable upward comparisons are nearly always going to be available, with potentially negative

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consequences for the self concept. In such circumstances, a focus on individual performance is imperative.

- In order to promote an individual rather than normative focus, feedback from coaches and support staff should always be presented in relation to personal improvement rather than by drawing comparisons with the performance of fellow competitors.
- The unique characteristics of each athlete should be emphasised by significant others, so as to encourage them positively to differentiate themselves, both from other athletes and from comparison information (Mussweiler et al., 2000).
- Those in support of athletes contemplating transition, should encourage them to identify and communicate with other athletes in the post-transition environment (preferably prior to the point of transition), so that they develop a positive self-concept from being associated with an elite group (i.e., a reflected glory effect; Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman, & Sloan, 1976). Care should however be exercised to ensure that such role models are similar to the athlete (in terms of experience), so as to be seen as a possible future self for motivational purposes (Seaton et al., 2008), yet sufficiently distant in performance standards so as not to pose a threat to self-evaluation (Festinger, 1954).
- Where possible, athletes should be encouraged to maintain interests and social contacts which are not associated with their competitive environment. If they are unable to differentiate themselves, on the basis of such alternative identities, as a means to insulate the self from a threatening social comparison, that comparison is more likely to be negative for self-concept (Mussweiler, et al., 2000). An athlete with low readiness for the transition may also be sensitive to this risk factor, because they lack the coping skills for the demands of the post-transition environment and are therefore less likely to make swift progress at the transition. Making upward social comparisons in such circumstances is likely to reveal a discrepancy between the ability of the self and of others, as the athlete is 'left behind', and this could perpetuate the negative effects on self-concept. Since

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evidence also suggests that self-concept affects performance, a lack of readiness could therefore potentially pose a serious threat to progress at the junior-to-senior transition (Marsh & Perry, 2005).

#### **5.4 Potential Limitations of the Thesis**

The methodology underpinning this programme of research is largely qualitative in nature, in order to provide an in-depth understanding of the transition experience, from the perspective of the participant. Given the aim of achieving a deep understanding, the qualitative methods used have been appropriate, having regard to the established relationship of this technique with theory building in the social sciences (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1997). In addition, the grounded theory approach, whereby connections between events are sought in order to construct a dynamic account of the processes experienced by participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) renders this a most suitable choice. Career transition is itself a dynamic process which occurs over time and a method of data collection and analysis via which the intricacies of this can be captured, examined and interpreted is most likely to add value to the research objectives described.

Despite the apparently good fit between the methodology and the research question, it may still be argued that there are potential weaknesses, and it is important for those reading this thesis to have regard to the potential limitations which these impose. The considerations most likely to arise in this respect are evaluated within the following.

Whilst qualitative methods may be criticised for a lack of objectivity and control, the focus in this research activity has been on describing processes and upon an analysis grounded in rather than imposed on the data, and on subjective experience rather than experimental manipulation and control of confounds. A further criticism which could be levied by those of a positivist persuasion, is that the research cannot be generalised to the wider athletic population. However, the aim of this research was to use a constructivist version of grounded theory, to provide a qualitative portrayal of the transition experience, rather than a picture of one external reality or truth. Thus, it has not been the researcher's aim to develop a formal grounded theory which can be generalised across populations,

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but a substantive one. In doing this, the objective was to capture and interpret the social world of the participants; to analyse the perceptions which the participants had constructed, based on their own lived experiences. By adopting this approach, the researcher was not assuming a unidimensional external reality which could be objectively observed and thus generalised to all athletes. Theory development within an interpretive paradigm is not designed to produce broad and general predictions, but rather to represent an interpretation of the social worlds of the participants as constructed by them (Charmaz, 2003). By using grounded theory methods in this way, the researcher could access information which quantitative research would be unable to uncover. In research within a social constructionist paradigm, the conditions under which a phenomenon is described and the theory produced, is proposed to be generalisable only to situations where similar conditions apply. The researcher has therefore sought to identify general patterns and to draw general conclusions, which have relevance for athletes undergoing transition in a similar social world with a similar perspective. In utilising the resultant theoretical framework, practitioners and researchers must consider the extent to which the theory applies in their chosen context (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Finally, it is appropriate to re-emphasise that the results of this study represent a substantive, but not a formal grounded theory. Indeed, to develop a formal grounded theory takes “several rounds of fieldwork, analysis, and publication” (Stebbins, 2006; p. 485). Therefore, although the development of our understanding of the junior-senior transition process in sport has been advanced through this research, this subject remains a work-in-progress and should be on-going.

The adoption of an alternative methodology, namely a deductive pattern matching procedure during the second study, should not be viewed as undermining the arguments advanced in the previous chapters and elsewhere in this thesis, supporting the grounded theory approach. Deductive pattern matching was employed in order to check the grounding of the theory in the data, to expose alternative interpretations that might exist and to clarify meaning, in order that the results could be communicated to the reader most effectively and so that theory was developed further. The additional researchers enlisted for the pattern matching, endorsed the interpretation of the data under investigation,

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which rather suggests that given the same conditions, subsequent research should produce similar results.

A further criticism often applied to qualitative research, is that retrospective accounts of events may be subject to memory decay and that intervening events may have affected the interpretation of the experience. Given the methods used in the first and second studies, the potential for recall bias was recognised and the researcher utilised available techniques in order to reduce this probability and/or to mitigate the impact; such as bounding (Hindley, 1979; Moss, 1979). In addition, the longitudinal study which constituted the second study in this thesis, whilst employing retrospective interview methods, was structured with the objective of reducing significantly the likelihood of memory decay through the frequency of the interviews.

### **5.5 Future Research Directions**

Whilst the within-career transition literature is relatively sparse in comparison to that regarding retirement from sport, during the course of this research programme new within-career transition research has been published (e.g., Bernie & O'Connor, 2004; Bruner et al., 2008). This development is entirely to be welcomed, and together with the current thesis, this represents a valuable addition to a rather restricted body of available knowledge. Nevertheless, there remain several areas identified as a result of this thesis, which will justify further research and these are alluded to within the following.

The transition experiences explored within this thesis were drawn exclusively from participation in individual sports. Whilst some research (e.g., Bruner et al., 2008) has looked at the transition in team sports, largely this has provided a description of the demands faced, rather than an examination of the process of transition experienced. Given the significant role of identity in transition, as demonstrated in the current research, and the importance of social and personal identities in the mediation of social comparison effects (Mussweiler et al., 2000), the experience of athletes selected for a senior or professional team is worthy of closer examination. Similarly, research should



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examine whether social affiliation with fellow athletes at senior level moderates the Big Fish Little Pond Effect (BFLPE).

Further research into the influence of the self-concept at transition is warranted. As Marsh and Hau (2003) highlight, individuals in all walks of life are likely to accomplish more if they feel competent in what they do, are self-confident and feel positive about themselves generally, and this applies especially to the junior-to-senior transition. Research should examine the mechanisms by which self-concept can be protected at transition. Referring to the BFLPE, Chanal et al. (2005) suggest that the benefits of role modelling and learning in a selective training environment should be weighed against the potential for negative impact upon the self-concept. However, when navigating the junior-to-senior transition within sport, it will not be possible completely to avoid circumstances where such risk arises. Therefore, other mechanisms which protect the self-concept should be pursued. The individual profiles of athletes resistant to the effects of social comparison should be scrutinised, in order that a greater understanding of those protective characteristics can be achieved. For example, Dai (2004) suggests that the effect of comparison will be influenced by whether the individual holds entity or incremental beliefs with regard to the comparison dimension, i.e., whether they believe they can improve, or that their ability is fixed. Since entity beliefs are associated with a helpless orientation and incremental beliefs with a more mastery orientation (Dweck, Chiu, & Hong, 1995), it seems likely that comparisons made by an individual with incremental beliefs may be less damaging for the self and more motivating at transition.

One of the strategies through which athletes can protect themselves from the BFLPE at transition (according to Mussweiler et al., 2000), is the differentiation of the self from the comparison target on the basis of identity. However, since athletes at an elite level will often develop a restricted self-identity (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Petitpas, 2000), they may be especially vulnerable to the effects of forced comparisons, particularly at a time when, as demonstrated in this thesis, the athletic identity is becoming more salient. Thus, research should investigate the ways in which junior athletes can be supported to develop

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a less exclusively defined identity in preparation for the transition, despite their increasing commitment to the athlete role.

The knowledge possessed by senior athletes on the basis of their direct experience, and which they are therefore equipped to share with younger aspirant athletes, not least in terms of the roles and behaviours required at senior level, is important for identity development (Ryan & Deci, 2003). Such communication will also result in a familiarisation with the post-transition environment as well as fostering feelings of relatedness. Although the programme trialled within this research represents a valuable first step, future intervention programmes and initiatives by national governing bodies, usefully could go beyond the current programme. The design and evaluation of programmes involving the mentoring of promising junior athletes by physically present role models, as opposed to the use of video, to determine whether the impact is greater when real, rather than symbolic models are used, would add value. In addition, programmes of this kind should emphasise the contribution of the coach to informational support, as well as focusing on coach-education regarding the particular elements of the relationship with athletes that have been signposted as important for transition progress as a result of this, and the pre-existing research.

A number of studies have suggested that some elite athletes experience transition-related distress at retirement (e.g., Werthner & Orlick, 1986). Whilst some effort has been directed towards preventing such anxiety through the promotion of life-skill programmes, there remains a need to provide professionally designed services to athletes in anticipation of this transition and to support those who actually experience distress (Lavalley, Nesti, Borkoles, Cockerill, & Edge; 2000). In a similar vein, research should be directed towards the counselling of athletes who experience difficulty during within-career transition. Whilst potential problems should be anticipated and prevented or mitigated as much as possible through careful preparation in the manner specified in this thesis, governing bodies should implement systems through which those concerned can assess an athlete's status in terms of transition-coping skills and readiness. For example, one of the participants in Study One received inadequate support from coaches, which

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delayed his transition. With appropriate monitoring, and early identification of this problem, his momentum at transition might have been recovered and appropriate lessons learned. Such matters represent areas for further research, along with the examination of the utility of counselling-based strategies for athletes experiencing difficulties at within-career transition.

## **5.6 Research Conclusions**

In conclusion, the research programme presented in this thesis has enhanced the pre-existing literature in a number of ways. Firstly, this thesis represents an in-depth analysis of the process of within-career transition; it goes beyond the existing research by offering a grounded theory of junior-to-senior transition which comprehensively explains the process of transition. It also represents the first time (to the researcher's knowledge), that an athlete has been followed for a period of two years during the process of transition to senior level, and towards elite status. The resultant Model of Junior-to-Senior Transition has revealed much about the development of the self through the course of transition, as it occurs over time. Building on this understanding, is the proposal of a much needed transition enhancement programme, designed to maximise athletes' readiness for the junior-to-senior transition and therefore to optimise their progress and performance at transition.

Overall, these research findings, grounded in the experiences of elite athletes, add an extra dimension to the literature addressing within-career transition in sport. This thesis has also increased the appreciation of the roles of significant others in the career transition process and provides coaches, practitioners and governing bodies with a number of recommendations to inform their work in support of aspiring athletes. Whilst more research is required in order more fully to comprehend the experience of athletes at this important transition, including in different contexts (such as team sports), this thesis has therefore enhanced the knowledge of a little-studied area of sport psychology. In particular, the applied perspective offers a unique insight and a platform from which sport psychologists can support the development of the talented individuals with whom they work.

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# APPENDICES

# Best Copy Available

Print bound close to the spine

**Participant Information Sheet**

**Investigating the careers of athletes**

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research.

The aim of this research is to investigate the experiences of athletes when they move up to senior status within their sport. Many talented individuals drop out of their sport at this stage, and it is hoped that by talking to athletes like you, researchers like myself will be able to inform athletes, governing bodies, coaches etc. as to how they can help their athletes to make the step up.

You have been chosen to be interviewed for this study because you have been through this transition. All information which you can give me about your experiences of the transition will be very useful so please give as much detail as you can and answer as honestly and fully as you can. There are no wrong answers!

The questions which I will ask you will be very straightforward, simply asking you to think back to the transition and discuss your perceptions of it, why you think you were successful etc. With your consent, I will tape-record the interview. However, your identity will not be revealed to any third party at any time. You will be identified by a number.

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

**(to be completed after Participant Information Sheet has been read)**

The purpose and details of this study have been explained to me. I understand that this study is designed to further scientific knowledge and that all procedures have been approved by the Loughborough University Ethical Advisory Committee.

I have read and understood the information sheet and this consent form.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions about my participation.

I understand that I am under no obligation to take part in the study.

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from this study at any stage for any reason, and that I will not be required to explain my reasons for withdrawing.

I understand that all the information I provide will be treated in strict confidence. I understand and consent that the interview be tape-recorded.

I understand that my identity will **not** be disclosed, but that the transcripts of my interview may be viewed (anonymously) by others in the research team for analysis purposes.

I agree to participate in this study.

Your name \_\_\_\_\_

Your signature \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of parent/  
guardian if under 18  
years of age \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

As part of the research process, it may be necessary to ask you to

- i) check your interview transcript for accuracy and fullness of detail,
- ii) give your opinion on the results of the study, and/or
- iii) answer further questions in order to help the researcher reach completion.

If you are happy with this, please provide a phone number on which you can be contacted and an address at which you can receive transcript/result information (by email or post):

Phone number \_\_\_\_\_

Address/email \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Many thanks.

# Appendix A

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Please provide some information about your time in sport. Again, this information will be held in the strictest of confidence, and will only be used for descriptive purposes. Your name will not be disclosed.

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**Name**

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**Sport**

**Curent level/ranking**

---

**D.O.B.**

---

**Male**    **Female**    (please X)

---

**Years in the sport**        years        months

---

**Years since reached senior status**        years        months

---

**Funding/sponsorship received? (please give details)**

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**Career highlights**

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**Highest level achieved (if different)**

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**Have you represented your country/GB? Please give details (e.g., if at junior or senior level, age group if junior)**

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Many thanks.

## Appendix A

Participant number:	Sport:
Date:	Interview number:

Main topics and questions	Probes/lower level questions	Notes
<p><b><u>Introduction</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe your sport involvement before this transition</li> <li>• Describe your sport involvement since you've made this transition</li> <li>• Can you describe your experience of the transition?</li> <li>• Tell me how the career stages differ?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Career history, ages, successes</li> <li>• Summarise career</li> <li>• When?</li> <li>• What happened?</li> <li>• Age?</li> <li>• Why?</li> <li>• Expected?</li> <li>• How did you feel about it?</li> <li>• Stressful?</li> <li>• What adjustments did you have to make?</li> <li>• What new demands?</li> </ul>	
<p><b><u>Facilitating the transition</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What factors were important in helping you make this transition?</li> <li>• What do you think you did that others didn't?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summarise/ reflect factors talked about</li> <li>• What made the transition easier?</li> <li>• Specific information: Who? What was their role? How did that help?</li> </ul>	

<p><b><u>Challenges</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What obstacles did you experience when trying to make this step?</li> <li>• What did you do to overcome these?</li> <li>• How did you cope with these?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What made the transition hard?</li> <li>• Who helped? How? (Coach, family, support staff, governing body?) What did they do? How did you cope with that?</li> </ul>	
<p><b><u>Minimising talent loss</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why? In relation to others, why didn't you drop out?</li> <li>• Did you consider dropping-out?</li> <li>• What else is important when trying to make this transition?</li> <li>• What do athletes need to prepare for in order to succeed at a professional level?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why?</li> <li>• What could be done to help athletes make the step?</li> <li>• Drawing on your experiences, what do you think is needed to help people coming through?</li> </ul>	
<p><b><u>Summary</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there anything which I should have asked you but didn't?</li> <li>• Would it be okay if I called you after I've written the interview up if I have any questions?</li> </ul>		



**Dear**

**Re: Loughborough University Research: The Transition from Junior to Senior Level in Sport**

I am writing to you regarding the above research project in which you participated. The first stage of this research is now nearing completion, and I thank you again for taking the time to be interviewed. I enclose the transcript of your interview and some preliminary results from the research. The next stage, based on your results, involves the testing of an intervention designed to help athletes successfully to make the transition from junior to senior level. However, before this can take place, I am requesting your thoughts on the results of the first stage. You may remember that you supplied your contact details for follow up and I am therefore contacting you to ask you to provide comment on the results:

1. For accuracy purposes I would be grateful if you would first check whether your interview transcript accurately represents your experiences of the transition. If you would like to provide additional information or remove any inaccuracies, then please make necessary amendments where appropriate and return the transcript in the pre-paid envelope. If I do not receive your transcript, I will assume that you are happy that it provides an accurate and full description of your experiences.\*
2. Secondly, your opinions on the developing theory are sought and I have therefore enclosed a brief summary of the results for your review. This process is necessary to ensure that the results of the research reflect the reality of your experiences. Please therefore provide any comments regarding the accuracy; either on the summary itself or on the attached sheet. Again, please return in the pre-paid envelope. Should you prefer, you may also email any comments to the address provided below.

Please also contact me with any questions or queries relating to the above. As stated at your interview, all communication from you is treated in the strictest of confidence and identifying information will not be released in the reporting of this research. Thank you again for taking the time to participate in this project. Your experiences and opinions are extremely valuable and I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience. If you have supplied me with an email address, I will also email the enclosed information to you in case this is your preferred method of communication. If you only supplied an email address and prefer to receive this information by post then please email me to request this.

Yours faithfully,

Beth Pummell, BSc, MSc  
School of Sport & Exercise Sciences  
Loughborough University  
Loughborough  
LE11 3TU

\*Please note that all interviews were transcribed verbatim (i.e., hesitations and grammatical errors inherent in speech were not corrected). The lack of flow and errors can sometimes be alarming for research participants. I would therefore like to reassure you that this is completely normal and typical across all individuals.

**Participant Information Sheet**

**Case Study: Perceptions of Transition in Sport**

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research.

In your last interview, we discussed your experience of the transition from junior to senior level.

This time I would like to continue the interview, talking about the experiences you have had in your sport over the last 6 months, since our last interview.

What I am aiming to do by talking to you about the last 6 months, is to try to understand the experiences that you are having in your ongoing transition up the world rankings.

The questions which I will ask you will be very straightforward and there aren't any wrong answers, so as before please try to answer as honestly and fully as possible. Again, your responses are confidential, and you will not be identified by name in any publication of this research.

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM**  
**Perceptions of Transition in Sport**

The purpose and details of this study have been explained to me. I understand that this study is designed to further scientific knowledge and that all procedures have been approved by the Loughborough University Ethical Advisory Committee.

I have read and understood the information sheet and this consent form.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions about my participation.

I understand that I am under no obligation to take part in the study.

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from this study at any stage for any reason, and that I will not be required to explain my reasons for withdrawing.

I understand that all the information I provide will be treated in strict confidence. I understand and consent that the interview be tape-recorded.

I understand that my identity will **not** be disclosed, but that the transcripts of my interview may be viewed (anonymously) by others in the research team for analysis purposes.

I agree to participate in this study.

Your name \_\_\_\_\_

Your signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Interview number:	Date:
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Main topics and questions	Probes/lower level questions	Notes
<p><b><u>Current perceptions of the transition</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you describe your tennis involvement since our last interview when your ranking was _____?</li> <li>• How would you describe yourself as a tennis player now?</li> <li>• What has changed about you in the last 6 months?</li> <li>• What have you learnt about the process of becoming a world-class tennis player in that time?</li> <li>• What are the differences and similarities between the stage you're at now and that of 6 months ago?</li> <li>• What has been most enjoyable about the last 6 months?</li> <li>• What has been least enjoyable?</li> <li>• What has made you carry on trying to move up the rankings?</li> <li>• How do you perceive your current tennis situation?</li> <li>• How difficult has the last 6 months been for you?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What have you been doing?</li> <li>• Significant successes</li> <li>• Significant failures</li> <li>• Current ranking/points</li>   <li>• What adjustments have you had to make?</li>   <li>• Differences?</li> <li>• Similarities?</li> </ul>	
<p><b><u>Facilitating the transition</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who/What do you think has been important to your progress in the last 6 months?</li> <li>• Who/What could you not have got to this point without?</li> <li>• Can you describe your social network at present?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who/what most important?</li>   <li>• Why?</li>   <li>• What role have they played?</li> </ul>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who has been the most important person in your progress over the last 6 months?</li> <li>• What support have they given you?</li> <li>• Anyone else been important?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How?</li> </ul>	
<p><b><u>Challenges</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What challenges have you had to overcome in the last 6 months to get to where you are in your sport now?</li> <li>• What strategy have you adopted to overcome these?</li> <li>• How have you coped with these?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What has made it tough?</li> <li>• Pick out particular challenges.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Last time you mentioned what you thought would be important to your progress continuing. What do you think <b>now</b> is important if you are to continue making progress?</li> <li>• Based on your experience, what advice would you give a player wanting to make it to the stage that you're at now?</li> </ul>		
<p><b><u>Summary</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are your expectations for the next 6 months?</li> <li>• Is there anything that we missed out about your current situation or the last 6 months?</li> </ul>		

Interview number:	Date:
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<b>Main topics and questions</b>	<b>Probes/lower level questions</b>	<b>Notes</b>
<p><b><u>Current perceptions of the transition</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Scott has now established himself as a senior player having been playing on the circuit for a full year now. How would you describe his 1<sup>st</sup> full year on the tour?</li> <li>● What do you think has changed about Scott in the last __ months?</li> <li>● What do you think he has learnt about the process of becoming a world-class tennis player in that time?</li> <li>● What are the differences and similarities between the stage Scott is at now and that of __ months ago?</li> <li>● In your opinion, what do you think Scott has enjoyed most and least about that time?</li> <li>● What has been most and least enjoyable for you or you as a team?</li> <li>● What do you think makes Scott keep trying to move up the rankings?</li> <li>● How do you think Scott perceives his current situation?</li> <li>● What has been difficult for Scott over the last __ months?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What has he been doing?</li> <li>● Significant successes</li> <li>● Significant failures</li> <li>● Current ranking/points</li>   <li>● What adjustments has he had to make?</li> <li>● What new demands has he encountered?</li> <li>● What have you had to do to overcome those demands?</li>   <li>● Differences?</li> <li>● Similarities?</li> </ul>	
<p><b><u>Resources</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Who/What do you think has been important to Scott's progress in the last __ months?</li> <li>● Who/What could he not have got to this point without? Who/what most important?</li> </ul>		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who have been the most important people in Scott's progress over the last 12 months?</li> <li>• What support have they given Scott?</li> <li>• Has anyone else been important?</li> <li>• What has been your role over the previous __ months?</li> <li>• Can you describe your current relationship with Scott?</li> <li>• What role have you played in Scott's transition over the last __ months?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How?</li> </ul>	
<p><b><u>Challenges/deficits and coping skills</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What challenges has Scott, or have you and Scott had to overcome in the last __ months to get to this position? (What has made it tough?)</li> <li>• What strategy has he/ have you as a team adopted to overcome these?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pick out particular challenges.</li> <li>• How has he coped with these?</li> </ul>	
<p><b><u>Moving forward</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you think now is important if Scott is to continue to make progress?</li> <li>• Based on your experience, what advice would you give a player wanting to make it to the stage that Scott is at now?</li> </ul>		
<p><b><u>Summary</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are your expectations for the next 6 months?</li> <li>• Is there anything that we missed out about Scott's current situation or the last __ months which is important?</li> </ul>		

### **Instructions and Questions**

My research has focused on the junior to senior transition and the first study involved building a model of the process experienced by athletes at this transition. The current study is a case study in which I tracked a tennis player over 2 years through this transition by interviewing him and his coach and sport psychologist. Your help is now requested in looking to see if the model of transition which I identified in my first study is shown in the case study. Basically I'd like to know your opinions i.e.:

- **Do you see in this data what I have seen in my first study (i.e., is what I've identified in my model represented in this data)?**
- **Have I identified the process properly (i.e., have I outlined the pattern of what is happening at this transition)?**

Once you have read the results file and the data file I've sent you, please answer the handful of questions I have included below.

a. For each question there is a Likert-type response and an open ended question. For the Likert response questions please indicate how much you think the predictions from the results are demonstrated in the data which you examined. *I have split the data up in order to give you a manageable amount of data, and as such it may be that one or more area from the results is not covered in your excerpt of data. If you feel that this is the case then please tick N/A box. If you tick the N/A box then please move on to the next question and ignore part b:*

b. For the open-ended part of the question, please give as much detail as you can but also feel free to add any other comment here or on the data itself, or in the results to send back to me. Also please feel free to cut and paste or cross-reference from the data or from the results file to highlight any point you would like to make. Finally, I understand that in some parts of the data certain themes may not be apparent, or that you may disagree with me, and therefore please feel free to be honest if you do not see any of the themes I've identified and/or to suggest alternatives. I welcome any feedback!

**To protect the participants, I would be grateful if you could please return all data documents to me once you have finished and please let me know if you have any questions. Finally thank you very much for your time.**



**Preparing for transition: Becoming Immersed**

1a. In your opinion, to what extent is preparation for transition demonstrated in the transition of this athlete?

N/A (please go to question 2)

0	1	2	3	4	5
Not at all					Very much so

1b. In your opinion, *how* is a preparation for transition demonstrated in the transition of this athlete? Please elaborate on your answer as much as possible.

2a. In your opinion, to what extent is readiness for the next stage (i.e. an ability to cope with performance and lifestyle demands) demonstrated in the transition of this athlete?

N/A (please go to question 3)

0	1	2	3	4	5
Not at all					Very much so

2b. In your opinion, *how* is readiness for the next stage (i.e. an ability to cope with performance and lifestyle demands) demonstrated in the transition of this athlete? Please elaborate on your answer as much as possible.

**Adaptation to transition**

3a. In your opinion, to what extent is adaptation to the transition demonstrated in the transition of this athlete?

N/A (please go to question 4)

0	1	2	3	4	5
Not at all					Very much so

3b. In your opinion, *how* is adaptation to the transition demonstrated in the transition of this athlete? Please elaborate on your answer as much as possible.

4a. In your opinion, to what extent does this athlete strive to achieve a sense of stability within the transition?

N/A (please go to question 5)

0	1	2	3	4	5
Not at all					Very much so

4b. In your opinion, *how* does this athlete achieve a sense of stability within the transition? Please elaborate on your answer as much as possible.



### **The Junior-Senior Transition: A Development of Self-Identity**

Every athlete experiences an individual transition but several common factors exist. The process of transition (over time) can be represented as the development of an athlete's identity. The transition began many months (even years) before the move out of junior sport, and adjustment similarly continued for a long period afterwards.

The main theme of my results was a continual development of identity. The self-perceptions held by the athletes evolved in accordance with the stage of their transition, their progress and performance, perceptions of themselves relative to other athletes, a feeling of belonging in their environment and their perception of how they are viewed by others. This identity was also subject to change as a result of setbacks, or a breakthrough to a higher competitive level.

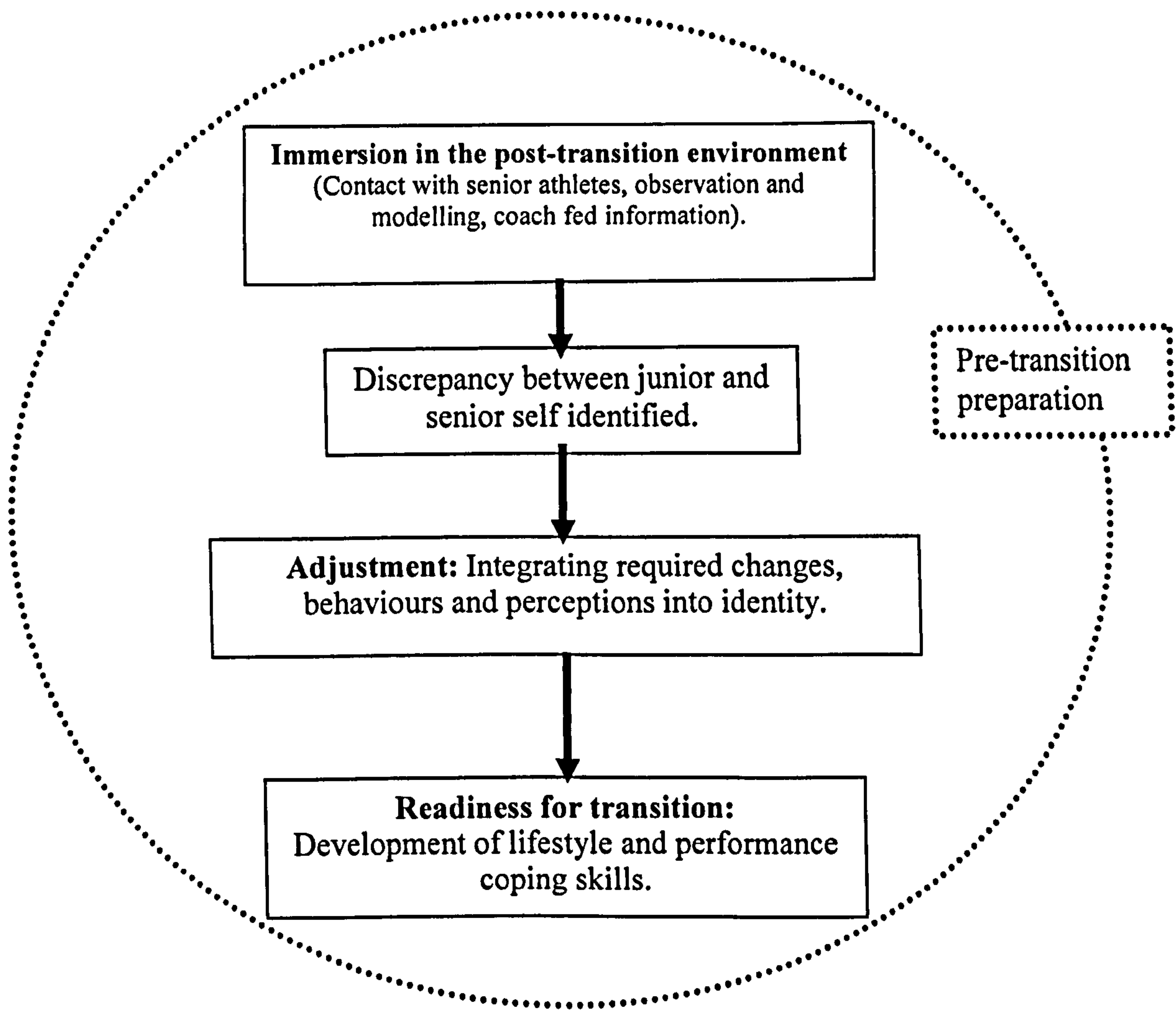
The events and changes inherent in the transition which triggered the development of identity are elaborated in the following sections:

#### **Preparing for transition: Becoming Immersed**

Building a senior identity involved an intense learning period, during which the athletes immersed themselves in their new environments and began to develop coping skills for the changes they faced (lifestyle and performance demands of their new environment). Becoming immersed in their new environment meant gathering information and observing and modelling senior behaviour, on and off the competitive ground. Athletes who prepared could more quickly acclimatise to the new environment, allowing them more easily to focus on maximising their performances. Preparation at each stage led to a state of readiness:

#### **Developing Readiness**

Well prepared athletes felt more comfortable in a new environment which they had strived to understand, and for which they had developed relevant skills and behaviours. Through such a process of immersion and the development of transition-related behaviours such as independence, responsibility and professionalism, the role of senior athlete (or athlete at the next competitive level) was adopted, and there was an ability to cope with and adjust to the performance and lifestyle demands of their new context. The role of preparation in developing readiness is shown in the model below:



**Figure 1: Preparation for Transition**

**Adaptation to Transition**

The demands to which the athletes had to adjust, fell into two broad categories; lifestyle and performance. A number of micro-transitions existed within their overall transition from junior to senior level, and at each step they encountered further demands and thus adjustment continued.

These demands included:

- Adjusting of lifestyle: Adjusting to the athlete-role, developing independence, achieving a life-balance
- Performance adjustments: Greater and tougher competition etc.

**Stability within change**

In all of this change, the athletes searched for and generated, stability e.g., by having a foot in both the old and new environment, contact with athletes at the next level or a consistent support team.

### **Beyond Transition: A Continual Discovery**

Adaptation to the changing lifestyle and performance demands at transition was on-going. Once the athletes had begun to compete at senior level tournaments, there was a series of further stages that related to the sport structure, peaks and troughs in performance. At various points the athletes had to:

**Break-through:** to the next level of competition in order to continue making progress. As each new level was approached there was a realisation of a discrepancy between the athlete's current position in the field and where they wanted to be, and who they were and who they needed to be. Once again, there was a learning and skill-development process for the even greater performance and lifestyle demands which were discovered.

**Disrupted balance:** Setbacks were also numerous along the non-linear path to senior success. Post-transition progress was defined by peaks and troughs in performance. Returning from a trough in performance required a process of rebuilding the identity of a successful senior athlete, very similar to that appropriate at inception of the senior career.

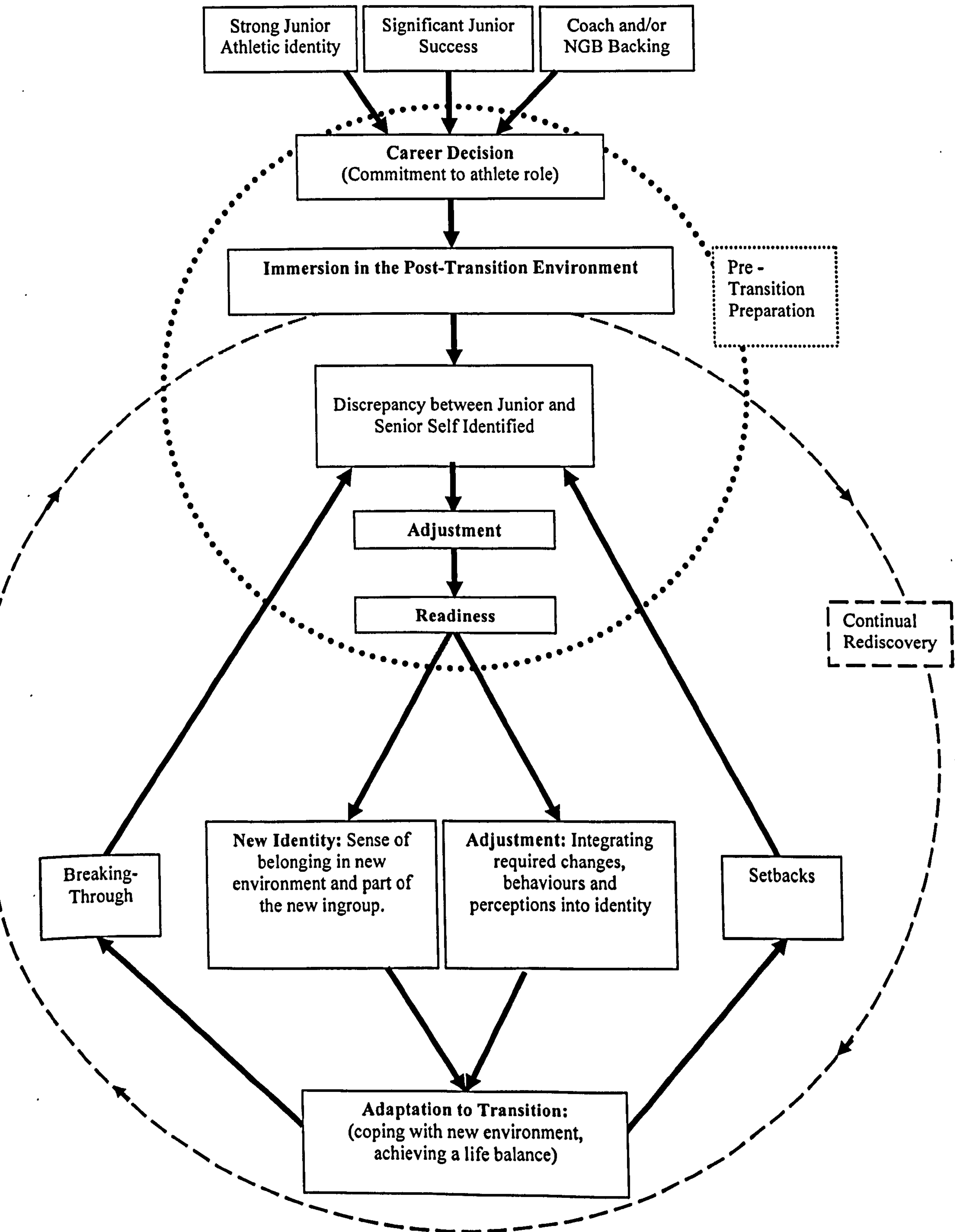


Figure 2: A Preliminary Model of Junior-to-Senior Transition.

### Time point 1: 6 -12 months post transition

#### **Tennis player 1:**

Well a lot of people have said to me, that I know that I'm not the only one who thinks that what I've done this year has been a good achievement, because a lot of people have said you know 'oh that's brilliant what you've, you know' and certain achievements that I've done abroad that haven't necessarily been winning tournaments but I've got more credit for when I've come back than I would have if I'd done the same thing here so its quite interesting.

#### **Interviewer:**

So is there anything else significant in the last 6 months that's developed?

#### **Tennis player 1:**

Davis Cup experience, erm, that came out of - well not out of nowhere, but it was a bit unexpected, erm, cos as I say I was nowhere near the ranking. Yeah, but that experience, to be, I mean - being around err Paul, that was the first time I'd met him, and obviously its, the experience that he has, its just, you know, being in Grand Slam finals and beating the number 2 in the world, and to have him helping me on literally a daily basis in practice the whole time for about 2 weeks, giving me tips, even when he's playing he's, he's you know helping me, you know 'try and do this, this, what do you think of that and that and', and even off the court as well, he was always, he spent quite a lot of time with me just talking to me and just almost like passing on knowledge, erm, which obviously that kind of thing, I always think that's invaluable, you cant, for somebody that wants to reach that level, I think that's really important, without that then you, you struggle quite a lot because apart from anything else it just makes you realise that 'god, this guy is, he's just another person', he wakes up in the morning, he has his breakfast, he does that, he does everything the same, yet he still has a lot he can give to you.

#### **Interviewer:**

What sort of things, like insights in to being a top 100 layer or?

#### **Tennis player 1:**

Its not so much that because the thing that, that's one of the things about tennis, its such an individual sport, there's no, there's no ingredients where if you do this, you're gonna get there, if you do that, there might be for some players but you can guarantee that if its some thing for some player, it won't, it will never be the same for another, it might be similar, for some players it might just be completely different, so its more to do with, sort of, not tech- well sort of technical, tactical advice when we're actually playing, cos that, those are the sort of things that

make a difference, if you improve, if I improve my game, that sort of thing will take care of itself, ranking and everything takes care of itself, erm, the other thing he sort of said was he set like a semi-ranking target for me, within, for the next sort of match so, that was like quite a big benefit when then I came back from the Davis Cup and I was straight back into my tournaments, and there was a lot of tough matches that I was in, and I was, I had his voice in my head saying 'You've gotta do this, you've gotta do this, come on' and I was thinking 'Yep, you know I'm gonna do that, if you don't pull this match out, this is it right now you know' [laughs]. That sort of encouragement from somebody like that, it just brings a little bit of variety to having like a coach saying it all of the time, and or your parent or whoever it is.

**Interviewer:**

Okay, what about looking at the other side of the last 6 months, has there been any like down times, I mean you've obviously had quite a lot of successes?

**Tennis player 1:**

Yeah, well towards the end of the erm, towards the end of that 12 weeks, probably after about 9 I was pretty much done, erm, just a comb- combination of loads of matches and sort of not being home for so long as well, erm, the trouble I had though was, I was in this satellite thing, a satellite is 4 weeks, you, so you're committed to 4 weeks, you get all the points at the end of the circuit, so basically the first 3 weeks, well, the 4 weeks you pick up circuit points and they get err converted into ATP points at the end of it, rather than Futures are just individual tournaments and you get the ATP points for that week. So basically I got to the final, the 1<sup>st</sup> week of the Satellite so obviously that's a good start, erm, and then the 2<sup>nd</sup> week I was, basically I was, 1<sup>st</sup> week I was feeling okay, when I was playing my matches but in between when I was off the court I was starting to think, 'Oh, I'm definitely struggling, I'm feeling a bit tired here', and then I got on to the 2<sup>nd</sup> week, and it was alright first match, second match I started getting this stiff neck, and my hip was hurting really badly, even worse on the quarter finals, the third day, could hardly move my neck the one side, erm, so I lost in the quarter finals and then sort of after that match I remember I was just thinking, this, I am absolutely burned out here, and mentally as probably more than physically, and if it had been individual tournaments, Futures or anything, there's no way I'd have played the next 2 weeks but obviously having done well in the 1<sup>st</sup> week having got these points which I was, definitely going to get, and also I had 14 points from the same circuit last year so I would've lost all of that which I didn't want to do, erm so I had to keep on playing these 2 weeks so ended up losing 1<sup>st</sup> round of inevitably the 3<sup>rd</sup> week, and then managed to win a couple of matches in the last week and got into the quarters. Erm, but I



suppose - that's one sort of mistake in the schedule, that we've made playing that many in a row but if I hadn't done as well at the start then I wouldn't have felt as tired you know so that's, it is quite hard to plan, and when you're playing well, for somebody, say if they had just been Futures and I'd got to the final of that 1<sup>st</sup> one, and my coaches had said, right that's you, you've had enough, well they wouldn't have said that because you don't stop when you're playing as well as I was, you, you sort of, there wasn't really, although I would say I was a bit tired, there's not really any way of knowing like how close you are to falling off a bit you know, erm and then, the other thing that was really difficult in that time was, I can't remember how long I went without coming back here home, it was probably about, erm, 10 weeks or so, maybe, probably a bit more, so that, that, its not so much not being at home, its more like, living out of a bag for all that time because I'm staying at my coach's or I'm staying erm somewhere with you know, friends and - instead of being able to sort of settle down and be at home and be around your family or something just for a few days, there's no way I can do that between tournaments because by the time I, probably be more tired than its worth, by the time I do that twice to get back to the tournament so, it, I mean, and also especially for me as I, because I'm quite an intense person, I mean I've got a lot better in the last 3 years or something, but because its not something that I'm naturally good at to just switch off, if I'm living out of a bag all the time and I'm, I'm not quite happy with the surroundings then I wont be able to switch off, I'll just get, I just get tense and tense and tense and tense, erm so that probably didn't help with everything, but that is probably one area of my sort of, of my life where I need to try and sort that out, have somewhere for, in between tournaments where I can sort of just have a few days and feel really comfortable and feel like, recharge the batteries and ready to go, cos that's so important to do that, especially if you're doing a long stretch like that, you know.

**Interviewer:**

So just a bit of time away from tennis?

**Tennis player 1:**

Yeah, I don't know, just with friends or going out for a walk, a long walk on my own or going out with any friends, erm, just something to - you know just switch off, and I only seem to be able to, cos I still see here as like my home, erm, I don't have anywhere else which I would be able to call that, erm, so this is like the only place where I sort of let my guard down a bit you know, which is something I'm going to have to sort out otherwise I'm going to have to come back here a lot more often, but the thing is I can't do that if there's not really any tennis here. It's a bit of a dilemma.

**Interviewer:**

Okay, what's changed about you over the last 6 months?

**Tennis player 1:**

What in a, well the biggest thing would be how I, the level I'm playing at, how hard I've become to actually beat, I mean, somebody, and that is always, that's actually been the main thing I would say, over the last even, well 6 months yeah, but even over the last year has been to, to develop a game and a personality and erm, an aura that is basically extremely hard to beat and I think no matter where I go now, for that, in these level of tournaments, no matter where I would go, people would know that when they went on the court they would have to beat me they wouldn't get anything from me, there, there's no way I would lie there, erm that would be the biggest thing I mean what else are you meaning, in terms of my, my, the technical side of my game or - erm, [pauses], let me think, well yeah the two main things would have been that what I've just said, I mean that's a huge thing, erm, but also the Davis Cup thing, definitely that altered not altered but just improved my, erm, my vision of where I'm going and where I need to go because being around, I guess such a, as big an event as that is giving, it gave me such like, such a confidence boost but also, to think, like my ranking was probably when I was there, about 450, but I was sort of thinking 'well if I'm here just now I mean, I can, I can definitely get to where they are', like the reason I've been given this chance is because other people think that as well, not because I'm friends with erm, not because anybody was doing a favour for me, erm, so to, to be picked for that at that stage was definitely a big boost, and that probably would have helped, well definitely did help with everything, every single thing that I was doing, if, if I had any little doubts of whether certain thing's good enough or, or anything like that, it was, definitely inclined me to think yeah that is good enough, that, I, this is gonna be alright, I'm gonna be, other people think I'm good enough as well, its not just me, so that's why those sort of things are so important and to be around like the bigger players cos it basically just tells me, rather than watching it on the TV, you would think it was like a different game, cos its like I'm here and they're on the TV whereas when you're in real life, you're like 'oh no, this guy's just another tennis player, that's just where I wanna go, that's just what I need to be around', and you need to get used to being in that environment rather than every time you're in there being a bit star struck, which, I think I in the situations that I've had, I've done pretty well with that cos then, I've recognised before I've gone that how important it was not too, well to make the most of it and to behave in the right way. I think those would be the two main things in that.

**Interviewer:**

So what do you think you've learnt, I mean I know you've talked about talking to Paul, and that sort of thing, what do you think you've learnt about the process of becoming a world class tennis player?

**Tennis player 1:**

Hmm [pauses] tough question that. A lot of it, is - since the last time I spoke to you, a lot of it would be to do with just having more experience, and [pauses], I'm just trying to - its not, its not as if, I mean if you looked at me playing on a tennis court today, and compare it with the, say you looked at me play the last time I spoke to you, you probably wouldn't notice any difference, visibly, it wouldn't be, certainly you definitely wouldn't notice any difference if I was just practicing, erm, a lot of the things are to do with confidence, confidence of having achieved what I had achieved in the first 6 months the year, erm, a lot of it was to do with, I had another training block behind me, so that actually gives me a lot of confidence, so I put it into my programme, erm, cos I, I really think that is an important part of it.

**Interviewer:**

What would you say the impact has been of your tennis on your life over the last 6 months?

**Tennis player 1:**

Well, one of the things, well probably the main thing that I've noticed is to do with erm, you know not getting, not having somewhere to have just a few days to recharge, one of the problems that I do have is because I left here, didn't really keep in contact with anyone cos I was like, I was away for this new adventure you know, I still keep in touch with them but they're both off at Uni so I do see them occasionally, so its all very well erm having like a, a house to go to or something like that but that doesn't necessarily make you able to recharge, I don't have this massive group of friends where right okay, I'm done for tennis for a few days I'm gonna go off here now and just switch off and just indulge in a bit of normality for a few days, I don't have that, its, I wouldn't say its, not something that, I cant really regret it because its just, where there's not anything, I can't do anything about it, cos, there's - if I wanted to have a massive, massive group of friends, then I wouldn't play tennis, I wouldn't have done that to start with, but that's just one of the problems. But it's just something that I've had, that I just have to deal with and erm, yeah that's, that is definitely one of the main things that I had noticed.

**Interviewer:**

So what's been most enjoyable about the last 6 months?

**Tennis player 1:**

Erm, the Davis Cup thing was an absolute high, erm, I enjoyed winning my first tournament in [my home country], because I have, there has been, I haven't directly been accused of it but, I think there's been words, because I have played quite a bit abroad, probably a few of the players and the coaches and everybody that would say 'Oh why is he going abroad, he's scared to play here', so now I've won something here as well, it sort of again gives me the license to, to go away again, I've proved that I've got nothing to prove at this level in this country so that was, well that was the main goal of the, of the block there, so I did that in the 2<sup>nd</sup> week which was pretty good, erm, most of it has been enjoyable. Those are the 2 obvious things though, because at the moment I'm still, well apart from these last 2 weeks when I've lost a few points I've just been going up and up and up and up and up, because I've had nothing to defend or anything so there hasn't really been, the only pressure there's been has been the pressure of myself and my own target, erm so its been quite a smooth rise so far, but I've got, I've got that same sort of thing, I've got no points to defend the 1<sup>st</sup> 4 months of the year, nothing at all, so I've basically got a free run at it right up until the next Davis Cup match so my whole schedule is literally planned around being able to be selected for that [laughs].

**Interviewer:**

Yes, what's the source of your efforts?

**Tennis player 1:**

I could never bear the thought of stopping playing right now, 19 years old, erm, still so much that I feel I can improve, still so much that I can get out of erm, get out of the game that stopping would be, would be like giving up, but it wouldn't even be that, it would just be stupid - pointless, there's no, because I'm so, if that's the line, I'm so far above it, its never really something that's crossed my mind, even though there are obviously hard, some quite hard times. Erm [pauses] yeah [pauses] not, its not an option, and the thing is that as well I am, I don't like using the word lucky but one things I have had, that I do have is that I, just I genuinely love playing tennis, you know, even like [I] remember watching [a] video thing [of me playing – put to music], that, I haven't, its probably only been a couple of weeks since I played a tournament, but that makes me want to play so badly, its like a burning I have inside me and, erm, not lucky, I don't know, its not lucky, but its just something I have - probably some players don't have it and obviously that makes it a bit harder for them but you know, yeah, I just love playing tennis,

even the last couple of weeks when I had about 4 days to do with my, because I had so much training to do in my programme, I hadn't played for a few days and got back on the court after about 4 days and I said to the guy I was playing with, I said, 'I can't tell you how good it actually feels to just hit tennis balls' [laughs], 'its only been about 4 days', that's the main thing to actually enjoy it because if you think about it that's why I started playing, for a bit of fun. Always, you should always remember that.

**Interviewer:**

Ok, and thinking about the - what do you think has been important in helping your progress?

**Tennis player 1:**

I tell you what was quite important was learning to drive and at the start of the year and then being able to drive to some tournaments, that definitely made life a lot easier than, for the tournaments because although it wasn't so much a factor this time because I was winning quite a lot of matches, but it, last time, when I was playing in the tournaments there I was maybe losing early a few times and I'd be stuck in wherever the tournament was because I'd be faced with getting a train back to probably from wherever I was, hanging around for somebody to give me a lift, and, but being stuck in this venue, for even practicing, even when there's a lot of matches going on so that, that erm, definitely restricts the sort of preparation for the next week whereas this time, I had my own car so if, if I had lost early I would have to go around different places to practice erm, I was able to leave when I wanted to leave, go to other tournaments when I wanted to go, erm, and that, that actually was a really quite a big thing because I hate the feeling of hanging around and waiting and relying on other people to get me around.

**Interviewer:**

What about things that have been difficult, things that you've had to overcome, what's made it tough the last 6 months?

**Tennis player 1:**

That thing to do with the recharging is definitely the biggest thing, I'm just trying to think of something else, I don't want to just repeat all that. Erm, to do with the matches, I'd say I've coped with this pretty well but I'd say it, it will, it's definitely one of the things that I was, something that I was consciously thinking about and trying to overcome the whole time, because I was on such a, a rich streak of form, every time, you know its, after a week or so its like waking up again, god I've got to do it all over again, cos I've won again, next morning I've got to do the same thing all over again, it would be so easy to just a) sort of let yourself down and

think 'Oh god I'm a bit tired I can't be bothered with this, its alright, I've won 9 out of the last 10 matches, I don't really need this today' or you could have the other thing where you just get so onto autopilot, you've won so many, you think oh I'm definitely gonna win this and you get a bit lazy almost. One of the things, the challenge I set myself was almost in a way that have you hear that playing the break of serve, never break till you hold, I was thinking right, that previous day's win doesn't become a win in my head until I've backed it up today, so I would, that was how I was sort of keeping myself fresh and focusing on almost, well not forgetting what had happened before cos I was sorting of using that but not coming back to that point, not resting on what I'd already done, cos that, you could see how that could potentially be a problem, and it's the same sort of, because its in the same country it's the same players, you might not be playing the same player every day but you're gonna come up against some player a few times and just the same group of people, it's the same thing, the same thing, no its not the same thing, its like 'yeah, come on', yesterday that didn't happen unless you win today'.

**Interviewer:**

Last time you mentioned what you thought would be important to your progress carrying on, what would you think now, for the next 6 months is going to be important for you making progress?

**Tennis player 1:**

I'm going down to train with Zac for the next 2 weeks, so I'm lucky to have, that, that opportunity as presented to me, but that is definitely gonna be a huge help to the start of the year because as I said its so important to be around those type of people so that you recognise that it is the same game that I'm playing. Also, the last time I had a few days training with him, I learnt so much cos he was so willing, like after the session he was, he sat down and talked to me, my coach and I for like an hour and he just seemed to be so willing to like pass over his knowledge so I think that's really given me, its like the Davis Cup thing gave me like a bit of a boost, I think that's gonna give me a bit of a boost for the start of the year, erm. A short term goal is to be in a position to be selected for that Davis Cup match so I mean, obviously and that's just, if that doesn't motivate me then I've got serious issues, I should hang 'em up [laughs], erm I'm always gonna have that in the back of my mind. Basically I think, I need, I say I need to, I want to get my ranking up into a position when I can play in Challengers as quickly as I can obviously because that sort of match, remember I said I had the sort of 6 or 7 decisions maybe wrong decisions that cost me between 4 and 4 and being in a 3<sup>rd</sup> set, what I felt in that is no different to what I felt a year ago in these Futures tournaments, slightly uncomfortable, playing

just slightly above my level but think how quickly I adapted to that, because I was playing it all the time I was able to adapt to it so if I can get into that sort of level, and play those sort of players week in week out, there's no reason why it would take me any longer than it had in the Futures, just being able to get my self in to that position often enough, with and the only one way to do that is a ranking, to get into the tournaments.

### Time point 2: 12-18 months post transition

#### **Tennis player 1:**

I felt like almost because, because they're a Challenger [tournament] and it's, I've got a conscious erm, there's some conscious level in my mind that knowing oh this a step up - it's a step up this is a level up from any Futures [tournament] and sometimes I feel I've lost the first set simply because of what the guy's ranking is next to his name, rather than because of what has actually happened on the court. So I'm sitting there thinking this is it - this is more to do with Lanzarote - there I played a guy 104 in the world and I lost 6-4, 7-5 - but I was sitting at the change over at the end of the first set 6-3 thinking 'I'm 6-3 down here and the guy hasn't done anything to have that'. I'd given him that. Erm I did manage to turn that round and I had a few chances to get the second set but I need to - in the Challengers I need to be able to have a mentality which I think I am actually a lot better equipped for now than the last 4/5 weeks. Suddenly I've been focusing on, even though I haven't been in the Challengers erm I need to think 'You know this is my level, I'm not out of my depth here' erm and it doesn't matter what the guys three digit number is or whether it's 2 digits or 1 digit next to his name - play the ball and have an attitude where rather than seeing it as almost a threat or wonder what, if I see that ranking I think 'Oh I'm expecting him to do something magical'. The guy was so ordinary, *so* ordinary - so if I can not see it as a threat and see it as 'Oh what a chance I've got here, I'm playing against somebody whose 100 in the world' and then sort of if you say 'Oh that's how a 100 in the world guy hits the ball, god look what I can from that, look how I can respond from myself, look how I can break straight back, just like I can do with somebody 500 in the world' And take it as that so that - it's just an opportunity rather than a threat because if I want to I mean I've got better at, the better players I beat the better I'll be and I'm not going to, If I keep beating guys who are 4 or 500 in the world and I keep doing that, and I keep doing that and I keep doing that then I'll stay at the same level. But to get, having opportunities to play, I should be wanting to play against people as highly ranked as possible.

**Interviewer:**

Did you go through a similar thing when you started playing the Futures?

**Tennis player 1:**

Erm I went through, well I almost, certainly the first three, I was in a state of - instead of playing, always playing somebody like I had in the previous two weeks ranked higher than me - I was known as the highest ranked player in all 3 of those tournaments and well I haven't - that's never happened in Futures before - in senior tennis for me. Erm so I'm playing, I'll play the first - I'll win the first round but I'll lose the second 7-5 in the third and - it's almost like I expect - I took for granted that I would take however you're playing in these matches would just be far too much for anybody in the tournament. But it wasn't as easy as that as, you know, I need to be in the other guys world more and be thinking well actually 'Every single match that I play here because I'm the top seed is the other guys final' - he's preparing to play the match of his life, he's got nothing to lose, he wants to beat me more than anything else so I should be saying 'Am I ready for that?' So arguably that sort of test could be more difficult than being an underdog.

**Interviewer:**

So it sounds like it's quite hard where you are at now?

**Tennis player 1:**

Exactly because I'm not, I'm at a stage where any Futures I enter I'm going to be the top two or three seed but I'm just, I could get in the odd Challenger but I could be sort of 3 or 4 places out. So I really need another 30 or 40 places and I'll be into the Challengers, week in week out I just haven't been able - with the sort of odd opportunities that I've had and they're not really consecutive. I haven't been able to just switch right on to it.

**Interviewer:** Do you think that's what you need then?

**Tennis player 1:** Yeah, I mean there's no reason why, it's no different to when I first started playing Futures but I was first in the qualifying and then I was losing these first rounds and finding I had so little time to do anything and then it only took me 3/4 months to adapt to that. Six months later erm less than 6 months later I won the, sorry about 8 months later I won the tournament. So there's no reason why having the same opportunities consecutively at that, at any level why I wouldn't adapt to that. Cos if - if I can learn just as quickly in that thing then what's the difference?



**Interviewer:**

In the last 6 months, is there anything that you've found as you've got better and progressed alone has got easier for you?

**Tennis player 1:**

I'd say - I'd say we got the level that I'm at erm, although confidence does fluctuate erm depending on matches won and performances not and everything like that, it's never going to stay exactly the same but I feel as if my lowest point - if I had a point that I'd say my confidence was at it's lowest - it's gone from there to there and it, what ever happens it would never go below that.

**Interviewer:**

So why is that? Why is it higher level of low confidence?

**Tennis player 1:**

I guess I've got six months more tennis in me. Probably 25, 30 more wins, good wins erm [the] fact that I am coming off the court against a guy about 100 in the world having lost 6-3, 7-5 and thinking 'I've only actually, I feel as if I've only actually given him 70% of what I can deliver there.' Those are sort of things that being around, being erm involved and having opportunities at that kind of level. I just know that I'm, I'm know that I'm getting better, I know how to get better, I know I've got the people around me that can help me get better.

**Interviewer:**

And you said you've spent some time with Zac? You've had some hits with them and stuff.

**Tennis player 1:** Yeah

**Interviewer:** Has he had any other kind of influence on you, or any other players?

**Tennis player 1:** Well he - I had two full weeks with him which was wonderful and then [as] I say he has kept in touch and we exchange emails you know, I send him emails about how the last few weeks have gone or some experiences in my game which I might want his opinion on and he sends back his opinion.. So passing that on and trying to help me not make the same mistakes as he had made.

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1 To what extent is preparation for transition demonstrated in the transition of this athlete?	Rating
<p><i>Player data 1: (Time points 1 and 2: Reviewer 1):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The learning period for the player involved level of play and time commitment. Initially there was frequent mention of time to recharge so that level of intensity could be maintained. There was also the mention of sacrifices and not being able to hang out with friends, however, the player knew that tennis was the right choice. What seemed to be helpful in preparation was the mentoring process with successful and experienced players.</li> </ul>	4
<p><i>Player data 1: (Time points 1 and 2: Reviewer 2):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>He spent time with higher level athletes or coaches, drew upon their experience and learnt the psychological skills that would be needed at the next level of performance.</li> </ul>	4
<p><i>Player data 2: (Time points 3 and 4: Reviewer 3):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The player talks about being aware of what is needed to progress and knowing that there are areas that need to be stronger. This therefore demonstrates a form of preparation in terms of identifying what changes are necessary for transition.</li> </ul>	3
<p><i>Player data 2: (Time points 3 and 4: Reviewer 4):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I see 1 and 2 as similar. I strongly agree with the idea that well prepared athletes feel much better in a new environment, and it is also very effective for their performance in next stage. The data file shows that the athlete has been developing his readiness for the next step in many ways. For example, he found out himself how his lifestyle was going to be different from junior level and it seems like he was ready for deal with that. I believe this readiness made it much easier for him to adapt to his senior athlete life. In addition, as he said he knows where he is now. I think this is a pretty important thing to know where he needs to go from now then he can step forward in the right direction.</li> </ul>	5
<p><i>Coach 1: (Reviewer 5):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Simple goal-setting/ visioning exercise. No detail given.</li> </ul>	1
<p><i>Coach 1: (Reviewer 6):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Firstly, the athlete had a period where they were competing at both junior and senior levels, giving the opportunity to experience the new situation while still having the familiarity of the junior tournaments. I also think the development of a plan about what their tennis would lead to helped to prepare them for the transition by allowing them to consider the issues they were going to face. Also I think the 'learning' of how to have a social and professional life, and to balance the two is a key theme throughout, and shows the maturity to take on and make the transition.</li> </ul>	5
<p><i>Sport psychologist (Reviewer 7):</i></p> <p><b>Modelling seniors:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Modelling seniors: 'Gradually starting to rub shoulders with people, you know, at the top end of the game, I mean, I know the Davis Cup experience was a tremendously self-confidence building experience for him', and: 'So he's being able to gain some extrinsic, external motivation from, from them', and: 'His fledgling relationships with senior role models', and: 'The director's taken to him, given him confidence', and: 'I know he has friendships with some prominent coaches who've also been a support, and I know that he's also has you know has friendships with players and other people he texts, like that, who've been an additional social support', and: 'Has been useful in increasing his awareness of standards, raising his game and learning a few self-management tools/'.</li> </ul>	3

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Adjustment to lifestyle: 'He [is] becoming accustomed to that, that lifestyle'.</b></li> </ul>	
<p><i>Sport psychologist: (Reviewer 8):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding the nature of the game. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accepting he needs to work hard and being committed to see that through.</li> <li>• Commitment to the path he has chosen (commitment, to me, comes across like a strong theme in terms of his own desire to succeed in this profession and the sense of commitment he gets from others such as his coaches)</li> <li>• I think he prepares for the transition by analysing the 'skill gap' between himself and other players- knowing his strengths and weaknesses, and also through comparison with others to know where he's making progress, especially in terms of rankings.</li> <li>• Learning from role models.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	4
<p><b>Mean reviewer rating Proposition 1:</b></p>	3.63
<p><b>2 To what extent is readiness for the next stage (i.e. an ability to cope with performance and lifestyle demands) demonstrated in the transition of this athlete?</b></p>	
<p><i>Player data 1: (Time points 1 and 2: Reviewer 1):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One of the reoccurring themes that was apparent from the interviews was developing confidence. The thought processes used during the readiness phase was supported by several statements such as 'having nothing to lose' and 'coaches and support staff believed that the player was capable, so they were', and successful players 'have the same experiences just like everyone else'. It appears that the player has acclimated to playing at difficult levels and as a result is experiencing success.</li> </ul>	4
<p><i>Player data 1: (Time points 1 and 2: Reviewer 2):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As the player reflects upon experiences on the 'Futures' circuit – understanding that he/she is amongst the better players in these tournaments and how this may affect his/her opponent. The player acknowledges that the 'Challenger' circuit requires a change in mentality – developing new psychological skills to cope with playing higher ranked players.</li> </ul>	4
<p><i>Player data 2: (Time points 3 and 4: Reviewer 3):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The player talks about being ready to move between different levels of tournaments and about certain points and matches which made them feel they were now ready to progress. Readiness appeared to be an important theme within this data set.</li> </ul>	4
<p><i>Player data 2: (Time points 3 and 4: Reviewer 4):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I see 1 and 2 as similar. I strongly agree with the idea that well prepared athletes feel much better in a new environment, and it is also very effective for their performance in next stage. The data file shows that the athlete has been developing his readiness for the next step in many ways. For example, he found out himself how his lifestyle was going to be different from junior level and it seems like he was ready for deal with that. I believe this readiness made it much easier for him to adapt to his senior athlete life. In addition, as he said he knows where he is now. I think this is a pretty important thing to know where he needs to go from now then he can step forward in the right direction.</li> </ul>	5
<p><i>Coach 1: (Reviewer 5):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some ad hoc learning about organisational demands of being on tour (bags, flights etc.) and of balancing social life/ playing demands i.e., responsibility, independence.</li> </ul>	1

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<p><i>Coach 1: (Reviewer 6):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The coach talks about the players increasing independence and responsibility for all aspects of his career, practicing, travel arrangements etc. Also, the fine tuning of other skills such as organisation help him to become ready and take on the responsibility of a career on the senior tour. The developing of a greater understanding about how his life will be as a 'professional' tennis player, i.e., time away from home, shows they are ready to cope with their new/different lifestyle.</li> </ul>	5
<p><i>Sport psychologist: (Reviewer 7):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Learning to manage under increased competition:</b> 'That it's tough out there', 'Coming to terms with the different kinds of, of competitors'. 'The emotional, the mental, emotional and physical, erm, drain, of, of playing tournament after tournament, erm, you know at, at the higher levels'.</li> <li>• <b>Adjusting to outcomes of winning matches:</b> 'Playing largely intrinsically, whereas now, if he doesn't win a match, he doesn't earn any money, he doesn't earn any points'. 'Being able to 'deal with the, the erm, the outcome oriented nature of, of the game properly'.</li> </ul>	4
<p><i>Sport psychologist: (Reviewer 8):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I think Scott assesses readiness through the perception of his ability and comparison to others.</li> <li>• Support from his family and coaches and being in a stable environment</li> <li>• Being invited to hit with top players (people he looks up to and aspires to), supports his sense of being ready to move into the senior network.</li> </ul>	3
<p><b>Mean reviewer rating Proposition 2:</b></p>	<b>3.75</b>
<p><b>3 To what extent is adaptation to the transition demonstrated in the transition of this athlete?</b></p>	
<p><i>Player data 1: (Time points 1 and 2: Reviewer 1):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• During the time point two interviews the player indicates that even though they are experiencing difficulty and not as much success they have to rise up to meet challenges: 'If I keep beating guys who are 400 or 500 in the world then I will stay at that level'. It is also apparent that the tennis player is in contact with Zac (stability within change) who is a successful player and has been a consistent source of support: 'I send him emails - and he sends back his opinion', and 'I can text him whenever I want and he has never not responded'.</li> </ul>	4
<p><i>Player data 1: (Time points 1 and 2: Reviewer 2):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not sure about this.</li> </ul>	3
<p><i>Player data 2: (Time points 3 and 4: Reviewer 3):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It appears that this athlete focuses on what is required more than actually making the changes. Although in broader terms they do discuss a wider goal of becoming the best that they can be and I guess that they are always adapting towards this goal.</li> </ul>	2
<p><i>Player data 2: (Time points 3 and 4: Reviewer 4):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are several related answers about this athlete's adaptation. Unlike his junior period, he is becoming used to dealing with his professional tennis-player life, such as frequency of travelling, hard training, and tough competition. Through the last few months of Challengers, he realised that the real field is a lot different from the imagined one and also he understood that it takes a longer time to become a part of it. This kind of cognition makes him feel much more comfortable with the higher levels of competitions. I can say that this can be the evidence of good adaptation. Moreover, appearance of adaptation is not only for his competitive life, but also for his life out side of tennis. The earlier interview suggests concerns in off court life,</li> </ul>	4

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<p>but the later one shows that he seems free from that, and he even found good balance between release and hard training.</p>	
<p><i>Coach 1: (Reviewer 5):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adjustment of vision to more realistic (top 100) goals.</li> <li>• Physical work - beating players (on the Challenger tour) he lost to previously.</li> <li>• It's my <u>job</u> to serve this match out': Stronger identity.</li> </ul>	3
<p><i>Coach 1: (Reviewer 6):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The developing of a greater understanding about how their life will be as a 'professional' tennis player, i.e., time away from home, shows they are ready to cope with their new/different lifestyle. Plus involvement in both junior and senior tours, the development of a 'social' and 'professional' life and acceptance of his role in his success by taking responsibility for his own career. The coach talks about the player 'seeing himself as capable of beating people in the top 100' which is better than a week ago. Plus there seems to be an understanding of what performance [he] is capable of on the court- gives clearer direction.</li> </ul>	4
<p><i>Sport psychologist: (Reviewer 7):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Learning to manage under increased competition:</b> 'That it's tough out there'. 'Coming to terms with the different kinds of, of competitors'. 'The emotional, the mental, emotional and physical, erm, drain, of, of playing tournament after tournament, erm, you know at, at the higher levels'.</li> <li>• <b>Different outcomes to games:</b> 'Playing largely intrinsically, whereas now, if he doesn't win a match, he doesn't earn any money, he doesn't earn any points'. 'Being able to 'deal with the, the erm, the outcome oriented nature of, of the game properly'.</li> <li>• <b>Role Models have helped:</b> 'Has been useful in increasing his awareness of standards, raising his game and learning a few self-management tools'.</li> <li>• <b>Finds it hard to adapt to changing environments:</b> 'Being a nobody, typically, not got selected, had been beaten in a practice set, and then, then left there, being luxury but being a nobody, and then ended up going back out onto the bump and grind of the circuit'.</li> <li>• <b>Shifting confidence:</b> 'I think it disrupts your flow a little bit, and his confidence wasn't as, maybe as high as it could've been'. 'He continues to carry much more confidence as a player'. 'The training base has also given him that confidence to keep going, because he's also been able to mix in with top players'.</li> <li>• <b>Feeling the Pressure:</b> 'Quiet five minutes, he didn't manage, or deal with that five minutes very well, he went into his shell a little bit'. 'I think he acknowledged that he felt, he felt the tension'.</li> <li>• <b>Dealing with the crowd:</b> 'He certainly felt the emotion of the crowd at that point in time, big game occasions, erm, and erm, and hadn't, hadn't had a big game occasion really'. 'He needs to learn how to manage himself'.</li> </ul> <p><b>Adjustment to lifestyle:</b> 'He [is] becoming accustomed to that, that lifestyle'.</p>	4
<p><i>Sport psychologist: (Reviewer 8):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being introduced to a different environment (big courts and audience) and being around more senior players- greater understanding and acceptance of the progression of his career path and the demands on him (page 4).</li> </ul>	4
<p><b>Mean reviewer rating Proposition 3:</b></p>	3.5
<p><b>4 To what extent does this athlete strive to achieve a sense of stability within the transition?</b></p>	
<p><i>Player data 1: (Time points 1 and 2: Reviewer 1):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Since the tennis player is seeking advice from Zac and telling him personally</li> </ul>	4

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challenging experiences indicating there is a desire to achieve stability. Close attention is paid to the advice received as Zac indicates mistakes that have been made and what he would do differently given the opportunity.	
<p><i>Player data 1: (Time points 1 and 2: Reviewer 2):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Player finds being away from home difficult.</li> <li>• Player acknowledges that the lifestyle can present difficulties and that his/her 'intense' personality can exacerbate these difficulties.</li> <li>• Player recognises that he must develop methods of dealing with this lifestyle</li> </ul>	4
<p><i>Player data 2: (Time points 3 and 4: Reviewer 3):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The player does talk about the overall goal of becoming the best that they can be and it seems that having this target provides a focus through any transition. They also mention the importance of keeping a good network around them such as coaches and family which will again provide further stability through the process.</li> </ul>	4
<p><i>Player data 2: (Time points 3 and 4: Reviewer 4):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I have not much to describe about this because in many ways, my answer for this question overlaps with the above one. In other words, it is hard to separate adaptation and stability.</li> </ul>	4
<p><i>Coach 1: (Reviewer 5):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No info given on this in interview. Impossible to say.</li> </ul>	Unable to rate
<p><i>Coach 1: (Reviewer 6):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As above - involvement in both junior and senior tours, plus the plan they developed may offer stability by keeping them focused and allowing them to track progress - it prevents the peaks and troughs having as much impact as hopefully they can be rationalised and accommodated in respect to the 'plan'.</li> <li>• The coach appears to have strong view on the difference between phases such as 'full time player' and 'professional' – [this] helps with the stability as 'support team' is useful and insightful.</li> </ul>	3
<p><i>Sport psychologist: (Reviewer 7):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>No change in some aspects of self-identity:</b> 'He's always seen himself as taking that pathway'. 'When his life has been tennis all along'. 'That no one is working harder than him, and therefore he will win matches, achieve his vision, maximise himself because no one works as hard as him, and its almost like a symbol, or an identity, and a trademark, that he carries, you know he has that reputation'.</li> <li>• <b>Personal Support:</b> 'I mean the team, myself Jacob, Sam, and his family, you know, have been together for a number of years now, and we've tried to keep that environment around him stable'.</li> <li>• <b>Support from role models:</b> 'Gradually starting to rub shoulders with people, you know, at the top end of the game, I mean, I know the Davis Cup experience was a tremendously self-confidence building experience for him'. 'So he's being able to gain some extrinsic, external motivation from, from them'. 'His fledgling relationships with senior role models'. 'The director's taken to him, given him confidence'. 'I know he has friendships with some prominent coaches who've also been a support, and I know that he's also has you know has friendships with players like Paul and other people he texts, like that, who've been an additional social support'.</li> </ul>	4
<p><i>Sport psychologist: (Reviewer 8):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He tries to achieve stability in his environment and in the transition to a senior role: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He tries to achieve this through others- 'access' to other players e.g., Zac and then seeing positive results. Playing well and being successful- confirms</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	5

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<p>his role in this stage.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowing where he was, where he is and where he wants to go and realisation of the progress he is making to get there - 'achieving a break through'.</li> <li>• Learning and gaining new tools.</li> </ul>	
<b>Mean reviewer rating Proposition 4:</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>5 To what extent is a continually developing identity demonstrated in the transition of this athlete?</b>	
<p><i>Player data 1: (Time points 1 and 2: Reviewer 1):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On two separate occasions in time point two interviews the tennis player mentions he has lost to a player ranked 100 in the world and that he felt he only gave 70% during that loss. While this could be viewed as a disrupted balance, I then to believe that this denotes break-through. They understand that while their confidence is both dispositional and situational there has to be a concerted effort to view setbacks as 'opportunities' to learn and [to] improve.</li> </ul>	4
<p><i>Player data 1: (Time points 1 and 2: Reviewer 2):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The player recognises how opponents on the 'Futures' circuit now view him/her <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledges that he is now highly rated on that circuit.</li> <li>• That he has progressed beyond the level.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	4
<p><i>Player data 2 (Reviewer 3):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There appears to be a changing identity as they are moving up the rankings and feel that they start to belong at the higher level. However, Scott's identity remains as an elite tennis player and I am not sure that it is 'constantly' changing. It appears to be more about moving towards the desired identity than changing one's own identity.</li> </ul>	3
<p><i>Player data 2 (Reviewer 4):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He is making progress. I can see that he is evolving throughout the data file. He discovered an actual professional tennis players' world through the experience, and he found his way to go. The data file also expresses the athlete's break-through by his successful event.</li> </ul>	5
<p><i>Coach 1: (Reviewer 5):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Again, impossible to say. The coach is fixated on his theory of 'social skills'!</li> <li>• I think we can see in the interview a really good description of the evolving coach-athlete relationship, and dependency. Less on identity though.</li> </ul>	Unable to rate
<p><i>Coach 1: (Reviewer 6):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The coach speaks of a time where the player 'unravelling' - i.e., they experienced a setback and had self-doubt about their ability to get where they wanted with [their] career. The player needed to refocus after some losses to better players and realise that they would still make it: 'He got blown off his own flight path by experiences with players a lot better than himself, and one in particular in his peer group which would be very different from him losing to an Agassi or a Roddick. But losing to him, brought out monsters from the deep, quite genuinely. And it changed - Scott was, out of nowhere, out of being on the very best form that he ever was, after a ten-day experience of being with Paul and in Jon's company and practicing with Jon, came back at only 60% of the player that he'd entered into that'.</li> </ul>	3
<p><i>Sport psychologist: (Reviewer 7):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Stable identity:</b> 'He's always seen himself as taking that pathway'. 'When his life has been tennis all along'. 'That no one is working harder than him, and therefore he will win matches, achieve his vision, maximise himself because no one works as hard as him, and its almost like a symbol, or an identity, and a trademark,</li> </ul>	3

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<p>that he carries, you know he has that reputation’.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Between two identities:</b> ‘Being a nobody, typically, not got selected, had been beaten in a practice set, and then, then left there, being luxury but being a nobody, and then ended up going back out onto the bump and grind of the circuit’.</li> <li>• <b>New Identity:</b> ‘I think whereas Paul and Zac were social supports 18 months ago, I think they’re less now. And now there are different people who are having confidence building, impacts on him.’</li> </ul>	
<p><i>Sport psychologist: (Reviewer 8):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a realisation of moving from a top-end junior player to a low senior-level player, and therefore mastering a changing identity. The grass court season may have caused the realisation that although he has made great progress he still has a long way to go and needs to continually develop and progress at different levels.</li> <li>• Rebuilding confidence at the training base.</li> </ul>	4
<p><b>Mean reviewer rating Proposition 5:</b></p>	<b>3.71</b>
<p><b>6 Model: In your opinion, how well does this model accurately reflect what is happening in the transition of this athlete?</b></p>	
<p><i>Player data 1: (Time points 1 and 2: Reviewer 1):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Based on the tennis player’s responses to the interview questions at different time periods it appears that the model holds up reasonably well. Specifically the arrows that revolve back towards: ‘Discrepancy between actual and ideal self’ indicate a dynamic process that is continually changing. The player’s comments are confident at times, reflective at others, but also suggest that the process they are going through will be a constant battle to become better and improve.</li> </ul>	4
<p><i>Player data 1: (Time points 1 and 2: Reviewer 2):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No comment given.</li> </ul>	4
<p><i>Player data 2: (Time points 3 and 4: Reviewer 3):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I think that an important consideration is the factors that are needed for transition to take place. This inclusion would provide some useful information for coach and athlete education. It seems to me that there are 3 broad factors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual - such as identity, ability, motivation, performance, satisfaction.</li> <li>• Relationship - with coach, friends, family, other players.</li> <li>• Environmental - Available competitions, funding.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• It appears that each of these ‘transition facilitators’ need to be in place for an effective transition to take place. Therefore, acknowledging the external influences to the player as well as the internal may further improve the model.</li> </ul>	4
<p><i>Player data 2: (Time points 3 and 4: Reviewer 4):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This is a quite well organised model for the athlete’s transition. It contains most essential parts of changes and challenges. However, I was wonder if those events occur in same order. I might think that some can happen in any stage of transition especially the breaking-through or setbacks.</li> </ul>	4
<p><i>Coach 1: (Reviewer 5):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It’s hard to say. I really need the model explained to me in more detail. Is it based on a previous model of transition (i.e., grounded theory), because I really struggle to derive it from what the coach has said – he only touches on limited areas in his own unique way.</li> <li>• Or perhaps not [I don’t need it explained] - its’ fairly intuitive.</li> <li>• The main areas of agreement are: i) Breaking through – this is logical and fits events. ii) Setbacks - this is logical and fits events.</li> <li>• New identity - I guess you need player interviews to verify this part of the model.</li> <li>• Adaptation, new identity and adjustment are well represented in the description of</li> </ul>	Unable to rate without player perspective



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Challenger tour matches.	
<p><i>Coach 1: (Reviewer 6):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The only point I will raise is: Is readiness related to wanting to make the transition? Can some athletes go through the 'developing readiness' but do so because they are at the stage where it is deemed that they should, and not because they want to - does that make a difference? This player seems to want to make the transition - is this an aspect of the commitment to the athlete role or readiness?</li> </ul>	4
<p><i>Sport psychologist: (Reviewer 7):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scott's transition seemed to evolve over time in much the way the model suggests, for example Scott went from immersions in the environment: 'Gradually starting to rub shoulders with people, you know, at the top end of the game, I mean, I know the Davis Cup experience was a tremendously self-confidence building experience for him'.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discrepancy between actual and ideal self: 'Being a nobody, typically, not got selected, had been beaten in a practice set, and then, then left there, being luxury but being a nobody, and then ended up going back out onto the bump and grind of the circuit'.</li> <li>Adaptation to transition: 'The biggest adjustments he's had to make, he's just, yeah, just the, the emotional, the mental, emotional and physical, erm, drain, of, of playing tournament after tournament, erm, you know at, at the higher levels'.</li> <li>Suggestion for additional component: Confidence? Confidence seemed to change and evolve throughout the transition, through working with seniors and working in more competitive tournaments, could this be added?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	4
<p><i>Sport psychologist: (Reviewer 8):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I really think this model captures the sequence of transition and supporting themes and reflects the data well. The reason I haven't given it a 5 is because I think there is something around the theme of control - what is and isn't in the players realm of control and how that could impact adjustment and readiness, but not sure where that would fit in and how.</li> </ul>	4
<b>Mean reviewer rating Proposition 6:</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>7 Any other comments</b>	
<p><i>Reviewer 8:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I think you've said somewhere about continual identity discovery- I think is fully supported- Scott has gone from understanding his entry level position as a player to various junior levels to being ready to transit to a senior player- this being a key mile stone and then working through the various levels this would entail. So I think the major times for readjustment to environment, to self-realisation of ones place in terms of their ability and where they fit into the whole world of tennis happens at these key milestones.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acceptance by senior peers I think has a big impact - just being invited to hit with one is encouraging - you feel like you've made it to the 'in' crowd. Learning from them and then seeing good results in your game would be very motivating and justifies your right to be in this crowd. I think acceptance from top players is an important theme. Your family and coaches have quite an unconditional duty to encourage and support you but it's something special when it's from people you aspire to.</li> <li>Something the coach said about his control of the various 'compartments'- I think that's really important. His sense of control and also his commitment to the process.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

Dear Parent or Guardian

**Re: Participant Information Sheet: The Junior - Senior Transition in Tennis**

I am writing to offer X the opportunity to participate in a new trial Sport Psychology programme at X Tennis Academy, run in conjunction with the Sport Psychology Research group at Loughborough University. The programme will run weekly from January throughout the Spring Term every Tuesday from 4.00-5.30pm and is free of charge.

The programme will involve information and preparation for the step up to senior tennis and forms part of a research project run by the Sport Psychology Research Group at Loughborough University.

Should you and your child wish to take part, please read the Programme Information below and return the attached consent form in the stamped addressed envelope provided as soon as possible.

**Programme information:**

The aim of this project is to educate tennis players regarding the transition from junior to senior level in tennis. Many talented individuals drop out of their sport at this stage, and it is hoped that through the development and testing of programmes such as this, researchers like myself will be able to help players to make the step up to senior level. The programme has been designed on the basis of research with World Class Lottery funded athletes and developed in conjunction with Loughborough University's, Dr David Lavallee, one of the world's leading experts on athletic career transition.

It is hoped that your child will benefit from this programme, and in order to test the effectiveness of the programme, information will be collected from your son/daughter via questionnaire and a diary of tennis-related activities. At the end of the programme, your child will be asked to answer a few questions in a short interview about the project, which will be recorded using a Dictaphone. On all collected information, your child will be identified only by a number and therefore their identity will not be disclosed at any time, nor will it be produced in any research publication or report. Data collected will not be used in any way other than for the purposes of the research project.

Your son/daughter is under no obligation to take part in the project and has the right to withdraw at any stage for any reason.

Should you wish for your child to participate in the programme, please sign and return the enclosed consent form at your earliest convenience (**and no later than 10<sup>th</sup> December**). If you have any questions regarding the research, please do not hesitate to contact me using the enclosed contact information.

Yours faithfully,

Beth Pummell, BSc, MSc  
PhD Research Student in Sport Psychology

Loughborough University  
School of Sport & Exercise Sciences  
Loughborough University  
Loughborough  
LE11 3HL

## *Appendix C*

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### **Moving from junior to senior tennis**

#### **INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

**(to be completed after Programme Information Sheet has been read)**

The purpose and details of this study have been explained to me. I understand that this study is designed to further scientific knowledge and that all procedures have been approved by the Loughborough University Ethical Advisory Committee.

I have read and understood the information sheet and this consent form.

I have been offered the opportunity to ask questions about my son/daughter's participation.

I understand that my son/daughter is under no obligation to take part in the study.

I understand that my son/daughter has the right to withdraw from this study at any stage for any reason, and that we will not be required to explain our reasons for withdrawing.

I understand that all the information provided will be treated in strict confidence.

I give consent for my son/daughter to participate in this study.

Son/daughter name

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of player

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of parent/  
guardian

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

QUESTIONS	PROBES	Notes
<p><b>Introduction</b> Welcome. Ground rules: Everyone's ideas are important and everyone must have the opportunity to speak. There are no right or wrong answers. Explain confidentiality boundaries.</p>		
<p><b>4. Warm-up question</b> What do you think the characteristics of a player who makes a career as a tennis player are?</p>		
<p><b>5. Adjustments</b> <b>Performance demands:</b> What's different in the tennis that is played at junior level and then at senior in Futures events? Then in ATP/WTA events?  What's different in the training they do?  <b>Lifestyle demands:</b> How do you think the lifestyle of a junior differs from that of a senior?</p>	<p>What do you think it might be like when you first start out on the senior tour?  (On court Fitness)</p>	
<p><b>6. Independence and Responsibility</b> What things will you have to learn to do for yourself that you don't do as a junior?</p>	<p>Sacrifices Travel Diet</p>	
<p><b>7. Scheduling/ Travelling</b> What do you know about how a senior player schedules their year?</p>	<p>(What's a typical year like? How do they choose which tournaments to enter? How do they know how many to do? How do they enter tournaments? When do they train?)</p>	
<p><b>8. Professional behaviours</b> In what way are successful senior players more professional than most juniors?</p>	<p>(How do they prepare for a match? After a match? Training? What's different?)</p>	
<p><b>9. Setbacks</b> What setbacks might you encounter in your transition from junior to senior?  How do you think players like ..... deal with those?</p>		
<p><b>10. Preparation</b> What could you do before the transition that would help you to prepare for the senior circuit:  On court?  Off court?</p>	<p>Where might you go for help or advice regarding this transition?</p>	

Interviewer: So, guys, remembering the ground rules, everybody's ideas matter and everybody has a chance to speak. Okay? So the first question: What do you think the characteristics of a player who makes a career in tennis are? Who wants to kick us off?

Tennis Player: Discipline.

Interviewer: Okay, what do you mean by that?

Tennis Player: Just like being focused on what they do and –

Tennis Player: Could you repeat the question please?

Interviewer: What are the characteristics of somebody who makes a career in tennis, as a tennis player?

Tennis Player: Commitment.

Tennis Player: Dedication.

Tennis Player: Passion.

Tennis Player: Not arrogant. Like, have self esteem but not being really like cocky like.

Tennis Player: Arrogant.

Tennis Player: I just said that.

Tennis Player: Well, look at Federer.

Tennis Player: He's not arrogant.

Tennis Player: Confident.

Tennis Player: I'd be arrogant if I beat everyone in the world.

Tennis Player: He's not – he doesn't –

Tennis Player: Federer is arrogant, if you listen to his interviews.

Tennis Player: I am number one.

Tennis Player: Yeah, I know, he's like –

Interviewer: Okay. So some people think arrogant, some people think not.

Tennis Player: You have to be devoted to what you're doing, always every day, because you could get sick of it if you weren't.

Tennis Player: You've got to enjoy it.

Tennis Player: You've got to be able to like travel all round the world.

Tennis Player: Yeah, you can't get seasick.

Interviewer: And do you agree with the things that they said already?

Tennis Player: Most things.

Interviewer: What would be the key ones?

Tennis Player: Dedication.

Interviewer: Everybody agree with that?

Tennis Player: Yeah.

Tennis Player: Yeah, definitely.

Interviewer: Anybody got anything else to add, other characteristics?

Tennis Player: Like, everyone can be one, yeah. Just depends what kind of game.

Tennis Player: Yeah, but they have, like Federer, like what characteristics they have.

Tennis Player: Most of them are quite respectable. Like, when you know they can be admired because they're not horrible to their opponents or something, that's when you can admire them.

Interviewer: Yeah. Anything else? No, are we all happy?

Tennis Player: About the mental side of it as well?

Tennis Player: Is it just mental things?

Interviewer: It's anything.

Tennis Player: You've got to have good fitness.

Tennis Player: Not mental, it's just like –

Tennis Player: You can see him like Rafa Nadal.

Tennis Player: The mental side is just like - most players are only like a couple on Saturday - and then really get angry. They need to have rituals.

Interviewer: Yeah, good. Anything else?

Tennis Player: Be able to work well with the media. And so, sort of to promote the sport and also to promote their profile if you like, if you're sort of an up and coming player, to be able to get sponsorships and things like that.

Interviewer: So kind of like X was saying, a bit like respectable and –

Tennis Player: Have charisma.

Tennis Player: Like, what's his name, Davydenko is like boring. But he's not to watch but he's not got a personality off court so he doesn't get sponsorships. You need to be like recognised to have sponsors.

Tennis Player: I don't see –

Tennis Player: As well, because he can't get a sponsor.

Tennis Player: But he so easily could if he wanted to though couldn't he?

Tennis Player: Davydenko is about seven in the world.

Tennis Player: He's three in the world.

Tennis Player: And he can't get a sponsor?

Tennis Player: Well, he could if he wanted.

Tennis Player: He obviously could.

Interviewer: Okay, guys. Let's move on to the next question. What do you think the differences are, and we're talking on court now, so in the actual tennis played, between like the junior tournaments and Futures tournaments?

Tennis Player: Hitting the ball.

Tennis Player: There's not – in the top game, there's not much difference, especially in the - the way they actually hit, they all very high standard, even if they're like 100 compared to like number one they hit quite similar. But it's more the mental side of stuff, that's how they beat each other. And like the juniors they can just –

Tennis Player: Hit the ball -

Tennis Player: One person can be a lot better than the other.

Tennis Player: Like can be changing pace as well, as you get older you tend to hit it harder. But you also get the consistency with the - it's a new pace as well, like learning to -

Tennis Player: To adapt and the way it's shot as well.

Tennis Player: Get used to the crowd and get used to new things.

Interviewer: Anything else?



Tennis Player: Like the fitness. Like they'd be much like fitter, and you can tell that they do loads of stuff out of court.

Tennis Player: Yeah, you can really tell they put in the hours.

Interviewer: Okay then. What about moving on then from futures to the higher levels of the - well, talking APT tour in terms of the futures, or the higher value tournaments or the woman's circuit?

Tennis Player: The players at the top of the ATP and the players at the top of Challengers and future. The players at the top of the ATP should know how to win matches, and more genuine and more experienced.

Interviewer: Okay. So what is it about them that allows them to know how to go about it? What do they know, any ideas?

Tennis Player: Well, different match, game plan, just -

Tennis Player: Situations and stuff.

Tennis Player: Yeah, like what to do on certain points and what's going to happen.

Tennis Player: Like Tomic who won in the Orange Bowl. Every, didn't actually drop a set in it, in the Orange Bowl, and when he - after he - like every time he had a close first hit, like 7-6 and 5, the second set after it was like 6-1, 6-2, always easier in the second set to like learn the opponents weakness.

Tennis Player: That's like the top people at the ATP as well.

Tennis Player: Yeah, but still -

Tennis Player: They'd be similar.

Tennis Player: You have to work out the play.

Tennis Player: He's like worth four ITF's and he's number 14.

Tennis Player: You have to work out how to play different players and in different games.

Interviewer: Yeah, so you're going to encounter a lot more people.

Tennis Player: Probably top guys are a lot more comfortable with their game. Sort of they know their limits. So they can change what their game plan is to suit the different players because they know exactly what they can and can't do. Rather than in the juniors you might be improving all the time, seeing exactly what you're capable of.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's a good point. Anything else? Okay. What about the training that they do? What do you think is different between the training that somebody in the top 100 does compared to the training that you guys do?

Tennis Player: They put a lot more time into it.

Tennis Player: Not really.

Tennis Player: Pressure.

Tennis Player: They put a lot more effort into it. Like, they know what they've got to work on and if they don't want to work on a serve and they won't they'll just think of something they need to work on, rather than just doing loads of stuff which is just irrelevant.

Tennis Player: Like they're more independent in what they want to develop. Like they tell the coaches what they want to work on rather than the coaches telling the players.

Interviewer: But what - specifically what would you see? Like if you were to take one of you guys and then, I don't know, Lleyton Hewitt or somebody, what would he be doing on a training day, what would you be doing on a training day, what would be the differences?

Tennis Player: I think we - he wouldn't be working on any technical things, he'd just be working on pure match play I think.

Interviewer: Anyone want to add to that, or disagree, agree?

Tennis Player: No, I don't like agree with that. Because like Henman has changed his serve and stuff loads of times, it's all part of the contest. It's always saying like Henman's been working on his service action and stuff. And all the players they sort of change technique, it's not just match play.

Tennis Player: The thing is you know what kind of player they want to beat though.

Interviewer: Okay. Any other differences that you might see, or similarities? What about their off court training? So in the gym, how much time do you think they spend in the gym?

Tennis Player: Probably more than on court.

Interviewer: Do you all agree with that?

Tennis Player: No.

Tennis Player: Yeah.

Tennis Player: Yeah.

Interviewer: So more than you guys, you think?

Tennis Player: Yeah.

Tennis Player: Yeah.

Interviewer: What kind of things do you think they'd be doing?

Tennis Player: More weights.

Tennis Player: Not just running.

Tennis Player: Yeah, they'll be doing - yeah. They'll be doing weights. Like stamina.

Tennis Player: Stomach.

Tennis Player: Or sprinting patterns. Like, what's that like dynamic exercise, that's like stretches with power, you know what I mean.

Interviewer: But we're not really sure kind of how much they'd be doing exactly.

Tennis Player: You'd be training more in the gym than you do on court.

Tennis Player: Yeah, the Williams sisters did more in the gym than on court didn't they.

Tennis Player: Yeah.

Interviewer: And is there going to be any variation in what they're doing?

Tennis Player: Yeah. Because they would like work on different things.

Interviewer: But over the course of like the year, or a month or whatever?

Tennis Player: Yeah, because if they had say an injury in a tournament, they need to get back and build up the muscle that was injured.

Interviewer: So if they're injured if they're playing a tournament? Okay. Right, moving on then from that kind of performance stuff, and still focusing on the differences between junior and senior, what do you think would be the difference in the lifestyle of like you guys as junior players and a senior player competing on the tour? So, you know, again, it can be anybody from Jamie Baker to somebody right up at the top?

Tennis Player: I reckon they'd have more facilities and stuff. They'd be given more things to use. Yeah, special treatment. Like, they've had physios when they're injured like straight away. And like we have to wait for a while before we go and see a physio or for the pain they'd get special fitness trainer maybe to be with them wherever they are.

Interviewer: So they've got access to all the facilities and all the things they need. But more specifically, like lifestyle, we're talking about what you guys do, day to day. So when you go home from tennis or during the day when you're at tennis, what are going to be the differences between what you do and what those guys do, do you think? What's their lifestyle going to be like?

Tennis Player: It'll be more serious.

Tennis Player: Yeah. More hectic as well because it's probably -

Tennis Player: They're like more structured like I might come in, might watch telly, might do this. They know what they do, they're going to come home, they'll eat at seven, this at like eight, so they're not just thinking on every day.

Tennis Player: I wouldn't think they'd have much of a routine. Because they're never in the same place for more than a month usually. So they'd always be changing things and getting used to different surroundings and things.

Interviewer: So what's the difference between that and what you do?

Tennis Player: Well, really we don't travel around the world. Well, yet.

Interviewer: So that's quite a major difference. Anything else? Otherwise it's pretty much the same is it?

Tennis Player: They probably sleep more.

Tennis Player: Like we're going home to our parents every night. They're going home and making their own dinner, and ironing their own clothes.

Tennis Player: That's really clever, ironing clothes.

Tennis Player: I reckon they'd get like –

Tennis Player: Go to bed at like nine. Well, like Rusedski used to like [go] to bed at like nine and get up at six and do like runs for two hours every morning.

Tennis Player: And work.

Tennis Player: Well, he got to like two in the world, didn't he.

Interviewer: So what differences does that mean then as well for your lifestyle? If you go to bed at nine O'clock.

Tennis Player: You're not going to have much of a party life.

Tennis Player: Social life would be pretty abysmal.

Tennis Player: If you're on tour though.

Tennis Player: You can't watch TV programmes.

Tennis Player: Hollyoaks then supper.

Interviewer: So we've touched on a few of the differences in lifestyle then. Now, as you get older obviously you take more independence or responsibility for things and because some more independent. What kind of things do you think you might have to learn to do for yourself when you make that step to senior level, which you don't do now?

Tennis Player: Reading maps, you've got to know where you're going.

Tennis Player: Deal with money much better. Because now we don't have to like - we get like money but we just spend it and that we don't have to think about oh we have to get this and all that.

Tennis Player: Picking the right tournaments. Because now you just enter as much as you can. But if you were older you'd just try and pick the ones that you thought you'd do well in, instead of like travelling miles, going out in the first round and then coming back. So that's like loads of money to lose on matches.

Tennis Player: And like the better you get, like Federer doesn't play that many tournaments does he, he only plays the big tournaments.

Interviewer: So you touched on something else there which is like scheduling. How do you think the senior players do schedule their year?

Tennis Player: They've coaches and stuff, people that they work with.

Tennis Player: Agents.

Tennis Player: Can't get Federer scanning through the book.

Tennis Player: They've got a manager or whatever.

Interviewer: Seriously though, how - if you were going out on your first year on the senior tour how would you decide what tournaments you would enter?

Tennis Player: Try and like get advice from other competitors.

Interviewer: But does anybody have any idea what kind of process those players go through to choose tournaments?

Tennis Player: I guess like you have to enter them and

Tennis Player: The ones that are like suited to your ranking I guess.

Tennis Player: And you can like enter them and then think it's not very good so you go well, I won't do that one next year. It's like experience.

Interviewer: Okay, so anybody got any more thoughts or insights on scheduling, anything else you might take into consideration?

Tennis Player: Location.

Tennis Player: Who's playing.

Tennis Player: If you've not like got that much money you couldn't travel to the other side of the world to go and play one tournament.

Interviewer: Anything else they might take into consideration in terms of scheduling their year?

Tennis Player: Working out when their training periods are, so they can actually prepare for playing for the tournaments for like four, five weeks constantly and then have a rest. Obviously training around the tournaments but getting prepared for the big - sort of prioritising the tournaments, as in how long you want to train for them.

Interviewer: Anything else? Okay, so what sort of time are we talking about that somebody might be travelling around for? Anybody got any ideas or guesses on that?

Tennis Player: Booking flights.

Interviewer: Yeah, you've got to book flights.

Tennis Player: Or you could just travel down the road, use the car. It could be in the seam country.

Interviewer: How long are we talking that they're going to be travelling for do you think?

Tennis Player: Nine months out of twelve or something.

Tennis Player: I'd say they'd be on the road half the year, probably actually more maybe.

Tennis Player: Sounds great.

Tennis Player: In a little camper van.

Interviewer: So what would the typical year of a player be then? Do you want to hazard a guess, what it would be like?

Tennis Player: Away from home a lot.

Tennis Player: On your own.

Tennis Player: Unless you're travelling with somebody, pretty boring.

Tennis Player: No, if you've got no-one going with you, they couldn't be like - you wouldn't enjoy it as much would you as if you had like a coach or a physio with you.

Tennis Player: If you're driving though you'd get quite tired.

Interviewer: Does anybody know though what like a player on a senior tour what their year is like - is anybody

Tennis Player: No.

Tennis Player: I don't know.

Tennis Player: They're just like

Tennis Player: They just tour.

Interviewer: Okay, let's move on then. But back to the question we were talking about before, the independence and responsibility. You were saying you've got to cook for yourself. Lots of people saying things like cleaning and ironing you may have to learn for yourself. Is there anything else that you're going to have to take responsibility for or become more independent about do you think?

Tennis Player: Yeah, tax. You would though, because like if you had –

Tennis Player: Make sure you do go and get sleep and eat well and are prepared.

Tennis Player: Like how much not to go out and stuff. Just to like stay in and prepare yourself for a match or something.

Interviewer: Anything else? What do you think - what else might change between now and when you're 18, 20, 21?

Tennis Player: You could go out and you might be more likely to go out rather than doing training and stick to it.

Tennis Player: But it's all right going out like when you've not got tournaments and stuff. You can't just be boring all the time.

Tennis Player: Yeah, but it's going to be there for you. So if you enjoy it then you might go out more than you focus on your training and stuff like that. Because you don't want to miss out on that part of your life.

Tennis Player: You've got to have more of a mind of your own. You won't have people telling you what to do as much.

Tennis Player: Yeah, exactly.

Interviewer: Anything else? Would you be more mature?

Tennis Player: I suppose.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay, next question then. In what way are successful senior players more professional than junior players?

Tennis Player: Probably like before their matches they focus more.

Tennis Player: Work harder.

Tennis Player: Before their match they probably focus more and like don't mess around before, like X did in Edinburgh.

Tennis Player: Probably prepare a lot more mentally before matches than we would. I'd say prepare altogether before. Like before – training, preparation.

Tennis Player: It's all match preparation.

Interviewer: Anything else apart from the preparation part?

Tennis Player: Preparation.

Interviewer: Ways they might be more professional?

Tennis Player: They have to compete on court. Off court.

Interviewer: Can you expand a little bit?

Tennis Player: Like more mature and self control and stuff like that.

Interviewer: Anything else on professional behaviour? So we've got preparing for a match, attitude.

Tennis Player: Yeah, that's preparation.

Interviewer: Okay, think again about your idols being ready. What would you expect of them?

Tennis Player: Preparation.

Interviewer: When they're playing or to be.

Tennis Player: Like they train harder.

Tennis Player: Diet.

Tennis Player: Yeah.

Tennis Player: All the little things add up to preparation.

Tennis Player: It does, doesn't it.

Tennis Player: Yeah.

Interviewer: So is that your final comments on that question?

Tennis Player: Yeah.

Tennis Player: Preparation.

Interviewer: What setbacks do you think you might encounter on your way to senior level?

Tennis Player: Losing.

Tennis Player: First hand? Every time.



Tennis Player: Injuries.

Interviewer: So, injuries, losing.

Tennis Player: There's a lot more players to play isn't there. There's like different types of player, not just like.

Tennis Player: It's not like just your age group is it, it can be anyone, no matter how young or old they are.

Tennis Player: You'd get tired.

Tennis Player: You might get like low confidence because you're competing in a new thing and then just decide that if you don't enjoy it or really you might still enjoy but not - because you're not winning or whenever, then.

Tennis Player: Low morale.

Tennis Player: Support as well. Because if you start losing and people start like - you might start thinking, oh maybe she can't make it or something like that. And you need like people around that are supportive.

Tennis Player: Financial obstacles. Sort of like, if you're not getting a lot of funding from wherever you're going to struggle to travel around tournaments and things like that.

Interviewer: Any other setbacks?

Tennis Player: I can't think of any more.

Interviewer: How do you think a player might deal with this, like the injuries, the losing, the confidence?

Tennis Player: People telling them that they can still do it. Even if - so like support. People like tell you it's all right, then you're more like.

Interviewer: Okay, so getting support from people. Anybody got any other ideas? No. Okay. Final question then. What do you think you can do before you get to the transition that's going to help you prepare for it?

Tennis Player: Learning about it.

Tennis Player: Sleep.

Tennis Player: Play senior tournaments early, like British tours and that stuff a couple of years before you're senior.

Tennis Player: Watch senior players.

Tennis Player: Ask them questions, if you know any.

Interviewer: So get information from them and watch them and ask questions. Anything else? On court and off court.

Tennis Player: I can't think of any.

Tennis Player: Learn about what sort of things you need to work on to get into the senior tour. Sort of like develop your net playing and things like that. And obviously build up physically. You'll probably need more things like that for the tour.

Interviewer: Okay. So on the courts, these are the things you'll need. Anything else? On court or off? Where might you go for advice?

Tennis Player: Coach.

Interviewer: Anything else?

Tennis Player: Talk to friends.

Interviewer: Where else might you go for advice?

Tennis Player: Pros.

Tennis Player: Yeah, ask Federer.

Tennis Player: Rusedski.

Interviewer: Anybody got any more ideas?

Tennis Player: We could ask a psychologist.

Tennis Player: Mum and Dad.

Interviewer: Everybody had their say?

Tennis Player: Yeah.

Tennis Player: Yeah.

Interviewer: Does anybody have any comment on any of the questions we've talked about? Okay.

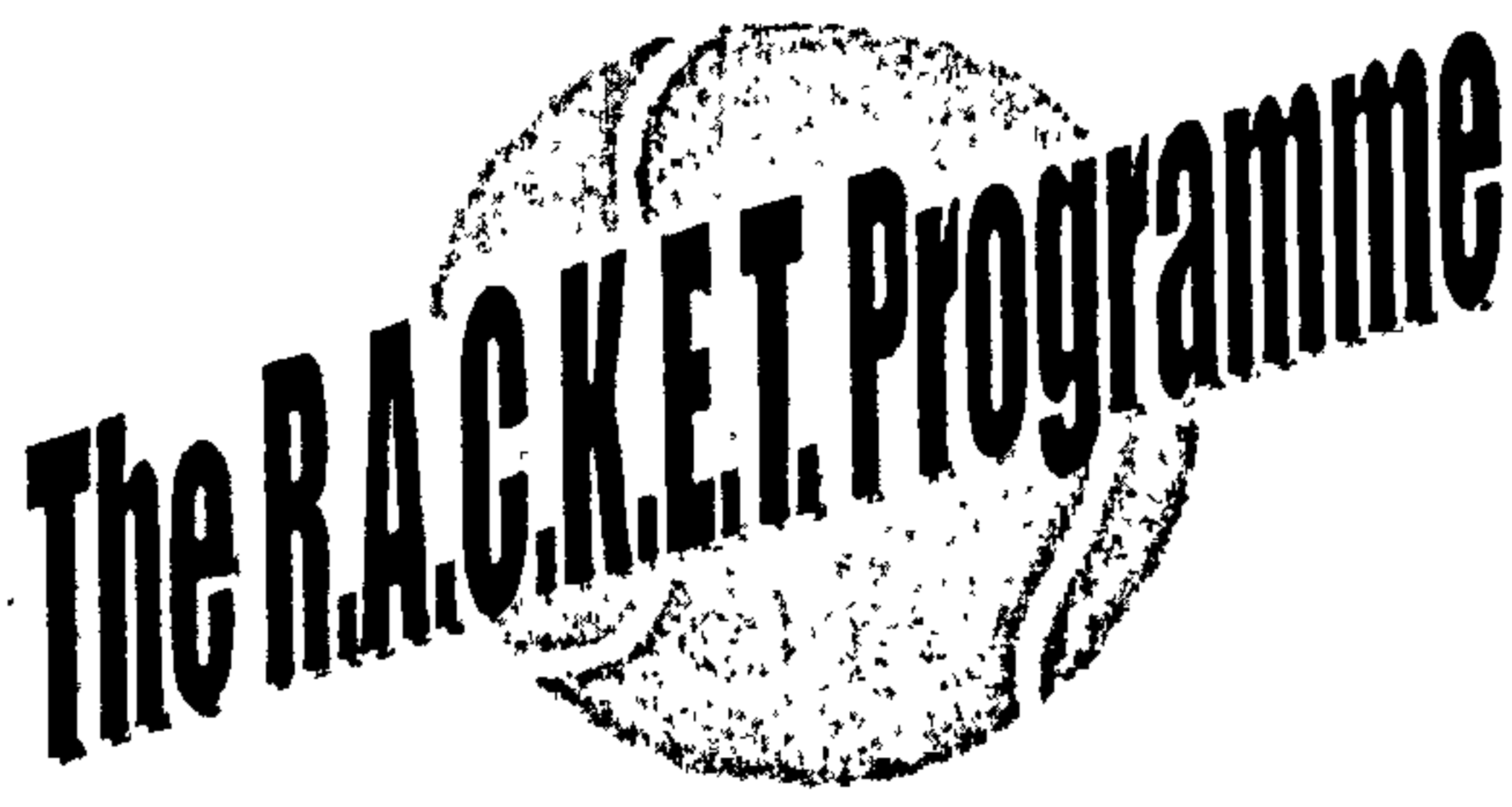
# Questionnaire

This questionnaire asks you to think about the transition from junior to senior level in tennis.

There are two sections: section A and section B.

Read and answer each question carefully.

There are no right or wrong answers. This is **NOT** a test. Please respond **HONESTLY** with how you feel **RIGHT NOW**.







## Appendix C

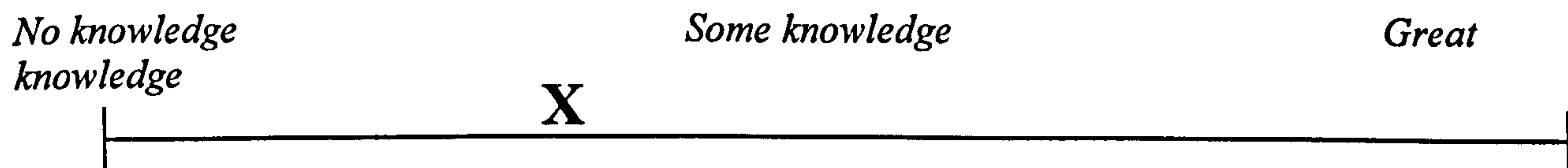
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### R.A.C.K.E.T. Programme Goal Setting

During the R.A.C.K.E.T. session this week, the group talked about senior tennis. Thinking back to that session, try to honestly think about how much (or how little) you personally know about senior tennis.

This goal setting worksheet asks you to assess how much you honestly think you know the areas of senior tennis which we discussed in the session. It also asks you to set a goal for the level of knowledge you would like to reach in that area during the R.A.C.K.E.T. programme.

For each questions you will be asked to mark your level of knowledge and your knowledge goal on the line using a **X**. An example is shown below:



*No knowledge* means you know nothing about an area.

*Great knowledge* means you know as much as a top senior player would know.

*Some knowledge* is halfway in between no knowledge and great knowledge.

**Please answer the questions on the following page in the same way as the example above. You need to provide two ratings for each question- one for your current knowledge, and one for your knowledge goal.**

**There are only 10 questions but please think carefully about each one and answer as honestly as you can. There are no right or wrong answers.**

Do not put your name on the worksheet, only the R.A.C.K.E.T. programme number which was given to you. This is not a test, and neither Beth, nor any of the coaches will know how you have rated your knowledge, so please answer each question honestly.

## Appendix C

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My R.A.C.K.E.T. Programme Number: \_\_\_\_

1. The level of knowledge I **currently** have about the differences between the tennis played at junior and senior level is:

*No knowledge  
knowledge*

*Some knowledge*

*Great*



During the R.A.C.K.E.T. programme, I would like to increase my knowledge of this to:

*No knowledge  
knowledge*

*Some knowledge*

*Great*



2. The level of knowledge I **currently** have about the differences between the lifestyle of a junior and senior tennis player is:

*No knowledge  
knowledge*

*Some knowledge*

*Great*

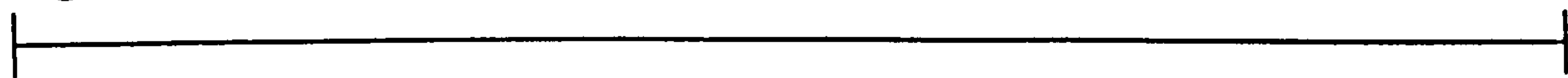


During the R.A.C.K.E.T. programme, I would like to increase my knowledge of this to:

*No knowledge  
knowledge*

*Some knowledge*

*Great*

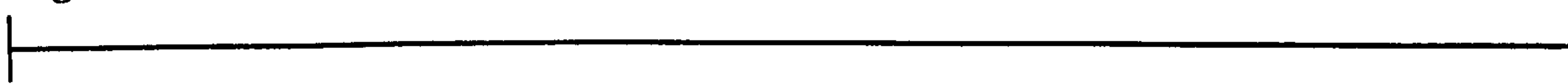


3. The level of knowledge I **currently** have of the different types of senior tournaments that there are is:

*No knowledge  
knowledge*

*Some knowledge*

*Great*



During the R.A.C.K.E.T. programme, I would like to increase my knowledge of this to:

*No knowledge  
knowledge*

*Some knowledge*

*Great*



4. The level of knowledge I **currently** have of exactly what senior players have done off and on the court to prepare themselves to make the step from junior to senior level is:

*No knowledge  
knowledge*

*Some knowledge*

*Great*



During the R.A.C.K.E.T. programme, I would like to increase my knowledge of this to:

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*No knowledge  
knowledge*

*Some knowledge*

*Great*

---

5. The level of knowledge I currently have about how much travelling is involved in being a senior tennis player is:

*No knowledge  
knowledge*

*Some knowledge*

*Great*

---

During the R.A.C.K.E.T. programme, I would like to increase my knowledge of this to:

*No knowledge  
knowledge*

*Some knowledge*

*Great*

---

6. The level of knowledge I currently have of how a senior player plans which tournaments to enter and when is:

*No knowledge  
knowledge*

*Some knowledge*

*Great*

---

During the R.A.C.K.E.T. programme, I would like to increase my knowledge of this to:

*No knowledge  
knowledge*

*Some knowledge*

*Great*

---

7. The level of knowledge I currently have about things I will need to learn to do for myself at senior level is:

*No knowledge  
knowledge*

*Some knowledge*

*Great*

---

During the R.A.C.K.E.T. programme, I would like to increase my knowledge of this to:

*No knowledge  
knowledge*

*Some knowledge*

*Great*

---

8. The level of knowledge I currently have of how much and what type of training senior players do is:

*No knowledge  
knowledge*

*Some knowledge*

*Great*

---

During the R.A.C.K.E.T. programme, I would like to increase my knowledge of this to:



## Appendix C

*No knowledge  
knowledge*

*Some knowledge*

*Great*

---

9. The level of knowledge I **currently** have of exactly what physical and mental match preparation successful senior tennis players do before a match is:

*No knowledge  
knowledge*

*Some knowledge*

*Great*

---

During the R.A.C.K.E.T. programme, I would like to increase my knowledge of this to:

*No knowledge  
knowledge*

*Some knowledge*

*Great*

---

10. The level of knowledge I **currently** have of how senior players behave more professionally than junior players is:

*No knowledge  
knowledge*

*Some knowledge*

*Great*

---

During the R.A.C.K.E.T. programme, I would like to increase my knowledge of this to:

*No knowledge  
knowledge*

*Some knowledge*

*Great*

---

Please hand this sheet into Beth when you have finished or at the next R.A.C.K.E.T. session, making sure that your R.A.C.K.E.T. programme number is written at the top.

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R.A.C.K.E.T. Programme Number: \_\_\_\_

Please circle the number that best reflects the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement regarding your participation *right now* in tennis.

1. I consider myself a tennis player.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

2. I have many goals related to tennis.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

3. Most of my friends are tennis players.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

4. Tennis is the most important part of my life.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

5. I spend more time thinking about tennis than anything else.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

6. I feel bad about myself when I do poorly in tennis.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

7. I would be very depressed if I were injured and could not compete in tennis.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

(Brewer & Cornelius, 2001)

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*Introduction: The purpose of this interview is education for junior players about the senior tour and the transition from junior-to-senior level. Therefore, please give as much detail as possible and emphasise any differences which you perceive, or have perceived between junior and senior level, what it takes to be successful at senior level, things that you have realised are important which you didn't as a junior etc. The video will be edited into clips so please don't worry about any hesitations or to ask for clarification as these will be edited out.*

Main topics and questions	Notes
<p><b><u>Background</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What's your current ranking?</li> <li>• Can you describe the path you've travelled from juniors to your current position (i.e., what tournaments did you play and when)?</li> <li>• What was that it like when you first started on the senior tour?</li> <li>• What have been your high points on the senior tour?</li> <li>• What have been the low points on the senior tour?</li> <li>• Have you encountered any setbacks?</li> <li>• What success did you have at U18's?</li> <li>• What made you decide to have tennis as a career?</li> <li>• Do you feel that you were ready to make the transition?</li> </ul>	
<p><b><u>Performance</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performance demands: What's different in matches – specifically at the different levels – junior to futures, futures to challengers, etc?</li> <li>• What's different in training between juniors and seniors?</li> </ul>	
<p><b><u>Lifestyle</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What's a typical day at a tournament like for you?</li> <li>• What's a typical day in a training period like for you?</li> <li>• What does playing professional tennis mean for your lifestyle?</li> <li>• How is your lifestyle different from what it was as a junior?</li> <li>• What things did you have to learn to do for yourself that you</li> </ul>	

## Appendix C

<p>didn't do as a junior?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you describe your diet?</li> <li>• What sacrifices have you had to make?</li> <li>• How do you achieve a life-balance on the tour?</li> </ul>	
<p><b><u>Professional behaviours</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are players more professional on the senior tour? In what way?</li> <li>• Training? What's different?</li> <li>• Can you describe your lifestyle?</li>   <li>• Could you talk me through in detail how you prepare for a match? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Physically</li> <li>ii) Mentally</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How do you review your matches?</li> <li>• What's been the hardest thing to get used to about playing on the circuit?</li> </ul>	
<p><b><u>Preparation for the transition</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you had much help from older/ more senior players?</li> <li>• What preparation did you do, on and off court, to make the transition from juniors to playing on the senior circuit?</li> <li>• What would you do now?</li>   <li>• Once you're competing in seniors, what gets harder?</li> <li>• Once you're competing in seniors, what gets easier?</li> </ul>	
<p><b><u>Summary</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there anything else which is important for juniors to know about making the transition which we haven't talked about?</li> </ul> <p>Many thanks.</p>	

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Dear Coach

**'Readiness, Attitude, Commitment,  
Knowledge and Efficacy for Transition'**

Thank you for your commitment to reinforcing the messages of the R.A.C.K.E.T. programme. Your reinforcement will help the players to think about how they can achieve their long-term goals.

In the session this week, the players are encouraged to think about what they can do, on and off the court, to prepare for senior level.

**This week's R.A.C.K.E.T Session Summary (6<sup>th</sup> March): Preparing for the transition:**

Research shows that players who engage in preparation for the transition to senior level experience a less-stressful transition, which consequently can help a player to make progress at senior level.

The players will hear from the senior R.A.C.K.E.T. players about the types of preparation they engaged in for the transition, which included activities both on and off the court:

- **Gathering information** about what it's like to compete at senior level. Players asked questions and sought advice from coaches and older players.
- **Watching older players** and modelling their behaviours such as how they prepare for matches whenever opportunities arose.
- **Learning from their junior experiences**, such as how to deal with success and how to cope with and overcome setbacks.
- **Having a role model:** Some players were able to arrange hits with senior players and/or seek advice from and ask questions of older players face to face. Others used the path which a role model had taken to senior level as inspiration and to help them to set goals for their own progress.
- **Training beyond juniors:** Trying to keep long-term goals in mind and training with the intention to make it to senior level.
- **Setting goals:** Keeping their long-term goals for senior success in mind, players were always setting process goals in order to keep them moving forward towards these long-term goals, realising that the most improvements came when they had identified specific areas of their game to work on.

**THEREFORE THIS WEEK PLEASE REINFORCE THESE POINTS WHEREVER APPROPRIATE:**

1) **Praise of important characteristics:** Where appropriate, praise characteristics which will be important at senior level and cite the importance of that strength in the senior game e.g. a style of play, effort, determination.

2) **Performance demands of senior level:** Where possible relate your coaching to what is required in the senior game, thereby educating the athletes about the demands at senior level e.g. 'Today I'd like you to focus on..... The ability to do this is crucial in the senior game'.

3) **Linking process goals to long-term goals:** When players are identifying process goals for a training session, encourage them to link their goals to their long-term goals and/or goals for senior level i.e. thinking about the type of game they want to develop in the long-term.

4) **Preparing for the transition:** Where possible, encourage players to gather information about senior level by asking questions, learning from modelling older players/role models. Encourage them to think about how their junior experiences (positive and negative) can help them to prepare for senior level.

Please record number of references you make to any particular player using a tally on the attached sheet. If you have any questions, please ask/call Beth.

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Week commencing:		D a y	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon
<b>R.A.C.K.E.T. Areas for reinforcement</b>									
Player 8	Praise of important characteristics								
	Performance demands of senior level								
	Linking process goals to long-term goals								
	Preparing for the transition								
Player 7	Praise of important characteristics								
	Performance demands of senior level								
	Linking process goals to long-term goals								
	Preparing for the transition								
Player 6	Praise of important characteristics								
	Performance demands of senior level								
	Linking process goals to long-term goals								
	Preparing for the transition								
Player 5	Praise of important characteristics								
	Performance demands of senior level								
	Linking process goals to long-term goals								
	Preparing for the transition								
Player 4	Praise of important characteristics								
	Performance demands of senior level								
	Linking process goals to long-term goals								
	Preparing for the transition								
Player 3	Praise of important characteristics								
	Performance demands of senior level								
	Linking process goals to long-term goals								
	Preparing for the transition								
Player 2	Praise of important characteristics								
	Performance demands of senior level								
	Linking process goals to long-term goals								
	Preparing for the transition								
Player 1	Praise of important characteristics								
	Performance demands of senior level								
	Linking process goals to long-term goals								
	Preparing for the transition								

## Appendix C

### **Directions:**

You have now been part of the R.A.C.K.E.T. programme for three months and I would like to ask you some questions regarding your thoughts and feelings about the project. Please be as honest as possible when answering these questions as there are no right or wrong answers, and it is your opinions that are important. For some of the questions, I will ask you to answer a question using a number between 1 and 7, which I will explain for you. For all of the other questions, please give as much information as possible and please ask me to explain if anything does not make sense or you are unsure about a question.

### **Part 1: Outcomes**

1) What did you like about the R.A.C.K.E.T. programme?

2) Do you think that the topic (the junior-to-senior transition) is an important one for junior players to get support with? Why do you think that?

3) What do you think the aims of the R.A.C.K.E.T. programme were?

4) Has the information provided in the programme been useful to you?

Not at all Very much so  
1      2      3      4      5      6      7

In what ways has the information been useful to you?

5) Which part or parts of the programme were most useful?

What was useful about that?

6) Which part or parts of the programme were least useful?

Why do you think that wasn't useful?

7) In what ways have you benefited from the programme? Probe: How?

8) Do you feel that you are more prepared for the transition from junior to senior level than you were before the programme?

Not at all Very much so  
1      2      3      4      5      6      7

In what ways do you feel more prepared for the transition?

9) Do you feel more committed to make the transition from junior to senior level than you did before the programme?

Not at all Very much so  
1      2      3      4      5      6      7

In what ways are you more committed to the transition?

## Appendix C

10) Do you feel more confident in your ability successfully to cope with the transition from junior to senior level than you did before the programme?

Not at all  
1      2      3      4      5      6      7  
Very much so

In what ways do you feel more confident in your ability for the transition?

11) Do you feel that you are more knowledgeable about what it is like at senior level than you were before the programme?

Not at all  
1      2      3      4      5      6      7  
Very much so

In what ways are you more knowledgeable about senior level?

13) Do you feel that you have developed any skills which will be useful to you for making the transition?

Not at all  
1      2      3      4      5      6      7  
Very much so

What skills have you developed?

14) Has anything else changed about you or your tennis in the last three months as a result of taking part in the R.A.C.K.E.T. programme?

15) Did you feel that you fully stuck to the job of carrying out all the tasks in the project?

Not at all  
1      2      3      4      5      6      7  
Very much so

Were there any aspects which you didn't do so well?

Why do you think you didn't complete those so well?

16) Do you feel that you were fully committed to the project throughout?

Not at all  
1      2      3      4      5      6      7  
Very much so

Were there any aspects which you weren't so committed to?

Why do you think you didn't complete those so well?



## Appendix C

### Part 2: Methods/Procedures

I would like to ask some questions relating to your thoughts and feelings about the videos, the coaches, the programme tasks and the programme leader in the project. Please be totally honest as your opinions are useful in evaluating the programme. Therefore please provide as much information as you can.

#### **Coaches**

1) Do you feel that the academy coaches have made a valuable contribution to your knowledge about the transition to senior level over the last three months?

Not at all Very much so

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

In what ways have the coaches made a contribution to you knowledge about senior level over the last three months?

Have the coaches talked about tennis at senior level more over the last three months than they did before the programme?

2) Do you feel that the academy coaches they have supported you over the last three months with regard to making the transition from junior-to-senior level?

Not at all Very much so

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

In what ways have the coaches been supportive?

How has this affected you?

3) Do you feel that the academy coaches have helped you to prepare for the transition to senior level over the last three months?

Not at all Very much so

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

In what ways have the coaches done to this?

4) Do you feel that the academy coaches have made a valuable contribution to how confident you feel in your ability successfully to cope with the transition to senior level?

Not at all Very much so

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

In what ways have the coaches contributed to this?

5) Do you feel that the academy coaches have made a valuable contribution to how committed you feel to trying to make the transition to senior level?

Not at all Very much so

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

In what ways have the coaches contributed to this?

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### Programme leader

1) Do you feel that the programme leader has made a valuable contribution to your knowledge about the transition to senior level over the last three months?

Not at all Very much so  
1      2      3      4      5      6      7

In what ways has the programme leader made a contribution to your knowledge about senior level?

2) Do you feel that the programme leader has supported you over the last three months with regard to making the transition from junior-to-senior level?

Not at all Very much so  
1      2      3      4      5      6      7

In what ways has the programme leader been supportive?  
How has this affected you?

3) Do you feel that the programme leader has helped you to prepare for the transition to senior level over the last three months?

Not at all Very much so  
1      2      3      4      5      6      7

In what ways has the programme leader contributed to this?

4) Do you feel that the programme leader has made a valuable contribution to how confident you feel in your ability successfully to cope with the transition to senior level?

Not at all Very much so  
1      2      3      4      5      6      7

In what ways has the programme leader contributed to this?

5) Do you feel that the programme leader has made a valuable contribution to how committed you feel to trying to make the transition to senior level?

Not at all Very much so  
1      2      3      4      5      6      7

In what ways has the programme leader contributed to this?

5) Was it beneficial that you already knew the programme leader before the project, or would it have been better to have someone leading the project who you did not know?

Why do you think that?

## Appendix C

### Videos

1) Do you feel that the videos you have watched during the R.A.C.K.E.T. programme have made a valuable contribution to your knowledge about the transition to senior level?

Not at all

Very much so

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

In what ways have the videos made a contribution to your knowledge about senior level?

2) Do you feel that the videos have made a valuable contribution to how prepared you feel to make the transition to senior level?

Not at all

Very much so

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

In what ways have the videos contributed to this?

3) Do you feel that the videos have made a valuable contribution to how confident you feel in your ability successfully to cope with the transition to senior level?

Not at all

Very much so

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

In what ways have the videos contributed to this?

4) Do you feel that the videos have made a valuable contribution to how committed you feel to trying to make the transition to senior level?

Not at all

Very much so

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

In what ways have the videos contributed to this?

### Other

1) Has anything or anyone else contributed to your preparation for senior level over the last three months?

If yes, what/who?

How have they/it contributed?

### Ecological Value/ General comments

1) If more players could get help from a programme like R.A.C.K.E.T, as you have done, do you think this would be a good idea? If yes, can you tell me why you think it is a good idea? If no, why not?

2) Is there anything about the programme which you felt was irrelevant, or not particularly helpful?

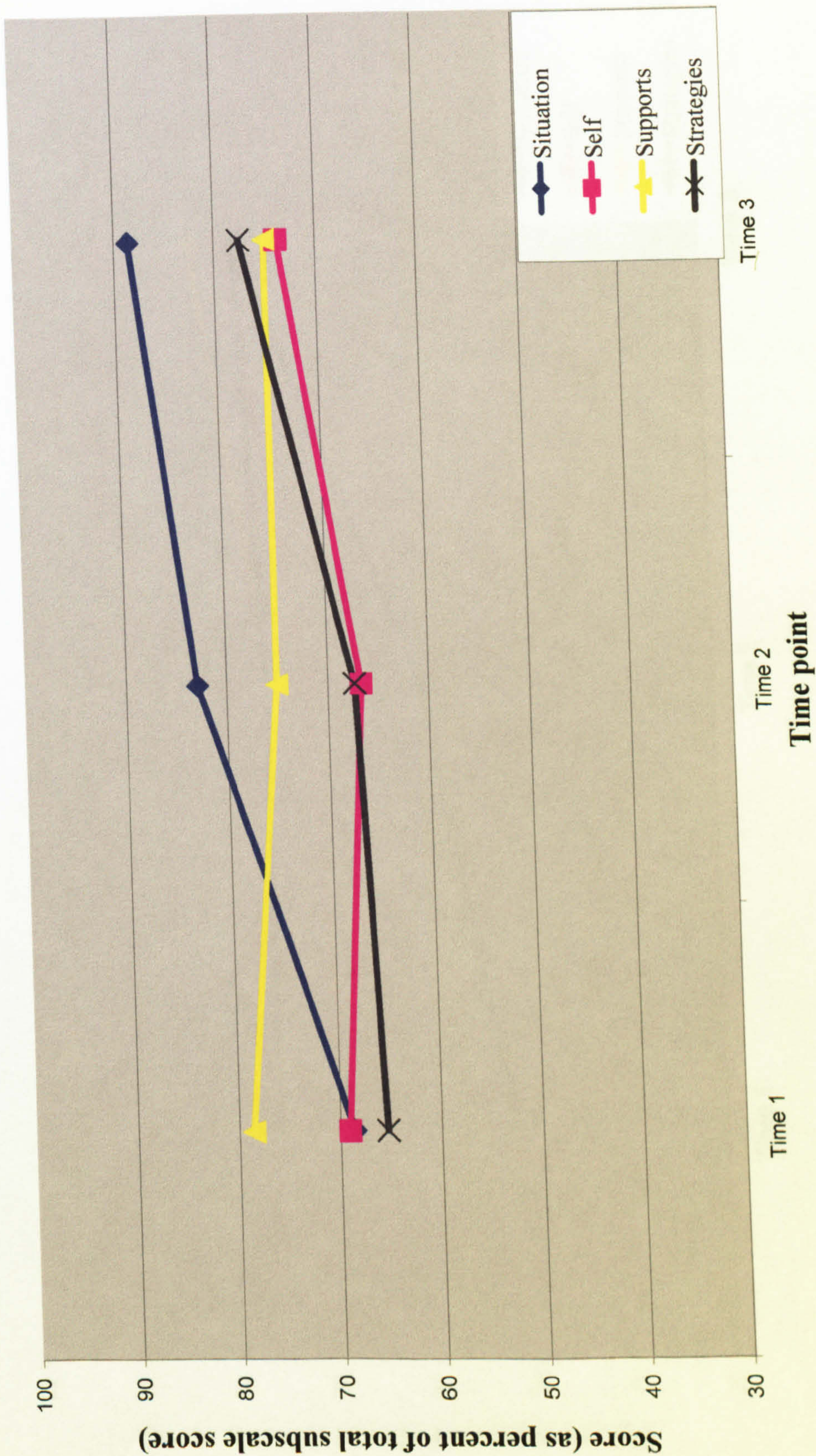
3) Is there anything about the programme which you think could be improved to make it more useful for players?

4) Finally, is there anything about the programme which we haven't covered or anything else you would like to say?

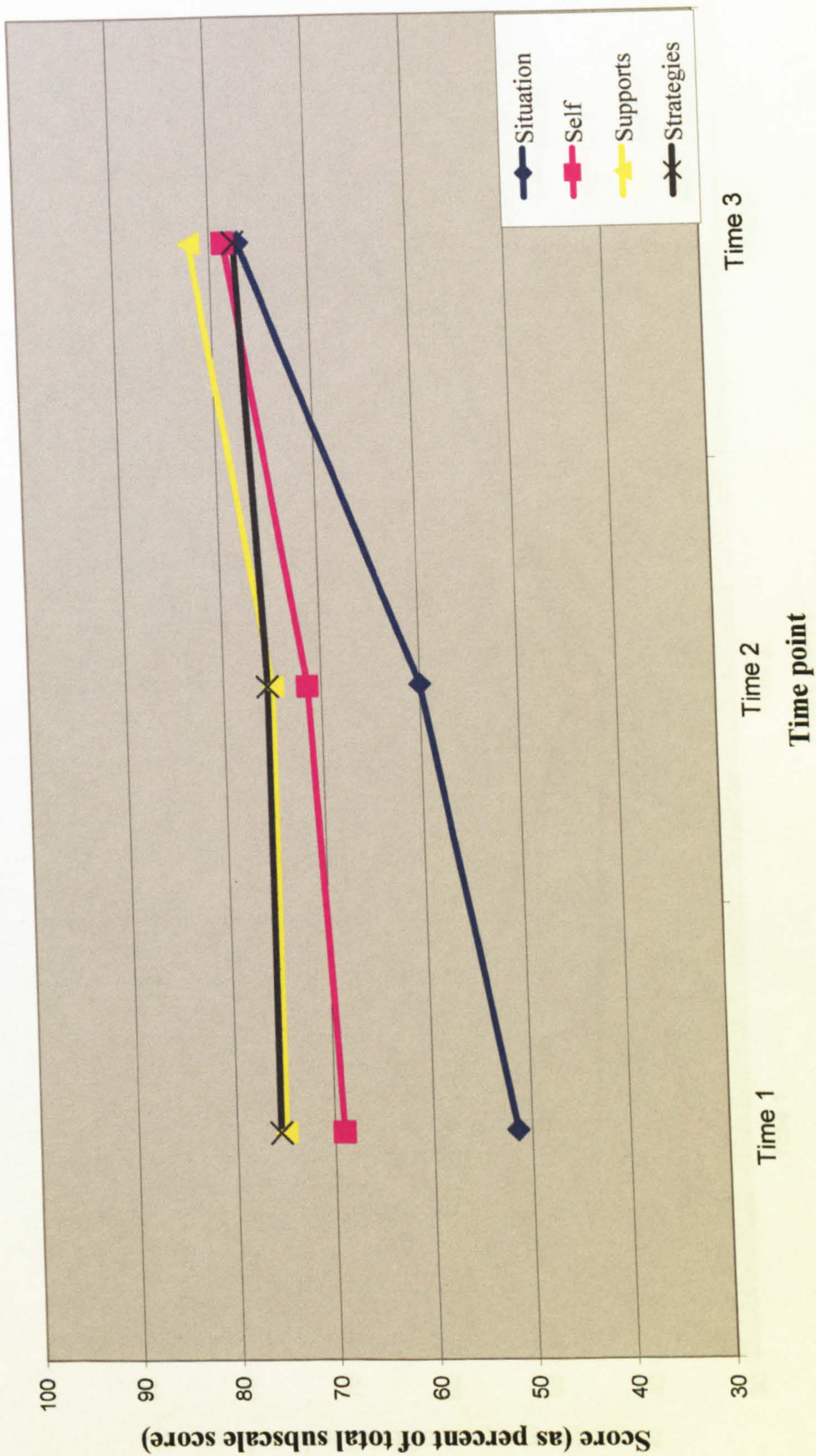
Participant no.	Delivery method														Mean (SD)									
	Coaches							Programme leader								Videos								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Mean (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6		7	Mean (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Contribution to transition knowledge	5	3	3	4	5	4	6	4.29 (1.11)	6	7	5	6	7	6	7	6.29 (0.76)	6	7	7	7	7	6.5	7	6.79 (0.39)
Support for transition	5	5	4	3	4	4	5	4.29 (0.76)	6	7	7	5	6	6	6	6.14 (0.69)	N/A							
Contribution to transition preparation	5	5	3	3	4	5	5	4.29 (0.95)	6	7	6	7	7		6	6.5 (0.55)	6	7	4	6	7	6	7	6.14 (1.07)
Contribution to transition efficacy	5	5	4	2	3	3	5	3.86 (1.21)	5	7	6	5	7	5.5	6	5.93 (0.84)	5	7	6	6	7	5	5	5.86 (0.90)
Contribution to commitment for transition	5	6	4	4	5	5	3	4.71 (1.11)	6	7	6	4	7	5.5	7	6.07 (1.10)	6	7	5	3	7	5	7	5.71 (0.98)
Mean overall contribution								4.29 (1.02)								6.18 (0.79)								6.13 (1.07)

Perceived contribution of teaching methods to transition preparation (on 1-7 Likert-type Scale; 1 = not at all, 7 = very much so).

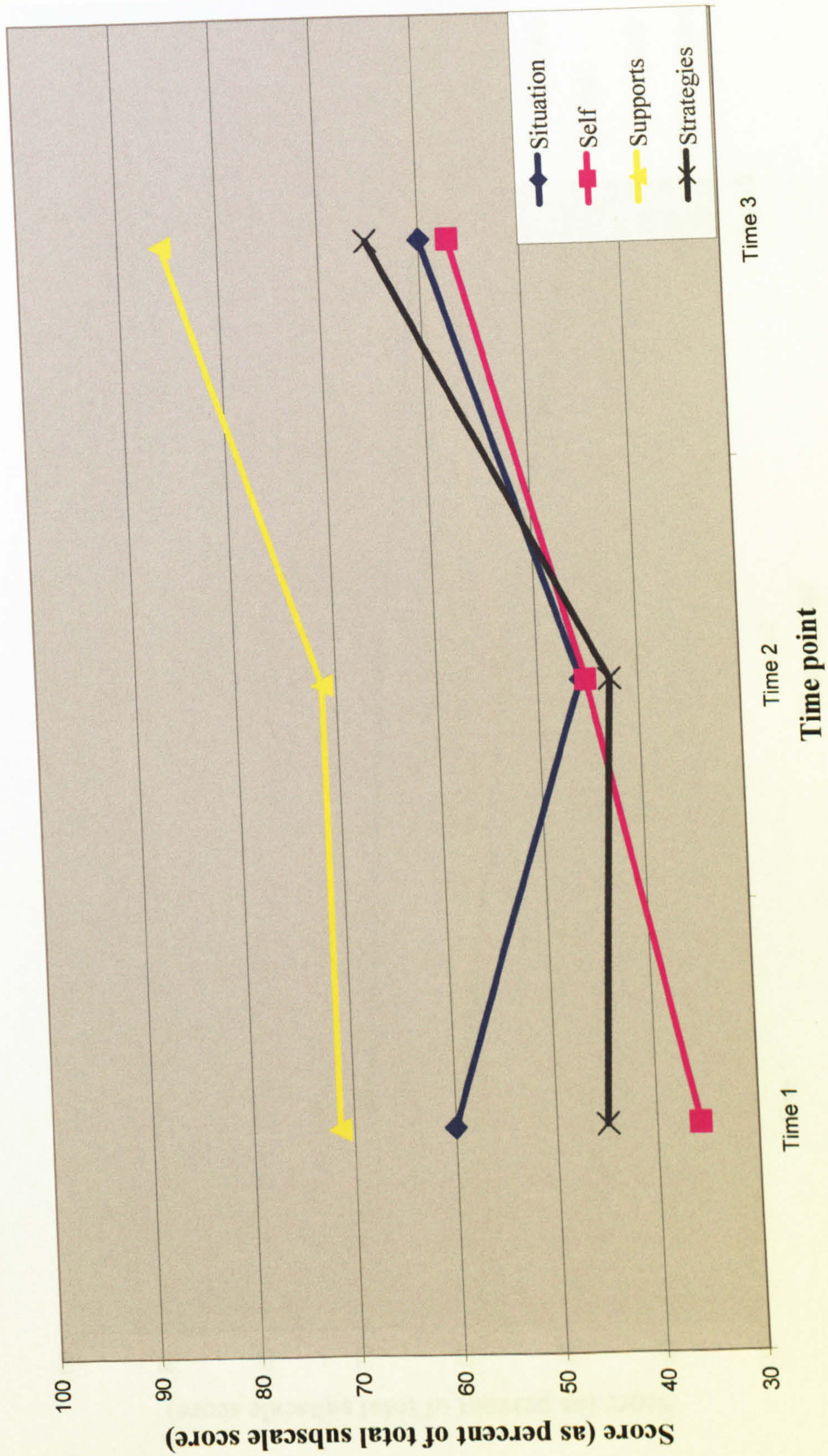
Participant 1



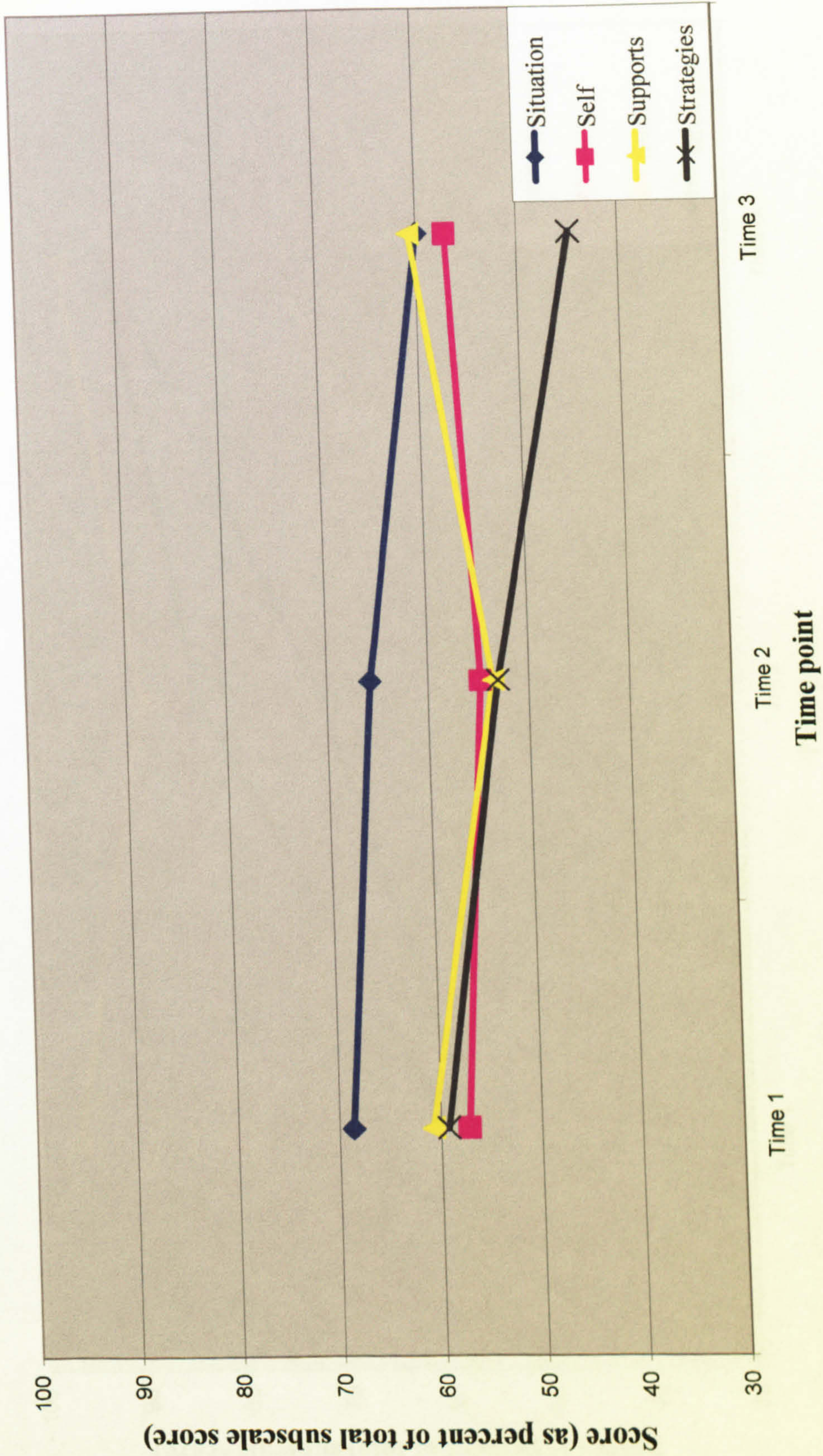
Participant 2



Participant 3

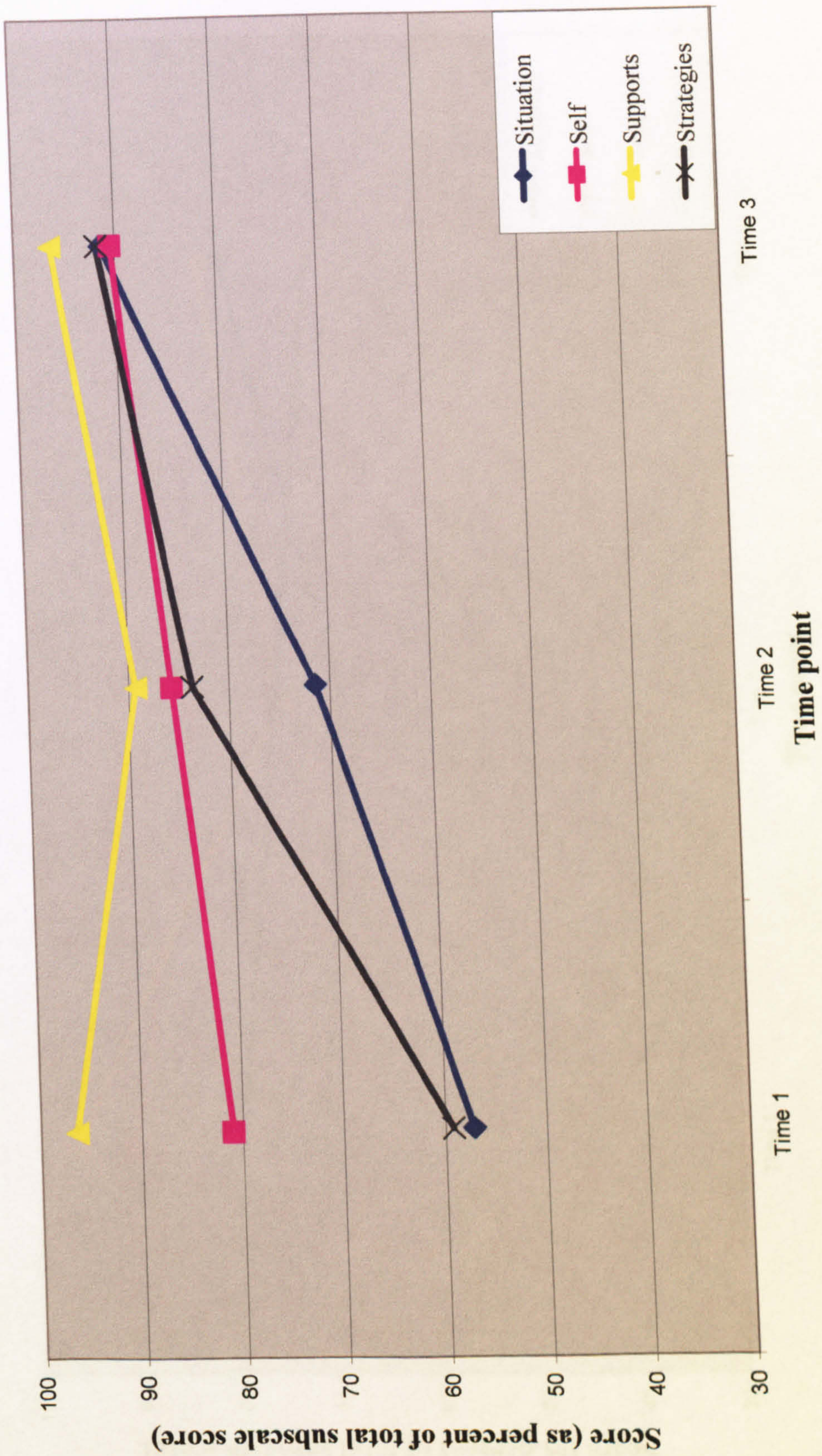


Participant 4

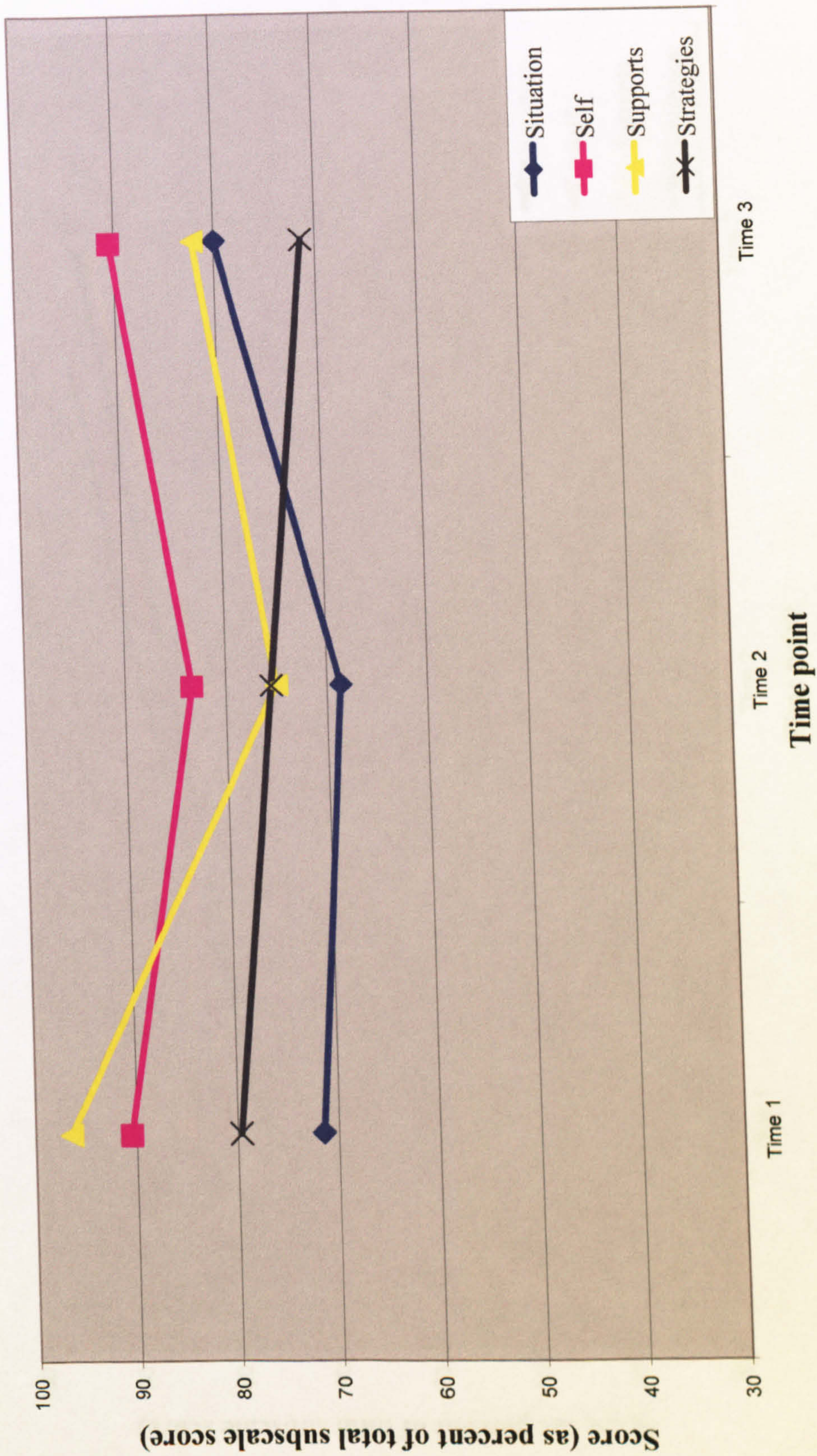




Participant 5



Participant 6



Participant 7

