

## Abstract

The aim of the study was to explore what sport federations look for when recruiting elite athletes into coaching, and what resources are offered to retiring elite athletes transitioning to coaching careers. We interviewed 10 federation officials representing eight different sports, winter and summer, individual and team sports. Thematic analysis was employed and four ‘what recruiters look for’ higher-order themes were found, including: having the whole package essential for coaching, personal attributes displayed in their time as an athlete, singular dedication to the sport, and the knowing them from their time as an athlete. Three higher-order themes surrounding resources were identified, on the support provided to those going from athlete-to-coach to facilitate a stable start, professional development, and holistic wellbeing. These resources were also considered in relation to the phase at which they were offered in the transition process, such as upon hiring, early on in the career and as ongoing ones. While a standard or universal approach to this does not appear to exist, practices and approaches were identified here that were considered within the scope of the existing research and can be used to inform future coach development work.

*Keywords:* recruitment, athlete-to-coach, federation, coach development

### An Exploration of Recruitment of Elite Athletes to Coaching within Federations

Elite athletes are regularly recruited into coaching, and occasionally they are inadequately equipped, having only their athletic experience and a limited start-up coaching toolkit as discussed in the fast-tracking pathway research (Blackett & Evans, 2018; Blackett et al., 2017, 2019; 2020; McMahon et al., 2020; Rynne, 2014). These tools appear to be inadequate to meet the challenges inherent in going from athlete-to-coach (Chroni et al., 2020) and for entering the coaching profession (Rynne, 2014). Effective coaching requires professional (contextual), interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge and skills along with a personal philosophy and understanding of values [Côté & Gilbert, 2009; International Council for Coaching Excellence (ICCE), 2013] -- all of which require time to be learned, developed, and understood. According to Chroni et al. (2020), the shift from an athletic career as a competitor to a vocational career as a coach entails re-identification(s) as the individual needs to undergo adjustments related to identity, skills, and competencies, which does not happen overnight. This shift can cause dissonance as the new coaching role demands that the person act as a coach and deliver on the job from the start.

Research advancements and interventions in the areas of athletic career and retirement from sport have provided fundamental knowledge and practices in understanding and supporting the athlete to transition beyond sport (see Park et al., 2013; Stambulova, 2017). Nevertheless, the athlete-to-coach mode of retirement involves a distinctive and abrupt transition that requires adjustments, coping, and support for meeting demands and barriers not previously identified in the literature (Chroni et al., 2020). While for many retiring athletes the transition to coaching has been perceived as an easy and comfortable one since the realm of sport is familiar (Chroni, 2014; Kavanaugh, 2010) and often fills the void of retirement (Lavalley et al., 1996), it is not as straightforward as it seems at first glance (Chroni, 2014; Chroni et al., 2020). Early career coaches who shifted to coaching straight out

of athletic retirement reported experiencing multiple job challenges related to not having transferred their being(s) and doing(s) from athlete-to-coach (Chroni, 2014; Chroni et al., 2020), such as caring for oneself to caring for others and being confronted with a context different from their own athletic experience.

The objective of the present study was to expand the existing knowledge of this within sport transition, by exploring aspects of the transition from the prospective employers' point of view. We sought to learn how federations that hire retiring elite athletes as coaches approach the person and circumstance. Recruitment, in this context, is operationally defined as a process of exploring retiring athletes' interest to coach, observing their skills and traits, and finally inviting an individual to try coaching, with no binding commitment of employment on either side. This process is different from traditional recruiting, involving the headhunting of individuals with well-developed skills and expertise for a job (see for instance, Breugh & Starke, 2000; Edwards & Washington, 2013; Green, 2005). The key purpose here is to harness the athlete's experience to develop the next generation. In this setting, federations offer opportunities to untrained unproven people who have excelled as athletes, based on a belief that they might 'have something' and that their elite experience will translate into good coaching. Our inquiry focused on learning what federations look for when recruiting these individuals as coaches.

### **On Athlete Retirement Within and Outside Sport**

Through the years, athletic retirement has been explored via non-sport and sport-specific models (e.g., Schlossberg, 1981, 2004; Stambulova; 2003; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Early on, researchers borrowed social gerontological models and thanatological models before employing transition models like Schlossberg's (1981, 2004) as the most suitable based on their openness toward positive and negative retirement experiences and various influencing factors related to adjustment(s) (for a review, see Park et al., 2013). Eventually,

sport-specific athlete retirement models were developed, with Taylor and Ogilvie's (1994) and Stambulova's (2003) being widely used. Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) took a holistic view embracing athlete retirement reasons, aspects related to one's retirement adjustment and available resources, the quality of athlete adaptation, and interventions for meeting retirement difficulties. Stambulova's model (2003), also through a holistic approach, considered athletic retirement as a process. In this process, the retiring athlete **must** cope with transition demands and overcome barriers assisted by resources and coping strategies. The model also considers the case of a retiree's available resources not meeting retirement demands thus necessitating an intervention.

Research advancements on athletic retirement and the shift to a holistic approach toward the athlete-person from start-to-end (Stambulova, 2017), led to the development of international initiatives (e.g., Athlete365 Career+, International Olympic Committee, 2018), regional guidelines (e.g., EU Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes, European Commission, 2012), and national **programs** (Stambulova & Ryba, 2013). These aimed to ease and assist athlete life in sport, **as well as to support the** transition to life after sport, equipping them with education and/or employment during and/or post the athletic career (Stambulova & Ryba, 2013).

In studying the literature and the **available** initiatives, it becomes apparent that athlete retirement is most often approached as the athlete's exodus from the world of sports. Today, we know that not all athletes leave sport **upon retirement**. Some stay and take on the role of a coach. Recently, national programs (e.g., UK Sport's Athlete to Coach Programme, Coaching Association of Canada's Coach Initiation in Sport) and sport-specific ones (British Athletics Athlete to Coach Programme, <https://www.uka.org.uk/media/news/2018-news-page/march-2018/athlete-to-coach-programme/>) have been launched to support the athlete-to-coach transition. These programs aim to equip the **transiti**o**n**g**** athlete with fundamental skills and

knowledge on how to coach. For instance, the UK program “Athlete to Coach” aims to provide transitioning coaches with the foundational skills to optimize their current technical and tactical knowledge” (<https://www.uksport.gov.uk/our-work/coaching/athlete-to-coach>).

The Canadian program is “an important introduction to the key coaching concepts and educational tools that are the foundation of the NCCP”, promoted as a resource “for athletes transitioning to coaching” (<https://coach.ca/nccp-coach-initiation-sport>). Alas, while many sport bodies have recently developed fast-tracking programs to “expedite coach education” among retiring elite athletes (Rynne, 2014, p. 300), it is unclear how well they address the unique needs associated with this type of career transition.

While research findings have suggested that post-career adaptations can take about a year and every athlete experiences the post-athletic career transition differently (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Alfermann 2000), none of these programs appear to address post-career within sport adaptations to coaching. Chroni et al. (2020), who studied the athlete-to-coach transition experience, identified similarities with post-career transitions outside sport but also unique adaptations that have neither been addressed by the literature nor the programs offered and which they labelled as occurring in a re-identification phase. During re-identification phase, athletes re-negotiate the familiar territory of self, sport, training, competition, and of coaching within their new context in an effort to understand the needs and approaches of themselves and others in order to embrace the new role.

To date, fewer than a handful of studies have explored the athlete-to-coach transition experience (Kavanaugh, 2010; Chroni, 2014; Chroni, et al., 2020). While the studies have been conducted in different countries and different sports, all concluded that the transition is not straightforward. Kavanaugh (2010) studied three tennis players in Australia, who transitioned to coaching without any formal pre-retirement planning and minimal part-time assistant coaching experience. Participants reported that becoming a coach was easy, noting that

transferring their athletic skills and experiences to coaching helped them maintain feelings of competence and self-worth. Chroni (2014) studied an alpine skier in Greece, who also retired without a plan and with no coaching experience or education. They also described the transition as an easy one considering their athletic experience as an advantage with regard to knowing the sport and lifestyle. Nonetheless, the researcher reported numerous challenges, such as finding new motivation, lacking coaching education, feeling side-lined when still fit to race, accepting that not everyone is cut out to be a champion, regulating own emotions when athlete effort and emotional investment were low, performing a dream job with few resources and minimal support. Chroni et al. (2020) studied six early career coaches of ski sports in Norway, who transited to coaching with varied levels of preparation (education and coaching experience). As in previous studies, the transition was initially portrayed as easy and uncomplicated, however when probed challenges were shared. For these coaches it was not easy to leave the elite mindset behind, to deal with unresolved feelings surrounding their sport, to accept that their athletic experience was not an exact match with coaching, to recognize that their embodied experiences did not translate directly to teaching, to shift to coach-appropriate language, to shift from a 'me-to-you' approach or to coach young athletes after life at the elite level.

Chroni et al.'s (2020) data analysis led to the empirical model "Athlete-to-Coach Transition Journey in Norwegian Winter Sports" [insert Figure 1 about here], which was developed as a hybrid of contextual and chronological elements framing the athlete-to-coach transition through three phases: career shift, re-identification, and professional development. The career shift phase entails exiting the athletic career and entering coaching. The re-identification phase entails critical examinations of what is happening in the uncertain and vague space and time of going from having been an athlete to becoming a coach and negotiating one's identity and role as a coach. The professional development phase is about

meeting [the](#) barriers and demands that can grow [or hinder](#) a coach in the profession. [This](#) re-identification phase had not been previously discussed by researchers and was identified as a critical phase where one re-negotiates familiar territory under new terms of engagement; requiring time, support, and a renewed sense of self-awareness for who the person is as a novice coach (non-expert), who his/her athletes are and what they need, instead of imposing expectations based on who the novice coach [was](#) as an elite athlete (ex-expert). The researchers concluded that the athlete-to-coach experience is unique and may have a profound effect on one's identity, behaviours, and actions as well as on the quality of the [coaching](#) they deliver and subsequently their longevity in [the profession](#).

### **On Pathways to Coaching**

As noted, career transition into coaching is an under-researched area (Lavalley, 2006). While few studies have [examined](#) why one becomes a coach (Abrahamsen & Chroni, in press), more studies have looked into how one becomes a coach and particularly [the](#) pathways to coaching (e.g., Gilbert [et al.](#), 2006; Nash & Sproule, 2009; Rynne, 2014; Rynne & Mallett, 2012; Werthner & Trudel, 2009). Rynne (2014) noted that a professional within [sport](#) career transition follows either the 'traditional path' that entails formal preparation and education or the 'fast-track path' that entails special concessions provided to retired elite athletes. A third pathway, the 'no formal education path' is often encountered in coaching where one enters without having any formal education and preparation, relying solely on athlete experience. This third pathway has been noted as a major concern in reports like the Sport for All Play for Life (Aspen Institute, 2015) which [notes that this is the most common pathway](#) among volunteer coaches [and calls for the training of all coaches](#) (Chroni, et al., 2018).

Studies like Rynne's (2014) and Blackett et al.'s (2017, 2019) are reviewed here because [they](#) indirectly touched on the athlete-to-coach transition and identified certain

challenges and facilitators experienced by coaches who follow the fast-track pathway. In Rynne's (2014) study, the fast-tracked elite athlete-to-coach lacked an understanding of biophysical knowledge and had difficulty empathizing with athletes who were not like [themselves](#), in comparison to an educated coach. The findings suggest that elite athletes who are fast-tracked into coaching may encounter professional demands and expectations for which their athletic experiences did not [prepare them](#), such as struggling to teach fundamentals and skills progression due to limited knowledge and understanding of pedagogy, psychology [and/or](#) physiology. Nonetheless, according to Blackett et al.'s (2017; 2019) interviews with professional football and rugby team directors, fast-tracked retired athletes are preferred [to external candidates when](#) hiring a head coach, due to their athletic abilities and experience. Their athletic [background](#) is believed to gain them respect faster and they are more trusted to reproduce team culture through their coaching practices.

The present study attempted to learn from [Norwegian](#) sport federations that have engaged in the practice of recruiting, hiring and employing retiring elite athletes as coaches. [Norway's sports federations are the governing bodies for their respective sport; for organizing and managing the sport from grassroot level to high-performance level. The federations are under the auspices of the Norwegian Olympic and Paralympic Committee and Confederation of Sports, which undertakes the joint administration of all sports in the country.](#) Both athlete retirement and coach-to-athlete transition have been overlooked in Norway. As Chroni et al. (2020) wrote, [as a field we](#) lack knowledge "on the retirement transition, experience, the demands and barriers Norwegian athletes face after the sport career as well as the resources and coping strategies they employ" (p. 753). While support and preparation are available to elite and professional athletes of Norway (see Chroni, et al., 2020), we do not know how many use these services and resources, to what extent [or](#) how efficient these have been. We also do not know [the circumstances under which](#) some retiring



elite athletes are recruited for coaching jobs. To address such knowledge gaps, we explored sport federations' (i.e., prospective employers) **viewpoints** with regard to *what they look for when recruiting elite athletes as coaches as well as what resources they offer to former elites who become early career coaches*. We deemed the learning sought here as instrumental for improving the preparation and support provided (e.g., by sport psychologists, coach developers, federation staff, mentors, coach educators) to those athletes who chose to retire into coaching.

### **Method**

On delving into the athlete-to-coach transition from the sport federation **viewpoint**, we drew on the interpretivist paradigm for employing qualitative methodology while being aligned with a constructivist epistemology and relativist ontology (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Our approach was shaped by the relativist and transactional views we hold as researchers and sport psychology practitioners, accepting that there are multiple truths (no single one) stemming from interactions, and findings being co-created through experiences and interpretations that take place during the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **Participants**

**Officials representing different** Norwegian sports federations, **which in the past** had hired elite athletes as **paid** coaches out of retirement, were **identified and** invited to participate in the study. The criteria for inviting participants were: (a) at least one elite athlete was offered a job and was hired as a coach right out of retirement from his/her athletic career; (b) the early career coach worked for the federation for at least one full season; (c) the person **most closely involved in** the hiring and work of the early career coach could be identified and interviewed. The timeframe of federations' experiences in recruiting and hiring an athlete-to-coach did not serve as a criterion. While **focusing on participants'** recent experiences overcomes retrospection and recollection limitations in data collection, Chroni et al. (2020)

pointed out that some of their study's participants who had transitioned not long before the interview had not reflected sufficiently on the transition, thus a timeframe criterion was not set. The findings from Chroni (2014), Chroni et al. (2020) and Kavanaugh (2010) provided enough contextual knowledge for appropriate questions and probes to overcome retrospection limitations.

Twelve Norwegian sports federations were identified and invited via telephone calls; all but two responded right away. We conducted 10 interviews with officials representing eight sports, three summer and six winter ones, one team and seven individual sports as well as one Paralympic. All interviewees were identified as the person involved with recruitment and hiring in general and who specifically worked with former elite athletes transitioning to coaching. The interviewees' positions within the federation varied, some were working as coach developers and others as sports directors. Table 1 presents the participants' role as described in the interviews by them, the number of years they had in that role, and the type of sport [Insert Table 1 about here]. Data saturation was reached as by interview number six we stopped attaining new data, new information from the interviewees. Therefore, after the tenth interview we decided not to go back and re-invite two federations that did not respond to the initial invitation. Furthermore, similar to the data collection phase experience, during analysis we also came to a point where we stopped identifying new codes and themes, and we perceived the data as abundant and rich (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

### **Ethical Considerations**

The Norwegian Centre for Research Data was informed prior to the onset of the study. The participants were informed in writing and orally of the study's purpose and processes, their rights and responsibilities as participants (interview and reflection) before signing a consent form prior to the interview. Participation was voluntary and they could withdraw at any time. To protect their anonymity, sports and third-party persons, we omitted

details that could render a sport and/or person identifiable and used codes (I1 to I10).

Considering the popularity and visibility of sports and sportspersons in Norway, the interviewees were informed, orally and in writing, of potential public recognition (Punch, 1998) due to wide media coverage.

### **Data Collection**

Five main areas shaped the semi-structured face-to-face interviews with the aid of an interview guide developed for the study: (1) Why they made the offer? (2) How they supported the early career coach? (3) What worked out smoothly? (4) What challenges did they meet? (5) What else could be done to support the athlete-to-coach transition? Sub-questions and probes were used to delve as deep as possible on all matters the participants brought up. For example, we asked them: “What have you seen with regard to how the athletes respond to working with the early career coaches’ right out of retirement in comparison to a new coach who is not a recently retired athlete?” In relevant cases, this question was probed with two questions: “What are the unique challenges associated with the relationship between athletes and a new career coach who is a recently retired elite athlete? What are the benefits to the coach-athlete relationship of a having an early career coach who is a retired elite athlete?”

The interviews were conducted at a day, time, and place selected by the interviewee; either at a meeting room in their respective federation’s offices or at the Norwegian Olympic Training Center to accommodate their busy schedules. Two of the authors conducted the interviews in English as previously done by Torregrosa *et al.* (2004) and Chroni *et al.* (2020). Both were trained and experienced in qualitative research and interviewing; whereas one had sport coaching background and the other sport psychology. Two interviewers can enhance the depth and quality of data, particularly through apt probing. One of the interviewers was bilingual (English and Norwegian); on the few occasions an interviewee needed to elaborate

in his/her native language, the interviewer translated [their](#) words to English and agreed with [the](#) interviewee onsite [on](#) the translation. The interviews lasted between 45 and 78 minutes ( $M = 59$ ), were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim yielding 138 single-spaced pages of text.

### **Data Analysis**

Braun and Clarke's (2006), Braun, Clarke, and Weate (2017) and Clarke and Braun's (2013), 6-step thematic analysis was employed, as a theoretically flexible method for identifying and scrutinizing patterns in qualitative data and based on previous use [in coaching](#) research (e.g., Schinke [et al.](#), 2013). The analysis was approached inductively at first and [subsequently](#), part of it [was then approached](#) deductively.

Inductively, the data [was](#) examined line by line to identify codes on recruiting, hiring, and support provided to early career coaches. The codes were organized in themes. We identified valid, mutually exclusive, and exhaustive (Gratton & Jones, 2004) themes within each interview and then across interviews. In some cases, themes were further collated into higher order themes [in an](#) effort to refine the categorization system of the analysis. Upon concluding the inductive thematic analysis, we revisited the data, codes and themes around support provided to transitioning individuals with regard to the time the support [was](#) given, in light of the phases identified in the empirical model of Chroni et al. (2020). The add-on deductive step enriched our findings. As a final step, the findings were written up and are presented below with raw data quotations illustrating the [interviewee's reality](#).

### **Ensuring Rigor**

Smith and McGannon's (2018) recent writings helped us ensure rigor in this study. Smith and McGannon (2018) challenged the conventional practices of member-checking, intercoder reliability and agreement practices and the use of universal criteria (also see Clarke & Braun, 2013). Accordingly, we employed member reflection, critical friends, and

researcher-reflection on how the choice of methods was underpinned by our ontological and epistemological perspective. Based on [these perspectives](#), multiple truths can be present all at once: created, re-created, and co-created by the engaging actors. Via member reflection, the interviewees had the opportunity to reflect and comment, add data, and further elaborate on the interview texts. As critical friends, the authors prompted auxiliary and/or alternative views and held extensive discussions upon identified codes and themes. Throughout the study we engaged in systematic researcher-reflection on the process and the product of our work, where our knowledge and experience on sport psychology, coaching and research were complementary.

### Results

The data presented here shares what Norwegian [sports](#) federation officials look for when recruiting an elite athlete to go into coaching and how they approach the athlete-to-coach transition with regard to the means of support the federation offers. We do not know whether these practices work as they have not been evaluated, and it was not in the scope of our study. [We also note here](#) that [there are no formalized practices in place](#); the majority of the practices identified are informal and [employed](#) as and when necessary for matching a person with a situation, "...we don't really have a good formal system for coaching [them] as coaches..." (I5). We also deem [it](#) essential to share here what two of the interviewees talked about [regarding](#) the effort they make not to hire retiring athletes as coaches, "...most of them lack experience as a coach and neither have the formal education...", and "...if you are a little too related, it is kind of hard to make the really tough decisions because you are a little bit too equal" (I9), plus "the amount of work ... is almost a shock to them" (I5). Moreover, the interviewees also pointed out occasions of negative reactions from coaches who went the education pathway of development and from the media when federations hire individuals directly out of athletic career, "...that in a way it was unfair, they were not experienced

enough, they didn't have the right skills" (I5). While these quotations connote an unenthusiastic stance, these federations had hired former elites in the past and did it again around data collection time, hence we kept their data in the analysis.

Retiring elite athletes in Norway are often recruited to coaching, some of them by federations and others by sports high schools and/or clubs. With regard to what federation officials look for when recruiting them, we identified four higher order themes; having *the whole package* essential for coaching, *personal attributes* the individual shows as *in their time as an athlete*, *singular dedication* to the sport, and lastly the prospective employer *knowing them well* from *their time as an athlete*. Table 2 presents these higher order themes, with underlying themes and codes [Insert Table 2 about here]. In the section below, we use raw data to aptly illustrate the themes and codes.

### **Recruiting Athletes to Coach: What to look for?**

#### ***Whole package***

***Knowledge.*** Prospective employers look for individuals that have the *majority of the* 'whole package' that brings interpersonal skills, education, professional skills *and* experience together under the all-embracing notion of knowledge. Knowledge emerged as a theme describing the combination of education, interpersonal skills, and long-term experience with the sport regardless if one made it to the top of his/her sport or not. Knowledge appears to entail more than education;

education is kind of the formal part and knowledge is also the experience and your values and more of the whole package. ... this knowledge is something about the education and the experience and what you bring in as a person and the way of putting them all together and in use (I8).

Some interviewees used the term "silent knowledge" when referring to what elite athletes can bring *with them* into coaching. Silent knowledge *encapsulates* sport skills,

interpersonal skills, and sport experience topped with one's heightened curiosity and understanding of the sport, as well as an inner sense of the sport's formalities and informalities, values, and rules. Silent knowledge is "priceless," a hidden "capital" within elite athletes that federations see as crucial to retain and not lose once they retire. As an interviewee noted, "all her experience is priceless, is [a] capital. And we have been discussing with her how we would like to try to keep her in the system... Last few months, I have been calling [her] to get some advice" (I9). A concern was raised that while too much focus on education might inhibit the expression of one's silent knowledge, it was also noted that when "a lot of experience and knowledge are somehow inside [the person], education can bring it out" (I8).

***Professional skills.*** Professional skills refer to the contextual skills of a coach.

According to the analysis, we found that skills that will aid the early career coach in doing the job, such as knowing the sport, understanding and leading the athletes, a developed sense of sport intuition, as well as the ability to shift beyond being an athlete are desirable. While "it is very important to have the right coaches and they need to be experienced with the sport before" (I10), is also important to "to learn each of the athletes, to know how you can explain things--with some you can be direct and some you have to talk more around" (I3). "Want to lead" (I4) is another desirable skill present in formal and informal athlete-leaders. "They have always been leaders, formal leaders as captains and informal leaders on the [field]" and can bring along "a lot of respect for free when they switch roles" (I7). Another central piece in the recruitment puzzle is the "shift from being an athlete to be a coach, to be a proper pedagogist and to be open" (I3). Additionally, the skill of intuition, the in depth understanding, the heightened sense one develops from playing at the highest level, necessary for coaching top athletes effectively was identified as important.

If you have played on the highest level you have this [sport] sense, if you haven't played you can have it [too]. Most of the coaches don't [have it] and then it is quite difficult to deal with players on a certain level, because to coach them effectively you have to show them during a game that you know what is going on. (I7)

***Interpersonal skills.*** The potential seen in athletes for making it in coaching also requires interpersonal skills, like emotional regulation, relating well with the athletes, and communicating.

Especially in the beginning as a coach, you cannot act like a player. When you get frustrated for example, you have to stay calm and analytical and this can be a big challenge. When you are a player you are warm, you are heated up and you are on the [field of play] and you are physical. And when the game is over, you are done. It is not like that for the coach, after the game you have to analyse and prepare and blah, blah, blah. (I7)

Federations look for retiring athletes with skills that help them communicate and relate efficiently, like “how do you relate and act in a meeting with different athletes, persons and situations” (I3) or “how they deal with fragile people, winning on Sunday and crying on Monday” (I5). It is key to “know how to communicate” (I7) and to not be “afraid to speak” up (I7) as coaching entails a lot of challenging decisions and moments, like play time, selection and deselection of players.

***Education.*** Education is viewed as the formal part of knowledge. While most federations want coaches to have **completed** formal education **before hiring them**, they often offer retiring athletes the opportunity to get an education while on the job. It is key that the retiring athletes “have started or will start education in [the sport] to become a coach” (I1) and that they see also value in attaining coaching education. When recruited without education they are often fast-tracked to Level 3 of Norway's coaching pathways' structure



(<https://www.idrettsforbundet.no/nif/trenerloypa/om-trenerloypa/>). One of the participant's elaborated on several reasons for developing a fast-track route for retiring athletes considered "elite league players" who have played multiple seasons:

Level 1 is basic, Level 2 is development and Level 3 is more for elite coaches. We have this fast-track we established last year... [where] we try to teach them the role of the coach and how to teach... because they didn't apply to normal [programs] as they are quite busy [playing]. So, we are trying to prepare them a little bit before they quit... And [we] also do that for screening, as we would like to engage them in the future on both men's and juniors' national teams for both sexes. (I7)

In this case, the fast-tracking option serves to prepare a player for life after sport but also gives the federation an opportunity to see their potential as a coach.

**Experience.** Experience as athletes themselves is key; it is a strength in terms of knowing what is happening on the field of play, in the dressing room and how athletes think. Some experience in coaching is added value, especially when coaching is viewed as "a feeling inside a person, a very special job and you have to like it" (I1). Interestingly, some interviewees noticed that they look for experience in elite sport but not necessarily in winning. As one shared,

most of the very good coaches, have been really good [athletes] but not winners; maybe performed their lowest at the Olympics, fought very hard but did not succeed. These are the ones we are looking for when looking for coaches in Norway... These persons have real love for the sport and did not succeed themselves maybe because they were not selfish enough, maybe they are too social and nice. They don't have this we have to win, have to win, have to win thing. (I2)

### **Attributes**

Under the higher order theme of attributes, an assortment of personal and professional qualities was identified based on a variety of codes. Personal qualities here entail personality traits of the individual and professional ones entail characteristics a person exemplifies in a work environment. We did not organize these codes into separate person- and profession-related sub-themes but kept one unified theme we labelled attributes. The decision was made because the information was shared by the interviewees while referring to third persons (recruited athletes), and to safeguard anonymity we did not ask for detailed information on whether an attribute was considered as personal or professional or who they had in mind when sharing the information. For instance, competitiveness may be a personal and/or a professional attribute characterizing an individual, depending on the person, life story and context, analogous to humbleness or initiative.

The variety of codes upon which we built the theme of attributes had to do with characteristics federations look for when recruiting athletes to coaching. Like, being “competitive, ...like to win, ...have this inner drive” (I7), along with having the “initiative” to take things forward, to see problems and fix these, “because I think it’s the most important thing; that you really have the motivation and that you can think of solutions and when you see something that has to be done, you try to do it” (I8). They also look for those who “are a bit more curious and show motivation for the coaching part” (I8) in questions they ask when they are still athletes. They look for an increased interest in helping and giving advice to others, for sharing instead of being selfish and “looking only in the mirror and never outside the window” (I8). “So, when I see an athlete who is also interested in what is happening around with other athletes and teammates and in the development of [the sport], I think they have potential for the coaching part” (I8). Additionally, “it’s important to recruit persons who are really curious and want to develop themselves, ...coaches really want to develop their weaker sides” (I4).

They also look for compassion, for those who want to be “close to the athletes, to understand the feelings of the athletes and to see when the athlete is kind of suffering or having a bad day or whatever” (I9). While leading is important and identified **above** as a desirable professional skill, efficient sharing of their knowledge and expertise is seen as crucial, “be kind of a leader in the group [but] most importantly how [you] explain things” (I3). Humbleness is another key attribute for being recruited into coaching because “a coach that knows everything is no good... players are changing and are better than before” (I1). A humble coach, “makes the decision in a proper way, he is not rushing it; he is asking, he is listening, he is considering, he is making people come [forward] with their views” (I6).

Finally, showing passion for coaching and its challenging tasks and loving the sport are attributes to also consider. “I think it’s both about their heart being in [the sport] and being ambitious and want a career in coaching” (I9). “It is passion for the sport and for [athlete] development” (I10). While “passion is one thing” coaching is not an easy job, hence, “...you have to want to engage against the athletes and you have to want to go into tough situations with the athletes, and to motivate them but also push them” (I10).

### ***Singular dedication***

***Loyalty.*** Loyalty to coaching is about prioritizing to the level of singular **round-the-clock** dedication, and appears to be desired from the start as it is the way to do the job; “the best trainers love [the sport] and take [the sport] 24 hours a day and want to be in the [sports]-hall. [The sport] is number one in their life” (I1). Hence, when “for some of the players [sport] is their life, it is easier to recruit [them] because you need to have time for [coaching]” (I4).

***Tolerant significant other.*** The interviewees also talked about the support one needs when going into coaching and pointed it out how important it is to have a family and/or significant other who also loves sport, allows and ‘tolerates’ the early career coach’s

uninterrupted focus on the job, free of guilt for being absent from home. Furthermore, interviewees appeared to be in limbo about a coach needing “to have a personal situation...” and having a personal situation “...where it’s possible” (I4). In other words, they would like for the coach to have a life outside sport, yet do not see it as easy to do so when coaching. An official elaborated on how a coach can be torn between work and home and dared to voice that it might better to be without a family -- on a personal note, he shared [that he himself](#) left national team coaching for a second opportunity with family life.

When you are away for 200 days in [the sport], it is really hard to do a good job for 200 days away from your family. So if you have a family, you very often come to this situation that you have a bad conscience because you are so much away you don’t see your children, you don’t see your wife and then after the first five days in the camp you start thinking about how things are at home. And then you are torn apart. So, it’s important to know the wife of the coach. Because if she is a tolerant person and is used to be 200 days alone, it’s OK. ... if you have a really strong wife or you love your children too much, because you have to, it is bad to say it, but the job is so demanding that [sport] must be number one. Family is [important] too but actually is best that you don’t have any family.” (I2)

### ***Recruiter knew them well***

Is important for the recruiter to know the person well before recruiting them to coach. Knowing the person from [their time](#) as an athlete, provides opportunities to look for his/her silent knowledge, the whole package, the attributes, and the singular dedication described above. They want to know them as athletes and as [people](#), to know their sport history; “most of these players have also played for junior national teams in their early careers, we know the persons from when they were 15, 16 years old” (I7); “I had been the national head coach

when they were athletes themselves ... so, I know them well from their active career” (I5).

Of course, their development and experience in coaching is also of interest those recruiting:

All coaches we have hired the last years they have been working as coaches. And I have been in personal [contact] when they all did the Top Coach [Education] program and have been the mentor for 3 of the 4, so, we have known them quite well and [this sport] is not a big sport. (I5)

### **Supporting the Elite Athlete Who’s Going into Coaching**

We asked lengthily about how they work, care for, and support the person identified to have potential for and then hired as a coach. Our questions aimed to explore a variety of circumstances in how they work with the athlete-to-coach transition, considering that some retiring athletes transit without any formal coaching knowledge or skills, others without a plan, and some while still training and competing themselves, to name a few of the many unique situations. In the section below and in Table 3, we present our hybrid of inductive and deductive analyses about the different means of support and resources provided when hiring a retiring athlete and their timing [Insert Table 3 about here].

#### ***Resources upon hiring***

The higher order theme of resources for a stable start was built on the themes of finding a good match, giving clear and precise guiding, as well as planning and providing coaching education. According to the data, it is crucial to properly match the person with the context, “it is very important to find the right coaches” (I10). For instance, in reference to considering a wide range of skills when matching a coach with certain athletes, an interviewee said, “we have this under 16 coach, he is from elite national team, he is also a teacher, knows how to teach. You would think this is necessary, especially when it comes to younger players and to create a secure environment” (I7). Clear and precise guidance comes in the form of a “player book” in some cases, sometimes called “a little book,” and other

times *it* is provided via close communication between the federation official and the early career coach. The guide books “describe all situations a younger player will experience. ... you can think about training and every other thing, tobacco, alcohol, snus and all these things, traveling; everything is described here” (I1), and a new coach can get a lot of help from this book. Of course, coaching knowledge and skills are important and desirable, and those that never developed any before hiring are asked to create a professional development plan at the start of their coaching career. How they respond to this planning gives an additional indication about their motivation to take up coaching and on occasion, an indication of a sport culture that disheartens some from education.

If they want to go into our system, they also have to do the education. I sit down with them and we make an individual plan and what to do at different stages. In that moment you can really see their motivation. Some genuinely ask when can I start, when is this course starting? We also have some that say it’s okay, we will do that, for now have enough to coach. For some, you also get the impression that [they] are doing this for us, to be in the system not for themselves. Some are eager to learn and develop, and during these conversations though not easy I think you can get a quite good idea about who is having this extra thing [niche to coach]. ... Sometimes, I think the main problem is themselves; has been in the culture that this part is not important, at least the formal knowledge. This is the culture they have been training in and working in, so I think they also think ‘This could be the way I could go’. And in this culture, I have experiences with athletes who are kind of afraid of the knowledge, because it is difficult. (I8)

### ***Resources at early career***

Coaching the new coach through mentoring, regular meetings and feedback, organizing communities of learning, and caring for the whole person are the most commonly

employed resources provided to early-career coaches. In all the federations we talked with, these means of support do not constitute a fixed plan of action, instead they improvise in order to meet the characteristics and needs of the person and potential coaching context. The one established step by all federations in the process of inviting someone to transition into coaching and supporting the person, is to sit down and make an individual plan that will suit the person and coaching setting. In the following quotation, the reader can get a sense of the support offered leading to the desired connection:

When we recruit, we have a talk about their experiences and their competence related to player development and to building teams, their attitudes -- Are they hard working? Are they trustworthy? Do they want to have leading experience? -- also their coaching and their personal background. ... If you want to be a coach at the top level, you need to go through the education. [If you don't have the education], you have to start with the education, then it's OK, it's a transition period. ... It is very important to put them into education. We have a lot of cooperation in the federation, we have a group with the national [team] coaches that has a meeting four times a year. We call them professional meetings. The head national team coach and me also talk with them. We also try to bring them in a training camp or championship, to be a sparring partner, if they want. We try to go to the senior championship every year and with the coaches for younger category we have a little group, we make analyses, we have discussions, we are working through the championship, and then also we are closer. (I4)

Regular meetings with more experienced coaches to create mentoring relationships is another way federations support developing coaches. As an official noted, "we have them in a lot of meetings together with other coaches so they can learn from each other and the system" (I10); "they have training camps together with the A team so they can learn from

them and also get help in a way” (I5). It appears that informal communities of learning are put together to protect and serve the starting coach,

In this team we had really experienced physiotherapists, X is working 100% for 5 or 6 years and Y has been in the federation for 30 years. That was in the background, to have experience in a team, experience that was OK for the athletes and then X and Y to be a discussion partner with this starting up coach. (I3)

Last but not least, caring for the whole person is critical and they try to engage with the novice coach as a person **and** not only as a performer, which was emphasized by the interviewees, “we talk about things in the life we changed for a coach; you have to go to the point about what you are doing with yourself and you have to be honest” (I1).

### *Ongoing resources*

The ongoing resources and support **do not differ significantly** from what is provided at early stages of the transition. Communities of learning, mentoring, and caring for the whole person as discussed above are also provided as prominent and ongoing means of support. Furthermore, advancing formal education was added by the federation officials **at** this stage, through identifying and planning opportunities for additional education like, gaining international coaching experience and following an experienced coach closely.

The best thing for you is to be open-minded and maybe go to another country and coach and then come back to us. Get the experience with the best athletes in other countries. ... I think it's hard for young ambitious coaches to see the opportunities outside Norway because they think Norway is the best and this is where I am going to be on the best team. But if they get outside, they also gain other perspectives when coming back. (I9)

Considering the preliminary exploration of the athlete-to-coach transition through the federation lens, it seems conceivable that the timing of the resources provided could intersect



with the phases of Chroni et al.'s (2020) empirical model. In particular, the resources provided upon hiring meets the demands, barriers and resources required at the career shift phase model; the resources at the early career addresses peculiarities of the re-identification phase; and the ongoing resources appear to be suitable for the professional development phase of the empirical model.

### Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore what sport federation officials look for when recruiting elite athletes into coaching, and what resources the federation offers to retiring elite athletes transitioning into a coaching career. While a standard or universal approach within sport transitioning does not appear to exist, federation practices and approaches have been identified that can be considered within the scope of the research to date and can be used to inform future coach development work. The identified strategies appear to go in the right direction with regard to the development of the internal and external resources athletes need when retiring into coaching (Chroni et al., 2020), however the lack of formalized practices or clearly defined professional development pathways raise both questions and concerns about the recognition and valuation of the specialized knowledge and skills of the profession (Gilbert & Côté, 2013) held by recruiters and employing coaches.

For sport federations, hiring athletes from within their system ensures a level of familiarity not only with the nuances of the sport but also with the particular sport leadership system (Blackett, et al., 2017; 2019). Personal knowledge of the individual, based on their role as an athlete and performance in the sport, were the primary pre-requisites for identification as potential coaching recruits. Notably, the emphasis appeared to be based on selection within the existing system over guided preparation which may serve to limit the development of both the individual and the sport system itself. Within the growing literature supporting the professionalization of sport coaching (see Thelwell & Dicks, 2018), it has

been recognized that the best preparation to be coaches of skill development and performance in sport comes from a combination of guided experiences, formal preparation in foundational fields of study, and self-directed learning skills (Dieffenbach, 2019; ICCE, 2013).

As noted by previous researchers (e.g., Blackett, et al., 2017; 2019) the resources provided for within sport transition are commonly situational, taking a ‘toolbox’ or apprentice approach as opposed to [providing](#) a systematic professional pathway or curriculum. Despite the recognition of the unique and complex nature of coaching in the literature and by the study’s participants, the prevalence of a ‘one at a time’ approach suggests a systematic acceptance and perpetuation of the ‘you played, therefore you can coach’ mentality noted by Rynne (2014). [Furthermore, experiences from one’s athletic career may also fast-track outdated, incorrect, and harmful coaching beliefs, behaviors and practices. McMahon and colleagues \(2020\) found that abusive practices that had been experienced and normalized in one’s own athletic career were perpetuated in the case of a fast-tracked swim coach. Concerns related to outdated and unsafe training practices are underscored by the call for professionals, including coaches, fluent in current and scientifically-sound sport science-based best practice for supporting athlete safety and wellbeing, as noted in organizational position statements such as the International Olympic Committee \(e.g., Mountjoy et al., 2014\). Ultimately, education has been highlighted as an essential element for both breaking through the normalized acceptance of wrongful behaviors associated with violence and abuse \(World Health Organization, 2010\) and to support professional socialization to decrease the subjective warrant that can reduce professional effectiveness \(Lawson, 1986\). Providing appropriate training for proper coach development is thus necessary to prepare and support the individual in transitioning from athlete to coach, and to ensure they receive the preparation necessary to become safe and effective professionals.](#)

While the use of a fast-track to coaching approach within elite sport settings is becoming more wide-spread and was reported as utilized by participants in this study, Rynne (2014) noted that little is known about the efficacy of such an approach in preparing professionals. While some officials noted that they kept in contact with those athletes they encouraged into coaching, across the federations there were no assessment strategies to evaluate athlete-to-coach professional development progress or readiness to coach or coaching effectiveness relative to supporting athlete development. Thus, the support for the use of an athlete-to-coach fast-track model appears to be primarily anecdotal.

In examining the athlete-to-coach transition from the coach perspective, Chroni et al. (2020) noted that the shift could be abrupt and, regardless of the cause, involved a period of coping with the emotions associated with career termination and a period of developing the skills to re-enter a known world, equipped to navigate with a new lens for a new set of responsibilities. The current federation approach to the within sport transition focuses largely on the practical preparation for the job requirements (e.g., developing sport-specific coaching skills, pedagogical skills) aiming to better support the athlete that is coached, and with minimal consideration for person-support that may be necessary for the coach. Given the transition out of sport literature (e.g., Park et al., 2013), concerns related to the retention of early career coaches (e.g., Lyle, 2002), and the emerging discussion about coach well-being (Stebbing et al., 2012), programs and sport psychology consultants may want to consider the importance of individualized coach development support during the athlete-to-coach transition.

### **Lessons Learned and Applications**

While a transition within sport may appear to be a natural on the surface, it presents unique challenges for both the federations and the transitioning athlete, many of which may not be initially apparent. There are potential pitfalls in fast-tracking individuals based on their

elite participation profile who have limited, if any, experience into the complex profession of coaching (Rynne, 2014). Sport federation and non-federation sport programs as well as professionals who work with athletes [to prepare](#) them for the transition, need to provide career pathway support that is designed and delivered by individuals with the training and skills to provide professional development and to address the challenges [associated with sport transition](#). In addition, we need to look into [the tacit knowledge of federation officials who identify and encourage elite athletes into coaching](#) and how they develop that feel for whom to select, as well as how federations hire and prepare [individuals within the federations who are responsible for having a ‘good eye for coaching talent’](#) and who are tasked with [identifying coaches from within the federation’s athlete population](#).

With the importance of the coaching role in athlete performance being well established (see Nash, 2014) and the growing understanding of the importance of preparation systems to support the profession of coaching (see Duffy et al., 2011; ICCE, 2013; Jones, 2006), the marginalization of the coaching profession remains one of the biggest challenges. Systemically, it will be necessary to raise awareness of the value of well-prepared coaches within the sport system along with addressing salary concerns [identified by the participants in another Norway-based study on the athlete-to-coach transition \(Chroni et al., 2020\)](#).

Efforts should also be made to increase both the quality and the quantity of a diverse range of individuals within the current coaching pipeline. Currently, the emphasis appears to [be on](#) retaining selected [successful](#) high-performance athletes to preserve and share their experiential knowledge within the system. This top end focus creates both a narrow pool from which to draw for an even smaller number of positions in which to place the transitioned coaches. Additionally, as noted in Chroni et al. (2020), within sport transition typically does not become a consideration until after the end of the athletic career.

Developing programs and opportunities that introduce within sport transition opportunities

that provide an introduction to the professional knowledge and skills of the coaching profession would raise awareness among athletes who might not otherwise consider coaching and who might not be identified through the current strategies.

Traditionally, the transition from athlete-to-coach has commonly been seen as an apprenticeship or rite of passage from one stage to another experience (e.g., Lyle, 2002) where working with more experienced individuals is considered to be the cornerstone of the learning. In addition to undermining the professionalism of the field itself and the importance of core knowledge development, the fast-tracking process increases the likelihood of an incomplete foundation of knowledge necessary to understand and develop human potential safely and effectively.

Another important consideration that addresses the challenges of professionalization in the field and the quality of coach preparation, involves recognizing that the majority of individuals transitioning from an athletic career into a [career in coaching](#) are well into their early adult years hence, it is then necessary to consider life stage, lived experience and knowledge in the design of professional development education. Adult learning theory (for a comprehensive overview see Merriam & Bierema, 2013) supports the development of environments that facilitate professional development through the recognition of unique needs and skills of adult learners and the use of situationally appropriate learning strategies.

The final challenge is the development of coach development system anchored by professionals who can provide both an educational structure and on-going support within the profession. Individuals within the federations tasked with recruiting and retaining quality coaches will want to explore the emerging best practices associated with creating sustainable and impactful coach development systems and delivery. Recent examples of work supporting coach development system design and delivery share best practices for administrators for creating learner centred coach education (Paquette & Trudel, 2018), an in-depth review of

coach education and development within The Football Association of UK (Allison, Abraham, & Cale, 2016) and the role of coach developers in supporting coach learning (Dohme *et al.*, 2019).

### **Conclusion, Limitations and Future Research**

In exploring the athlete-to-coach transition from a potential employer perspective, we found that they favour high level of experience and expertise with the sport, yet the same value is not placed on the expertise and skills associated with the profession of coaching. The existing system also ensures a level of conformity by bringing in ‘good people’ whom they know and can attest for their motives, behaviours, culturalization and loyalty to the sport. While this approach helps maintain a cultural comfort zone, it may not support opportunities for growth and innovation within the coaching profession or within the federations themselves.

Whereas this study provided insight into a previously unexplored area of the within sport athlete career transition, several key limitations should be noted. Interviewees were selected based on their job tasks within the sport federations, and the interviews focused on their personal experience in working with athletes transitioning into coaching but did not focus on the federation policies and programs (or lack thereof). Thus, an individual’s approach within a sports federation system may not be representative of the federation approach and further studies are needed to better understand the systems that support inside sport transition. Additionally, this study was limited to examining inside sport transition within a single country.

Future studies of sports leadership organizations in other countries are needed to provide the context necessary to explore essential approaches, similarities and differences in the identification of and support of athletes transitioning within sport (also in positions other than coaching). Further studies are also essential to explore the impact of current approaches

that prepare athletes for within sport transitions and their effectiveness in developing the core skills of their new profession.

### References

- Abrahamsen, F., & Chroni, S. (in press). Longevity in elite coaching: Motives and maneuvers keeping them in the game. *Roeper Review*.
- Alfermann, D. (2000). Causes and consequences of sport career termination. In D. Lavallee & P. Wylleman (Eds.), *Career transitions in sport: International perspectives*, (pp. 45-58). Fitness Information Technology.
- Allison, W., Abraham, A., & Cale, A. (Eds.). (2016). *Advances in coach education and development: From research to practice*. Routledge.
- The Aspen Institute (2015). Sport for all play for life.  
<https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/sport-all-play-life-playbook-get-every-kid-game/>
- Blackett, A. D., & Evans, A. B. (2018). “Active” and “passive” coach pathways: Elite athletes’ entry routes into high-performance coaching roles. *International Sport Coaching Journal*, 5(3), 213-226. doi: 10.1123/iscj.2017-0053
- Blackett, A. D., Evans, A. B., & Piggott, D. (2020). Negotiating a coach identity: A theoretical critique of elite athletes’ transitions into post-athletic high-performance coaching roles. *Sport, Education and Society*, 1-13. doi: 10.1080/13573322.2020.1787371
- Blackett, A. D., Evans, A. B., & Piggott, D. (2019). “They have to toe the line”: A Foucauldian analysis of the socialisation of former elite athletes into academy coaching roles. *Sports Coaching Review*, 8(1), 83-102.
- Blackett, A. D., Evans, A., & Piggott, D. (2017). Why ‘the best way of learning to coach the game is playing the game’: Conceptualising ‘fast-tracked’ high-performance coaching pathways. *Sport, Education and Society*, 22(6), 744-758.



- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
- Braun, V., Clarke, V., & Weate, P. (2017). Using thematic analysis in sport and exercise research. In B. Smith & A.C. Sparkes (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of qualitative research in sport and exercise* (pp. 191-205). Routledge.
- Breaugh, J. A., & Starke, M. (2000). Research on employee recruitment: So many studies, so many remaining questions. *Journal of Management*, 26, 405-434.  
doi:10.1177/014920630002600303
- Chroni, S. (2014). From competing to Vancouver 2010 to coaching in Sochi 2014: The case of an overnight career transition. Oral presentation at the 28<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Applied Psychology, Paris, July 8-13.
- Chroni, S., Nilsen, D. A., Medgard, M., Sigurjonsson, T., & Solbakken, T. (2018). *Profiling the coaches of Norway: A national survey report of sports coaches and coaching*. Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences.  
<https://brage.bibsys.no/xmlui/handle/11250/2569671>
- Chroni, S. A., Pettersen, S., & Dieffenbach, K. (2020). Going from athlete-to-coach in Norwegian winter sports: Understanding the transition journey. *Sport in Society*, 23(4), 751-773. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2019.1631572>
- Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2013). Teaching thematic analysis: Overcoming challenges and developing strategies for effective learning. *The Psychologist*, 26(2), 120-123.
- Côté, J., & Gilbert, W. (2009). An integrative definition of coaching effectiveness and expertise. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 4(3), 307-323.
- Dieffenbach, K. (2019). Frameworks for coach education and development. In K. Dieffenbach, & M. Thompson (Eds.), *Coach education essentials*, (pp. 3-16). Human Kinetics.

- Dohme, L. C., Rankin-Wright, A. J., & Lara-Bercial, S. (2019). Beyond knowledge transfer: The role of coach developers as motivators for lifelong learning. *International Sport Coaching Journal*, 6(3), 317-328.
- Duffy, P., Hartley, H., Bales, J., Crespo, M., Dick, F., Vardhan, D., Nordmann, L., & Curado, J. (2011). Sport coaching as a 'profession': Challenges and future directions. *International Journal of Coaching Science*, 5(2), 93-123.
- Edwards, J., & Washington, M. (2013). Managing a sport organization: The impact of recruiting, selecting, and retaining elite level coaches in sport. *Journal of Applied Sport Management*, 5(3), 80-112.
- European Commission. (2012). *EU guidelines on dual careers of athletes*.  
[http://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/sport/library/documents/dual-career-guidelines-final\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/sport/library/documents/dual-career-guidelines-final_en.pdf)
- Fusch, P. I., & Ness, L. R. (2015). Are we there yet? Data saturation in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, 20(9), 1408-1416. <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol20/iss9/3>
- Gilbert, W., & Côté, J. (2013). A focus on coaches' knowledge. In P. Potrac, W. Gilbert, & J. Denison (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of sports coaching* (pp. 147-159). Routledge.
- Gilbert, W., Côté, J., & Mallett, C. (2006). Developmental paths and activities of successful sport coaches. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 1(1), 69-76.
- Gratton, C. & Jones, I. (2004). *Research methods for sport studies*. Routledge.
- Green, C. B. (2005). Building sport programs to optimize athlete recruitment, retention, and transition: Toward a normative theory of sport development. *Journal of Sport Management*, 19, 233-253.
- International Council for Coaching Excellence. (2013). *International sport coaching framework*. Human Kinetics.

International Olympic Committee. (2018). *Athlete365 career+*.

<http://www.olympic.org/athlete-career-programme>

Jones, R. L. (Ed.). (2006). *The sports coach as educator: Re-conceptualising sports coaching*. Routledge.

Kavanaugh, T. E. (2010). *Transitions to the other side of the net: Tales of tennis players who became coaches*. Doctoral dissertation, Victoria University.

Lavallee, D. (2006). Career awareness, career planning and career transition needs among sports coaches. *Journal of Career Development*, 33, 66-79.

Lavallee, D., Gordon, S., & Grove, R. (1996). A profile of career beliefs among retired Australian athletes. *Australian Journal of Career Development*, 5(2), 39-42.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage Publications.

Lyle, J. (2002). *Sports coaching concepts: A framework for coaches' behaviour*. Psychology Press.

McMahon, J., Zehntner, C., McGannon, K. R., & Lang, M. (2020). The fast-tracking of one elite athlete swimmer into a swimming coaching role: A practice contributing to the perpetuation and recycling of abuse in sport? *European Journal for Sport and Society*, 1-20. doi: 10.1080/16138171.2020.1792076

Merriam, S. B., & Bierema, L. L. (2013). *Adult learning: Linking theory and practice*. John Wiley & Sons.

Mountjoy, M., Sundgot-Borgen, J., Burke, L., Carter, S., Constantini, N., Lebrun, C., ... & Ljungqvist, A. (2014). The IOC consensus statement: Beyond the female athlete triad—relative energy deficiency in sport (RED-S). *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 48(7), 491-497.

Nash, C. (Ed.). (2014). *Practical sports coaching*. Routledge.

Nash, C. S., & Sproule, J. (2009). Career development of expert coaches. *International Journal of Sports Science and Coaching*, 4(1), 121-138.

Lawson, H. A. (1986). Occupational socialization and the design of teacher education programs. *Journal of teaching in physical education*, 5(2), 107-116.

Park, S., Lavalley, D., & Tod, D. (2013). Athletes' career transition out of sport: A systematic review. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 6(1), 22-53.

Paquette, K., & Trudel, P. (2018). The evolution and learner-centered status of a coach education program. *International Sport Coaching Journal*, 5(1), 24-36.

Punch, K. (1998). *Introduction to social research: Quantitative and qualitative approaches*. Sage.

Rynne, S. (2014). 'Fast track' and 'traditional path' coaches: Affordances, agency and social capital. *Sport, Education and Society*, 19(3), 299-313.

Rynne, S. B., & Mallett, C. J. (2012). Understanding the work and learning of high performance coaches. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 17(5), 507-523.

Schinke, R. J., McGannon, K. R., Battochio, R. C., & Wells, G. D. (2013). Acculturation in elite sport: A thematic analysis of immigrant athletes and coaches. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 31(15), 1676-1686.

Schlossberg, N. K. (1981). A model for analyzing human adaptation to transition. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 9(2), 2-18.

Schlossberg, N. K. (2004). *Retirement smart, retire happy: Finding your true path in life*. APA Books.

Sinclair, D. A., & Orlick, T. (1993). Positive transitions from high-performance sport. *The Sport Psychologist*, 7(2), 138-150.

- Smith, B., & McGannon, K. R. (2018). Developing rigor in qualitative research: Problems and opportunities within sport and exercise psychology. *International review of sport and exercise psychology*, *11*(1), 101-121.
- Sparkes, A. C., & Smith, B. (2014). *Qualitative research methods in sport, exercise and health: From process to product*. Routledge.
- Stambulova, N. (2003). Symptoms of crises-transition: A grounded theory study. In N. Hassmen (Ed.), *SIPF Yearbook 2003*, (pp. 97-109). Örebro University Press.
- Stambulova, N. (2017). Crisis-transitions in athletes: Current emphases on cognitive and contextual factors. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, *16*, 62-66.
- Stambulova, N., & Ryba, T. (2013). *Athletes' careers across cultures*. Routledge.
- Stebbins, J., Taylor, I. M., Spray, C. M., & Ntoumanis, N. (2012). Antecedents of perceived coach interpersonal behaviors: The coaching environment and coach psychological well-and ill-being. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, *34*(4), 481-502.
- Taylor, J., & Ogilvie, B. (1994). A conceptual model of adaptation to retirement among athletes. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, *6*, 1-20.
- Thelwell, R., & Dicks, M. (2018). *Professional advances in sports coaching*. Routledge.
- Torregrosa, M., Boixados, M., Valiente, L., & Cruz, J. (2004). Elite athletes' image of retirement: The way to relocation in sport. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, *5*(1), 35-43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200490517977>
- Werthner, P., & Trudel, P. (2009). Investigating the idiosyncratic learning paths of elite Canadian coaches. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, *4*(3), 433-449.
- World Health Organization. (2010). *Violence prevention: The evidence*.  
[https://www.who.int/violence\\_injury\\_prevention/violence/norms.pdf](https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/norms.pdf)

Figure 1

*Empirical model: Athlete-to-coach transition journey in Norwegian winter sports (Chroni, et al., 2020)*

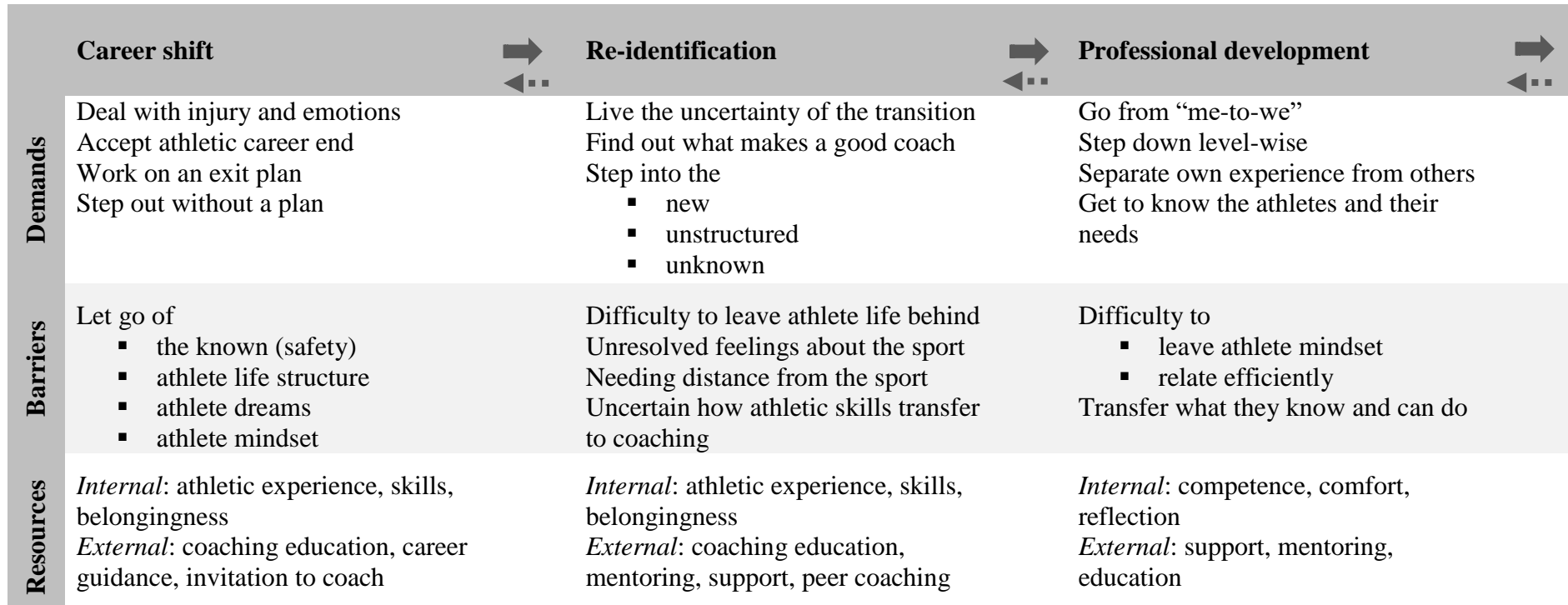


Table 1

*Participant table*

<b>Sport</b>	<b>* Years of experience</b>	<b>** Role as it relates with the A-to-C</b>
Summer, team	26	Finding new coaches for junior and men's teams
Summer, team	20	Leading the 'play development and coaching' section, hiring coaches for junior women's teams
Summer, individual	16	Hiring coaches and all staff
Summer, individual	37	Involved with hiring coaches for the national team
Winter, team	25	Working with coach education and development, and coach-potential identification
Winter, individual, parasport	8	Involved with hiring coaches and coaching the coaches
Winter, individual	12	Working with national teams, organising the coaches and people that work with them
Winter, individual	4	Working with coach education and development, and coach-potential identification
Winter, individual	8	Working with hiring coaches, development teams and the national teams
Winter, individual	3	Working with hiring coaches, organizing the national teams and all around the teams

Note: \* years of experience in their role as it relates to the A-to-C

\*\* the role was described as such by the participants in the interviews (raw data)

Table 2

*What federations look for when recruiting retiring elite athletes as coaches*

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Higher Order Themes</b>
Combination of interpersonal skills, education, experience	Knowledge	<b>Whole package</b>
Intuition	Professional skills	
Can shift beyond being an athlete		
Understands athlete experience		
Leadership	Interpersonal skills	
Knows the sport		
Emotional regulation skills	Education	
Relating well with athletes		
Communicative		
Values education	Experience	
Has education		
Past athletic experience	Personal and professional characteristics	<b>Attributes</b>
Past coaching experience		
Competitiveness		
Initiative		
Compassion		
Willingness to share knowledge		
Humbleness		
Eagerness to learn and develop		
Curiosity for coaching and athlete development		
Passion for coaching		
Love for the sport	Loyalty to coaching	<b>Singular dedication</b>
Coaching is priority in life		
Coaching is 24/7	Tolerant significant other	
Family / significant other loving sport		
Family / significant other accepting uninterrupted focus	Athlete	<b>Recruiter knew them well</b>
Know them as athletes		
Know sport history		
Know them as persons		
Know coaching experience	Coaching	



Table 3

*Resources provided to retiring elite athletes who are recruited and hired as coaches*

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Higher Order Themes</b>	<b>Timing</b>
Consider early career coach and athletes as individuals and the sport culture for a good match	Find a good match	<b>Resources for a stable start</b>	<i>Upon hiring resources</i>
Provide handbook (where available)	Give clear and precise guides		
Provide and plan for educational opportunities Fast tracking	Plan and support education		
Provide monitoring, meetings, feedback	Coach the coach	<b>Resources for professional development</b>	<i>Early career resources</i>
Place coaches into coaching team with others who have experience	Communities of learning		
Have a person dedicated to supporting the coach	Mentoring		
Engage with the coach as a person	Whole person care	<b>Resources for holistic wellbeing</b>	
Provide educational opportunities and clear formal educational pathways	Support formal knowledge	<b>Resources for professional development</b>	<i>Ongoing resources</i>
Provide international learning opportunities			
Create/facilitate/encourage groups of more and less experienced coaches to discuss relevant topics	Communities of learning		
Provide opportunities for a person dedicated to supporting the coach	Mentoring		
Engage with the coach as a person	Whole person care	<b>Resources for holistic wellbeing</b>	