

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

#### Abstract

This study was conducted with 56 recently retired full-time sports coaches in order to examine the importance of career awareness, post-sport career planning, and career transition needs. Results indicated that the individuals did not have a high level of career awareness, had done relatively little post-sport career planning during their coaching careers, and moderately appreciated their career transition needs. However, a positive relationship was found between support systems for coaches and career awareness, career planning, and career transition needs. Results are discussed with regard to career transition theory, as well as previous research on career transitions among sports coaches and athletes. Recommendations for future research, as well as suggestions for career counseling practice, are suggested.

## Career Awareness, Career Planning and Career Transition Needs among Sports Coaches

As the demands associated with competitive sport have increased over the years, so has the academic interest regarding sports career transitions (Wylleman, Alfermann & Lavallee, 2004). As a result, a considerable research agenda has been established with regard to career transitions among athletes (Lavallee, Sinclair, & Wylleman, 1998; Lavallee, Wylleman, & Sinclair, 1998). The significance of career transitions among sports coaches has also been highlighted by several authors in recent years (e.g., Gordon & Lavallee, 2004; Hawkins & Blann, 1993; Wylleman, Lavallee & Alfermann, 1999), but researchers have largely neglected to study this population.

The extant research on sports career transitions has focused primarily on the adjustment difficulties experienced by retiring athletes. Although one of the only inevitabilities in high-performance sport is that eventually every competitor will have to terminate her or his sporting career at the elite level, there is evidence that some sport performers do experience serious psychological difficulties when faced with retirement (Grove, Lavallee, Gordon & Harvey, 1999). As a result, several theoretical models have been employed in an effort to gain a better understanding of process of retirement from sport. For example, social gerontological theories of aging have been applied to sport in order to equate the process of athletic retirement with retiring from the workforce (e.g., Johns, Linder, & Wolko, 1990). Thanatological models, in a similar fashion, have utilized theories of death and dying to explain distressful reactions to athletic retirement (e.g., Blinde & Stratta, 1992). Both of these perspectives have offered little to the understanding of sports career transitions, however, because they have viewed retirement as an event and not a process (Taylor & Ogilvie, 2001).

More recently, transition models have been proposed as an alternative framework for research in the area. The most frequently employed model which has been outlined in the career transition from sport literature is the model of human adaptation to transition as proposed by Schlossberg and associates (Schlossberg, 1993; Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). In this model, successful transitions are predicted by how individuals see the transition that they are currently facing, the personal characteristics brought to the transition, social support networks, and how they tend to cope with transitions generally. Empirical support has been demonstrated for this model among several samples of retired athletes (e.g., Parker, 1994; Sinclair & Orlick, 1994; Swain, 1991), but no theoretically-driven research has been conducted with sports coaches.

The existing research conducted with retired athletes has shown that elite sport environments which require excessive time and energy commitments leave individuals with little time for pre-retirement planning during their careers (Lavalley, 2005; Lavalley, Gordon, & Grove, 1996; Taylor & Ogilvie, 2001). Career awareness and (pre-sport) career planning have been shown to be effective in helping retired athletes make successful transitions out of sport (Grove, Lavalley & Gordon, 1997; Lavalley, 2005). Due to sports coaches also working in a similar environment, this population has been highlighted as a special population worthy of investigation (Gordon & Lavalley, 2004; Hawkins & Blann, 1993; Wylleman, Lavalley & Alfermann, 1999). There has, however, been only one study published in this area to date. Following the development of the *Australian Coaches Career Transition Inventory* (ACCTI), which was based on previous research with the *Professional Athletes Career Transition Inventory* (Blann & Zaichkowsky, 1986, 1989), Hawkins and Blann (1993) administered the ACCTI to national- and international-level coaches in

Australia representing a broad range of individual and team sports. The purpose of the study was to assess coaches' levels of career awareness, post-sport career planning involvement and career transition needs, types of programs most useful in meeting career transition needs, and projected future perceptions of life satisfaction after sport. Results revealed that the majority of coaches did not think about their coaching career ending or felt it was important to plan for such an event despite some expression of job insecurity. The participants in this study were also found to be so focused on maintain and enhancing their coaching career development that they did not engage in career planning and involvement activities outside of coaching during their coaching careers. Consequently, several recommendations were provided by the researchers based on their findings and previous research with athletes, including the suggestion that sports administrators work with coaches to identify their needs in order to establish career transition programs specifically for coaches. Moreover, social support was highlighted as a key area in that career transition interventions for coaches should be developed, designed, and delivered in ways that appropriately involve coaches' spouses, significant others, and/or families (Hawkins & Blann, 1993). Social support has been proposed as a factor that influences the transition adjustment process (Schlossberg, 1993; Schlossberg et al., 1995) and previous research by Webb, Nasco, Riley, and Headrick (1998) with retired athletes has suggested a link between social support networks and post-sport career planning and career transition needs.

It has been recently suggested that future research extend the pioneering efforts of Hawkins and Blann (1993) by examining the career transition experiences of recently retired coaches (Gordon & Lavalley, 2004). It has also been recommended by Wylleman et

al. (1999) to examine specific variables among sports coaches that have either previously been studied with athletes in transition or are directly related to relevant models in order to contribute to theoretical developments in the area of sports career transitions. These include: career awareness, which has been proposed to be related to the personal characteristics brought to a transition (Lavalley, 2005; Schlossberg et al., 1995); post-sport career planning, which has been proposed to be related to social support (Webb et al., 1998) and how people cope with transitions in general (Schlossberg, 2003); and career transition needs, which has been proposed to be related to social support (Webb et al., 1998) and how people see the transition that they are facing (Schlossberg, 1993). Based on these recommendations, as well as the suggestion to identify intervention strategies that would help sports coaches make the transition to a post-coaching career (Hawkins & Blann, 1993), the aim of this study is to examine the relationship between transition resource factors (i.e., situation, self, supports, and coping) and career awareness, post-sport career planning and involvement, and career transition needs among a sample of recently retired sports coaches. This study is specifically designed to determine the extent to which coaches are aware of career development issues, engaged in post-coaching career planning, and appreciate career transition needs, and also determine how these career awareness variables relate to the transition resource factors. Based on previous research with coaches and athletes (e.g., Hawkins & Blann, 1993; Lavalley et al., 1996) it was hypothesized that the participants would have low levels of career awareness, not have engaged in post-sport career planning during their coaching careers, and not have a great appreciation for their career transition needs. In addition, it was hypothesized that career awareness among participants would be significantly related to the personal characteristics brought to the

transition, the extent to which they engaged in post-sport career planning would be significantly related to social support and how they cope with transitions generally, and what participants perceived to be important with regard to their transition into a career after coaching would be significantly related to how they see the transition that they are facing and social support.

## Method

### *Participants*

A sample of 56 sports coaches (38 males; 18 females) were recruited for this study, all of whom had retired from full-time coaching at the national level in the United Kingdom. The participants were from a range of fifteen sports including athletics ( $n = 5$ ), basketball ( $n = 4$ ), canoeing ( $n = 2$ ), cricket ( $n = 4$ ), diving ( $n = 2$ ), football ( $n = 9$ ), golf ( $n = 3$ ); gymnastics ( $n = 2$ ), hockey ( $n = 4$ ), judo ( $n = 2$ ), netball ( $n = 1$ ), rowing ( $n = 2$ ), rugby ( $n = 6$ ), swimming ( $n = 5$ ) and tennis ( $n = 4$ ), and had an average of 11.4 ( $SD = 4.4$ ) year's experience as a full-time coach. Criteria for inclusion in the study was that participants had been full-time coaches at the time of their retirement, had been retired from coaching for less than two months ( $M=43.8$  days,  $SD=6.9$  days), and that they were in the process of making a transition to another career outside of sports coaching (i.e., they had not permanently retired from working). The mean age of the sample was 39.27 ( $SD=5.62$ ) with an age range of 33-52 years. All participants gave consent to participate in the study.

### *Procedure and Measures*

A total 71 participants were initially contacted via their sport organizations and invited to anonymously complete and return the *Transition Coping Questionnaire* (TCQ; Schlossberg, 1993) and an adapted version of the ACCTI (Hawkins & Blann, 1993) within

two months of their coaching career termination via a postal survey. A cover letter explaining the purpose of the study, informed consent form, and pre-paid returned envelope addressed to the researcher were included with the questionnaires. A return rate of 78% was achieved.

The TCQ was designed to help individuals identify problem areas for particular transitions in their lives, understand where the stressors are with regard to these transitions, and help in identify strategies to overcome any stressors (Schlossberg, 1993). Content validity was for the TCQ was established by selecting topics to be measured from a review of the literature and from the model of human adaptation to transition, and a preliminary version was piloted to establish the appropriateness of the questionnaire (Schlossberg, 1981, 1993). The questionnaire contains 58 items that ask the respondent to rate themselves on 5-point Likert scales in the following four areas, with higher scores predicting a more successful adjustment to a transition: (1) how they see the transition that they are currently facing (*Situation* Scale = 8 questions; Range = 8-40); (2) the personal characteristics that they bring to the transition (*Self* Scale = 10 multi-part questions; Range = 10-50); (3) what help they have from significant others (*Support* Scale = 15 multi-part questions; Range = 15-75); and (4) how they tend to cope with transitions generally (*Coping* Scale = 25 questions; Range = 25-125). Schlossberg and colleagues (Schlossberg, 1993; Schlossberg et al., 1995) have offered the following three classifications for scores on the TCQ subscales: *Strong*, *Moderate*, and *Low*; the ranges for each of these classifications are as follows: *Situation* (Strong = 30-40; Moderate = 19-29; Low = 8-18); *Self* (Strong = 38-50; Moderate = 24-37; Low = 10-23); *Support* (Strong = 55-75; Moderate = 35-54; Low = 15-34); *Coping* (Strong = 93-125; Moderate = 59-92; Low = 25-58). Previous research with

retired university faculty members, retired athletes, distance learning students, adults whose physical abilities have suddenly decreased, and families making geographical relocations has demonstrated strong internal consistency reliability for this questionnaire with consistency coefficients ranging from 0.74 to 0.88 (Goodman & Pappas, 2000; Lavalley, 2005; Schlossberg et al., 1995; Weisenberg, 2001). The alpha coefficients in the present study were found to be acceptable across the four subscales (see Table 1).

The ACCTI was developed by Hawkins and Blann (1993) to evaluate career awareness, career planning, and career transition needs among sports coaches. This instrument includes three subsections that focus on: (1) Demographic Information (e.g., Age, Gender, Sport); (2) Career Development and Transition, which includes questions in the areas of career awareness (i.e., the extent to which coaches are aware of career development issues), post-sport career planning and involvement (i.e., the extent to which coaches have engaged in post-coaching career planning), and career transition needs (i.e., what coaches perceive to be important with regard to their transition into a career after coaching); and (3) Career Planning for Athletes (i.e., the extent to which coaches feel they have helped prepare their athletes for career outside of sport). The ACCTI, which has established cross-cultural equivalency according to the recommendations of Gessavoli (1993), has been shown to be a reliable measure of career transition experiences among coaches (Hawkins & Blann, 1993). Respondents are asked to rate themselves on 6-point Likert scales, anchored by *Strongly Agree* (6) and *Strongly Disagree* (1), as well as complete several rank-item response choice questions.

The ACCTI was initially pilot tested for this study with a sample of nine coaches representative of the target population, and feedback on the format and content of the



questionnaire was also received from a panel of academic experts in sport psychology and sports coaching. Following this pilot work, this questionnaire was adapted in several ways. Firstly, several demographic information questions and all the career planning for athlete questions were excluded, as they were deemed to be inappropriate for the study. Several career awareness, post-sport career planning and involvement, and career transition needs questions were also changed to be used retrospectively (e.g., the item "I think about my coaching career ending" was changed to "During my career, I thought about my coaching career ending") as a result of participants having recently ended their coaching careers. Finally, the rank-item response choice questions were reworded in line with the other questions employed across this questionnaire, and utilized 6-point Likert-type scales anchored by *Strongly Agree* (6) and *Strongly Disagree* (1).

These changes resulted in the 26 item-version of the ACCTI that was employed in this study, which included five demographic information questions as well as 21 items from the original Career Development and Transition subsection of the questionnaire. Nine items assessed career awareness among the participants. The internal consistency coefficient for this scale was found to be 0.72, and the items were averaged to provide a measure of *Career Awareness*. A measure of *Post-Sport Career Planning and Involvement* was obtained by taking the mean of seven items (internal consistency coefficient = 0.79). A measure of appreciation of *Career Transition Needs* was obtained by taking the mean of five items (internal consistency coefficient = 0.83).

#### *Data Analysis*

Descriptive data for each of the measures was initially calculated. A MANOVA was conducted to examine the effects of situation, self, support, and coping TCQ subscales) on

career awareness, post-sport career planning and involvement, and career transition needs (ACCTI subscales).

## Results

Descriptive data for ACCTI and TCQ subscale scores are presented in Table 1. The results of the TCQ data indicate that the coaches in this study scored low on how they see the transition that they are currently facing, the personal characteristics that they bring to the transition, and what help they have from significant other, and moderate on how they tend to cope with transitions generally (cf. Schlossberg, 1993; Schlossberg et al., 1995). The ACCTI data indicate that participants overall did not have a high level of career awareness, had done relatively little post-sport career planning during their coaching careers, and moderately appreciated their career transition needs.

MANOVA results indicated that *Situation* ( $F 3, 53=6.15, p<0.05, \eta^2=0.08$ ), *Self* ( $F 3, 53=5.12, p<0.05, \eta^2=0.07$ ), and *Supports* ( $F 3, 53=9.22, p<0.01, \eta^2=0.12$ ) had statistically significant independent effects on *Career Awareness*. A two-way interaction of *Situation* and *Supports* ( $F 3, 53=4.84, p<0.05, \eta^2=0.20$ ) also had a significant effect on *Career Awareness*. The main effect of *Situation* ( $F 3, 53=5.86, p<0.05, \eta^2=0.08$ ), *Supports* ( $F 3, 53=8.94, p<0.01, \eta^2=0.16$ ), and *Coping* ( $F 3, 53=4.97, p<0.05, \eta^2=0.06$ ) were found to be statistically significant with regards to *Post-Sport Career Planning and Involvement*, and *Self* ( $F 3, 53=4.91, p<0.05, \eta^2=0.06$ ) and *Supports* ( $F 3, 53=7.45, p<0.05, \eta^2=0.10$ ) had significant effects on *Career Transition Needs*. A two-way interaction of *Situation* and *Supports* ( $F 3, 53=4.65, p<0.05, \eta^2=0.21$ ) had a statistically significant effect on *Post-Sport Career Planning and Involvement*. Through examination of the effect sizes, a

medium effect size was indicated for differences on the TCQ subscales among *Situation* and *Career Awareness*, *Situation* and *Post-Sport Career Planning*, *Supports* and *Career Awareness*, *Supports* and *Career Transition Needs*, *Self* and *Career Awareness*, *Self* and *Career Transition Needs*, and *Coping* and *Post-Sport Career Planning*, while a large effect size was indicated for *Supports* and *Post-Sport Career Planning*. All of these differences were deemed to be moderately or highly meaningful (Cohen, 1988).

### Discussion

The focus of this investigation was to extend the previous research conducted by Hawkins and Blann (1993) with sports coaches by examining the relationship between transition resource variables and career awareness, post-sport career planning and involvement, and career transition needs. Analysis of the data obtained from 56 retired sports coaches revealed that, as expected, these individuals had relatively low levels of career awareness, had done relatively little post-sport career planning during their coaching careers, and moderately appreciated their career transition needs. Moreover, they scored low on how they saw the career transition that they were facing, the personal characteristics that they brought to the transition, and what help they had from significant others, and moderate on how they have coped with transitions generally in the past. These results are consistent with the findings of Hawkins and Blann, who found that coaches in their study were reluctant to consider careers outside of coaching despite an expression of job insecurity. The coaches in the present study were also found to be similar to those studied by Hawkins and Blann, as they collectively tended not to engage in post-sport career planning activities during their coaching careers. These results could be attributed to the lack of a dedicated career transition program for coaches in the United Kingdom at the time

of the study, as well as their level of awareness of other types of career transition support that they could access. As has been found in research with athletes, access to, and use of, career transition support services influences the quality of adjustment to sports career termination (Gorely, Lavalley, Bruce, Teale, & Lavalley, 2001).

Further analysis of the data revealed that career awareness among coaches is related to personal characteristics brought to the transition, how they see the transition they are facing, and support obtained from significant others with regard to their career transition. Post-sport career planning and involvement is related to how coaches see the transitions they are facing, support obtained from significant others, and how they cope with transitions generally, whereas career transition needs was found to be related to how coaches see the transitions they are facing and support obtained from significant others. There are several implications of these findings from a theoretical viewpoint. For example, knowledge about the relationship between transition resource factors and career awareness, post-sport career planning and involvement, and career transition needs adds detail to Schlossberg's (1993) model as it applies to career transitions in sport. In addition, these results mirror previous research conducted with retired athletes, which has revealed the importance of pre-retirement planning (e.g., Grove et al., 1997) and social support (e.g., Webb et al., 1998) in the career transition process for athletes.

The results generally support the study hypotheses overall. However, unexpected significant results were obtained for the *Situation* subscale in relation to career awareness and post-sport career planning, and an insignificant result was found with regard to the hypothesized relationship between this subscale and career transition needs. These results suggest that how sports coaches view the transition that they are facing is more important

with regard to career awareness and planning than previously proposed, as well as less important with regard career transitions needs. This has implications for both theory development and future research, as the adjustment to retirement process might be more complex and dynamic (cf. Grove et al., 1997; Lavallee, 2005).

The *Supports* subscale obtained significant results with regard to career awareness, post-sport career planning and involvement, and career transition needs among coaches. These are interesting finding, as several authors have underlined the importance of interpersonal relationships on career transitions among coaches (Gordon & Lavallee, 2004; Hawkins & Blann, 1993). Social support was also found to be a significant contributing factor (with the *Situation* subscale) in career awareness and post-sport career planning and involvement, and this suggests that it is particularly important with regards to the way coaches perceive the transitions that they face. Research with athletes has shown that this population can often feel alienated from their sport upon career termination (Webb et al., 1998), but that that those who engage in productive confiding activity through significant others experience a more successful post-retirement adjustment (Grove et al., 1998; Lavallee, Gordon & Grove, 1997).

Coaches are a unique population in terms of career transitions because many are former athletes themselves who will have previously experienced a career transition from participation in their chosen sport. Lavallee et al. (1997) have provided evidence to suggest that for these individuals, the continued involvement in sport as a full-time coach might help ease their transition from sport as an athlete by allowing their sport-related identities and social support systems to remain intact for a period of time. At the same time, however, these coaches may put themselves at-risk to experience career transition difficulties when

they retire from the coaching profession if they do not engage in post-coaching career planning prior to their retirement (Wylleman et al., 1999). In this study, post-sport career planning and involvement was found to be related to how coaches cope with transitions in general. However, a limitation is that only transitions in general were assessed and not how coaches who were former athletes themselves previously coped with their retirement from sport as an athlete. This is potentially an important area for future research, as Sinclair and Orlick (1993) have advocated the vital importance of previous experience with transition for retiring athletes.

There are a number of other limitations that should be taken into account when considering the implications of these findings. First, this is only the second study to employ the ACCTI, which was based on previous research with the *Professional Athletes Career Transition Inventory* (Blann & Zaichkowsky, 1986, 1989). For more generalizable results to be obtained and subsequently applied, the ACCTI requires further evidence to support its reliability and validity. There is also a procrustean limitation in Schlossberg's (1993) scoring classification which needs to be taken into account when interpreting these results. In addition, it should be noted that the response rate of 78% in this study may have resulted in a biased sample who were more interested in sharing their views about their career transition out of coaching. Finally, this research was lacking prospective data, and future studies may want to compare pre-transition and post-transition data in order to overcome some of the limitations of retrospective analyses.

It is also recommended that researchers continue to replicate studies being conducted on career transitions among athletes with sport coaching populations. For example, the reasons for a career transition (e.g., age, personal choice), interacting factors differentiating

adaptation to the career transitions (e.g., identity as a coach, socioeconomic status), and tertiary factors mediating adaptation to career transition (e.g., coping skills, interpersonal relationships) all require further investigation with coaches. Researchers should also examine whether or not existing developmental theories (e.g., Super, 1990) and career transition models for athletes (e.g., Gordon & Lavalley, 2004; Stambulova, 2000; Taylor & Ogilvie, 2001; Wylleman & Lavalley, 2004) can accommodate the experiences of coaches and assist in translating research into practice. In addition, studies are required to evaluate the effectiveness of career transition interventions for coaches. Such a program of research would assist in the development of career transition intervention programs for coaches which, as has been previously suggested by Hawkins and Blann (1993), should involve coaches' spouses, significant others and/or families.

#### Suggestions for Career Counseling Practice

The results of this study can be applied by career counseling practitioners working with individuals both during their sports coaching careers and also with coaches in transitions (e.g., recently retired). Enhancement strategies are appropriate when working with coaches pre-retirement, such as identifying skills that they developed in sport that could be transferred to other areas of their lives (e.g., leadership, communication and performing under pressure). Opportunities for the transferable skills to be practiced during intervention sessions should be provided, as well as feedback, support, and follow-up in order to enhance personal competence. When working with coaches post-retirement, it is advised that supportive strategies be employed. These could include the enhancement of social support among coaches' families and significant others if required, and the development of life skills that can augment the individual's ability to cope with their coaching career

termination. Goal setting could also be used during this period to identify new skills, as well as develop future plans.

This research, along with the available data on retired athletes, suggests that working in sport environments often leaves individuals with little time for pre-retirement planning during their careers. Hawkins and Blann (1993), however, found that the majority of their sample of sports coaches expressed feelings of job insecurity. Individuals considering careers in sports coaching should, therefore, engage in post-sport career planning during their coaching careers in order to increase their career awareness and career transition needs. As few programs exist specifically for sports coaches (Gordon & Lavalley, 2004), these individuals should seek out career counseling practitioners who can assist them their post-sport career planning.



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Table 1

*Mean, Standard Deviation, and Bivariate Correlation Scores for Australian Coaches Career Transition Inventory (ACCTI) and Transition Coping Questionnaire (TCQ) subscales*

Scale	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
ACCTI							
1. Career Awareness	0.72						
2. Post-Sport Career Planning and Involvement	0.78	0.79					
3. Career Transition Needs	0.69	0.71	0.83				
TCQ							
4. Situation	0.34	0.29	0.23	0.81			
5. Self	0.31	0.19	0.26	0.62	0.86		
6. Supports	0.49	0.46	0.38	0.65	0.22	0.89	
7. Coping	0.11	0.27	0.14	0.20	0.35	0.18	0.77
<i>M</i>	3.58	3.51	3.24	18.20	22.49	31.84	81.22
<i>SD</i>	0.31	0.23	0.38	2.57	4.08	3.37	5.56

*Note.*  $N = 58$ ; Alpha value are on diagonal, correlation values below diagonal.