

2019

The Extra Mile: How Collegiate Coaches Can Better Prepare Student-Athletes for Retirement

Kayla Hunter

Follow this and additional works at: <https://pillars.taylor.edu/mahe>



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hunter, Kayla, "The Extra Mile: How Collegiate Coaches Can Better Prepare Student-Athletes for Retirement" (2019). *Master of Arts in Higher Education Theses*. 144.

<https://pillars.taylor.edu/mahe/144>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Theses at Pillars at Taylor University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master of Arts in Higher Education Theses by an authorized administrator of Pillars at Taylor University. For more information, please contact pillars@taylor.edu.

THE EXTRA MILE: HOW COLLEGIATE COACHES CAN BETTER PREPARE
STUDENT-ATHLETES FOR RETIREMENT

A thesis

Presented to

The School of Social Sciences, Education & Business

Department of Higher Education and Student Development

Taylor University

Upland, Indiana

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Higher Education and Student Development

by

Kayla Hunter

May 2019

© Kayla Hunter 2019

**Higher Education and Student Development
Taylor University
Upland, Indiana**

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER'S THESIS

This is to certify that the Thesis of

Kayla Elizabeth Hunter

entitled

The Extra Mile: How Collegiate Coaches Can Better Prepare
Student-Athletes for Retirement

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the

Master of Arts degree
in Higher Education and Student Development

May 2019

Todd Ream, Ph.D. Date
Thesis Supervisor

Skip Trudeau, Ed.D. Date
Member, Thesis Hearing Committee

Drew Moser, Ph.D. Date
Member, Thesis Hearing Committee

Tim Herrmann, Ph.D. Date
Director, M.A. in Higher Education and Student Development

Abstract

The power of high athletic identity coupled with the unfamiliar process of athletic retirement presents a unique crossroads for individuals approaching the end of their intercollegiate athletic careers. Despite the presence of several resources to aid student-athletes, the literature reports a range of both positive and negative experiences for retiring student-athletes. Collegiate coaches serve a prominent role in the lives of student-athletes and therefore present a valuable avenue through which mentorship, identity development, and preparation for retirement can occur. Therefore, the purpose of the research was to explore the impact, if any, of collegiate coaches on the retirement process of student-athletes. Using a quantitative survey design, the study explored the collegiate athletic retirement experiences of 121 retired intercollegiate student-athletes. Results suggested a strong coach-player relationship does not directly translate into adequate preparation for retirement. Rather, participants indicated a desire for more practical discussions on what to expect following retirement. Implications for intercollegiate athletic administrators and coaches as well as implications for future research are discussed.

Acknowledgments

Conducting this thesis has been one of the most growth-generating experiences of my life. In more ways than I can name, the process has cultivated in me confidence, curiosity, and a desire to begin every day as a learner. The following pages would not have been possible without the support of friends, family, and a truly amazing God.

Thank you to my husband, the constant encourager who pushed this project to the finish line. You are my number one fan and biggest supporter, and you always believe in my abilities more than I do. Thank you for the laughter you bring to even the most stressful of moments and for the ways you push me to pursue my passions.

Thank you to my parents and siblings for providing the opportunities that made my passion for this topic possible. Thank you for feeding my competitive spirit, for cheering me on during my own intercollegiate athletic career, and for supporting my desire to pursue collegiate coaching.

Thank you to Cohort XI, the missing piece to my Taylor University experience. You all have shown me community in new ways and have taught me to better care for others and myself. You all have helped me lean into deep conversations and have modeled finding beauty in the trivial moments of life. I will forever cherish our journey together.

Thank you to the MAHE faculty members who saw untapped potential in me from the beginning. Thank you for truly loving the work you have been called to do and

for walking alongside us as we stumble through the mess of research and graduate school. My confidence in my professional abilities is stronger because of you all, and I will forever be grateful for your influence in my life.

Thank you to Skip Trudeau and Todd Ream, the two most gracious assistantship/thesis supervisors I could have asked for. Skip, thank you for being flexible during my chaotic first semester and for pushing me to invest time in this work. Todd, thank you for the countless hours you have sacrificed to make this thesis possible. Thank you both for reading my work, for offering honest feedback, and for speaking into my passion for this topic.

Thank you to my research participants, without whom the study would not exist. Your belief in the potential of this study was inspiring, and I feel honored to have a glimpse into your intercollegiate athletic experiences. Your participation has made an investment into the lives of future intercollegiate student-athletes, and I am confident they thank you as well.

Thank you to Jesus, the ultimate reason for anything of value on the pages to follow. Thank you for bringing me to MAHE and for surrounding me with genuine love, challenge, and support. Thank you for whispering your promises into my doubt and confusion and for your faithful plans for the future.

MAHE has been the most unexpectedly wonderful experience of my life and can only be explained by the divine work of the Lord's hands. I praise Him for the ways He is using this time to make known His purpose for my life, and I pray this work and anything resulting from it be pleasing to His perfect name.

Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
Athletic Identity	2
Intercollegiate Athletic Retirement: Transition from Student-Athlete to Non- Athlete	3
Purpose of Study	3
Chapter 2 Literature Review	4
The Student-Athlete Defined	4
Athletic Identity	5
Identity Foreclosure in Student-Athletes	9
Intercollegiate Athletic Retirement	10
Available Resources for Retiring Athletes	14
Conclusion	16
Chapter 3 Methodology	18
Design	18
Procedure	19
Participants	19
Instrument	20

Data Analysis.....	21
Chapter 4 Results.....	23
Descriptive Statistics.....	23
Test Statistics.....	28
Summary.....	29
Chapter 5 Discussion.....	30
Implications for Practice.....	32
Limitations.....	34
Implications for Future Research.....	36
Conclusion.....	37
References.....	39
Appendix A: Instrument.....	45
Appendix B: Sample Email Correspondence.....	49
Appendix C: Informed Consent.....	50

List of Tables

Table 1. Participant Distribution by Sport	20
Table 2. “Following Retirement from Intercollegiate Athletic Competition, I Experienced Difficulties Defining My Identity” by Sport	25
Table 3. Responses to “My Collegiate Coach Prepared Me for Retirement from Intercollegiate Athletics” by Sport.....	26
Table 4. Survey Items Addressing Preparation for Retirement	27

List of Figures

Figure 1. Responses to “Following Retirement from Intercollegiate Athletic Competition,
I Experienced Difficulties Defining My Identity” by Gender24

Figure 2. Responses to “My Collegiate Coach Prepared Me for Retirement from
Intercollegiate Athletics” by Gender.....26

Chapter 1

Introduction

Not a seat is vacant in the small-town university gym, where the roar of rival crowds seems to pierce the walls. Both teams circle up for a time-out, knowing this year's collegiate volleyball league champion will be named in the next few minutes. Courtney Johnson, a senior captain and the home team's leading attacker, is locked in on her coach. The huddle breaks, and Courtney's head fills with ten years of volleyball memories: the shouts of joy in success, the pain of heartbreak in defeat, and the sweat and tears shed in private. Overcome with passion, she turns to her setter with a look that says, "Give me the ball. I'm ready." The ball is served, the pass is perfect, and the set goes to Courtney. She soars through the air, attacking with precision to send the ball straight down. As the ball races to the floor, the court suddenly disappears. The voices of the crowd grow faint, and Courtney finds herself falling through the air with no ground in sight. Flailing her limbs in desperation, Courtney abruptly wakes up in her room. She slowly sits up as reality begins to set in. The championship game was last week, her team lost, and her time as an intercollegiate student-athlete came to an end. Courtney curls up in her blanket and begins to sob.

In this fictitious scenario, Courtney represents one of roughly 525,000 student-athletes competing at the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) levels (NAIA, 2018; NCAA 2018b).

Courtney's experience portrays the complexity surrounding athletic identity development and the subsequent transition out of intercollegiate athletic competition.

Athletic Identity

The significance of identity development during the college years is evident in Arthur Chickering's identity development theory. Among the seven key vectors contributing to identity formation, the four most notable for the purpose of this study include 1) managing emotion, 2) developing mature interpersonal relationships, 3) establishing identity, and 4) developing purpose (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The intercollegiate athletic experience incorporates each of these vectors in some capacity. Student-athletes must learn to balance the emotional highs and lows of competition amid limited time for academic or social responsibilities. Furthermore, the team component of athletics provides opportunities to develop deep interpersonal relationships with teammates. Intercollegiate athletic competition also creates a common goal among team members, often providing a profound sense of purpose for student-athletes.

The fourth vector discussed in this section—establishing identity—proves most interesting to the current study. While athletic identity undoubtedly develops during the college years, some student-athletes may arrive on campus with previously formed identities already rooted in athletics. These identities may be cultivated through participation in foundational youth sports leagues, many of which children are enrolled in during highly formative stages of early adolescent identity development (Lau, Fox, & Cheung, 2005). When athletic participation continues into young adulthood, the result is often a difficulty imagining one's life without competition in sport (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Petitpas, 2000; Lau, Fox, & Cheung, 2005).

Intercollegiate Athletic Retirement

The term *retirement* is often associated with the culmination of one's professional career. However, the conclusion of an athletic career represents an equally difficult transition that can occur with or without warning. Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) defined a transition as "an event or nonevent resulting in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and/or roles" (p. 33). In the case of retirement from intercollegiate athletics, the transition is rarely a nonevent. Time, limitations of the body, or other uncontrollable factors eventually put an end to the student-athlete experience. The question, therefore, is not *if* a student-athlete will undergo a transitional event, but *when* the transitional event will take place. To provide clarity to the type of transitional event, the review of literature discusses transitions out of intercollegiate athletics in three major categories: (1) unforced and foreseeable retirement, (2) forced but foreseeable retirement, or (3) forced and unforeseeable retirement.

Purpose of Study

Athletic identity and intercollegiate athletic retirement represent two variables essential to the collegiate student-athlete experience. These two variables interact frequently, often impacting the difficulty and duration of an individual's transition process. The purpose of the research was to gain a better understanding of how student-athletes transition out of intercollegiate athletic competition. More specifically, the research explored the role of intercollegiate coaches in the retirement process. The study was guided by the following research question: What impact, if any, do collegiate coaches have on the student-athlete retirement process?

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Of the roughly 525,000 student-athletes participating in NCAA or NAIA varsity athletics (NAIA, 2018; NCAA, 2018b), an estimated 1% advance to some level of professional competition (Stankovich, Meeker, & Henderson, 2001). Therefore, college graduation inevitably signifies the end of official athletic competition for most student-athletes. The specific reasons for retirement may vary, as may the ways each individual experiences retirement. The unique consequences of athletic retirement largely depend on the strength of one's athletic identity, the foreseeability of retirement, and the quality of available resources.

The Student-Athlete Defined

Student-athletes are defined as “a group of young people who, as a function of their shared athletic experience, encounter atypical demands and pressures that often challenge the course of their personal development and well-being” (Etzel, Ferrante, & Pinkney, 1996, p. 1). The complexity of the student-athlete experience includes the unique challenge of successfully balancing athletic, academic, and social tasks (Woodruff & Schallert, 2008). For some students, participation in intercollegiate athletics mimics the commitment required of a full-time job. According to the 2015 NCAA survey, student-athletes spend an average of 31.5 hours per week on athletics, with Division I football averaging 42 hours per week. No sport reported an average of less than 27 hours

per week spent on athletics, and similar if not increased hours of commitment were reported during the off-season (NCAA, 2015). Student-athletes consequently must prioritize whether to spend their remaining time on academics, social networking, or personal development. This problem may be intensified at institutions where the student-athlete role and accompanying athlete subculture are overlooked as strong developmental forces (Melendez, 2010). Encapsulating the entirety of the student-athlete experience requires a holistic view of the varying demands vying for their time and energy.

Within the student-athlete definition is a particular distinction regarding the term *elite athlete*. The precise definition varies across current literature and often depends on the perspective of the researcher. Some define elite athletes as those who participate in highly selective or prestigious travel programs intended specifically for intercollegiate athletic preparation (Brown & Potrac, 2009). Others define elite athletes as individuals competing at the amateur intercollegiate level, most often NCAA Division I (Beamon, 2012; Lockhart, 2010; Petitpas, Brewer, & Van Raalte, 2009). Additionally, others define elite athletes as individuals competing at the Olympic or international level (Poucher & Tamminen, 2017; Stephan & Brewer, 2007). For the purpose of the current research, elite athletes are those competing at NCAA Division I institutions as well as athletes competing, or preparing to compete, at a professional level beyond intercollegiate athletics.

Athletic Identity

Athletic identity is most appropriately defined for the current study as “the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role” (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993, p. 237). Pragmatically, identification with the athlete role is thought to develop

through cognitive, affective, behavioral, and social functions (Murphy, Petitpas, & Brewer, 1996). Most broadly, athletic identity is defined as composing one's social role or occupational self-image (in athletics) (Melendez, 2010). Athletic identity may intensify or diminish at any point in one's life as the result of a number of factors.

Development of athletic identity in youth. In most cases, athletic participation and athletic identity development begin at a young age. Adolescence is a formative and critical time for identity development as young people work to establish behaviors, values, roles, and aspirations (Lau, Fox, & Cheung, 2005). As a result, young athletes who realistically consider professional careers are likely to quickly develop exclusively athletic identities. Sports, in turn, become not only a central part of their youth but also an integral part of their future (Brewer et al., 2000). The reality of athletics as a common activity for young children fosters attachment to the athlete role before other alternative identities can be explored.

Athletic identity and the student-athlete. The impact of athletic identity on college student well-being demonstrates both positive and negative results. For example, in one study, former student-athletes looked forward to experiencing college in the traditional sense but experienced "a sense of loss of identity, social network, structure, and motivation" following retirement (Moreland-Bishop, 2009, p. ii). Strength of athletic identity association in literature is most widely evaluated by the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS), which scores items on a 7-point Likert-type scale (Brewer et al., 1993). Higher scores demonstrate stronger, more exclusive identification with the athlete role and vice versa.

Benefits to high athletic identity. Research by Miller and Kerr (2003) supported several positive results associated with strong athletic identity. For example, athletic participation was found to ease feelings of loneliness and stress for student-athletes during their first year of college. The study found over-identification with the athlete role was often temporary, developing in the early to middle years of college but dissipating in association with new, non-sport related identities. Aside from the health benefits of physical activity, other social and emotional benefits included developing time management skills and the ability to meet athletic and academic demands (Miller & Kerr, 2003).

Moreland-Bishop (2009) provided additional support for high athletic identity as a predictor for successful retirement from athletics. Participants scoring higher on the AIMS scale reported higher scores on the Exhausted Eligibility Transition Scale (EETS), an assessment of one's perception of the transition away from athletic competition. EETS measures perception and therefore may not accurately represent the reality of the transition. Nonetheless, the results of the study suggested individuals with higher athletic identities experienced lower degrees of difficulty in the transition from athlete to non-athlete (Moreland-Bishop, 2009).

Cost of high athletic identity. Strong connection to the athlete role can result in significant challenges in retirement, regardless of the level of competition. Such challenges may include emotional difficulties as well as uncharacteristic postretirement vocational behavior (Shachar, Brewer, Cornelius, & Petitpas, 2004). Similarly, validation of association to athletic identity significantly predicts anxiety symptoms for

athletes in the post-retirement period and may be a risk factor for the development of psychiatric distress (Giannone, Haney, Kealy, & Ogrodniczuk, 2017).

Specific research on Olympic athletes demonstrates the high degree to which athletic identity encompasses one's identity. Stephan and Brewer (2007) suggested one's identity becomes singularly defined in relationship to his or her sport. Intercollegiate student-athletes often pursue commitment regimens similar to those of professional athletes, with lives revolving around training, travel, and competition (Stephan & Brewer, 2007). Such intense schedules may cause student-athletes to embody the thoughts of one retired Olympic archer who stated, "When you train all the time, there is no difference between you and your sport. You are one" (Stephan & Brewer, 2007, p. 75). A one-dimensional sense of self is often created, which can lead to traumatic experiences when one's identity becomes unbalanced, lost, or relinquished (Brown & Potrac, 2009).

Impact of rhythms, routines, and rituals on athletic identity development.

Athletic identity is unique in several ways, particularly with regard to the formation of daily rhythms. "Rituals are salient evidence of behavioral commitment to groups," or, in this case, teams or athletic programs (Watson-Jones & Legare, 2016, p. 44). Some rituals may be highly visible, as many athletes report warming up the same way before every game and practice (Poucher & Tamminen, 2017). However, other habits are likely kept private. When life is organized around athletics, even small day-to-day matters point back to the goal of peak athletic performance. Athletes wake up early for practice, eat well-balanced meals to fuel their bodies appropriately, and go to sleep early to be well-rested for the next day of training (Stephan & Brewer, 2007).

Such rituals create a continuous cycle, as student-athletes form rituals as a result of participation in athletics and simultaneously increase their athlete identity by participating in said rituals. Watson-Jones and Legare (2016) affirmed this idea, noting several benefits of group rituals including group member identification, commitment to group values, and increased social group cohesion. Praise from significant mentors and peers within these social groups reinforces exclusive athletic identity development as positive feedback increases the importance attached to athletic dominance (Brown & Potrac, 2009).

Identity Foreclosure in Student-Athletes

Identity foreclosure is the process of committing to an identity before exploring other roles (Beamon, 2012). This is often the case with student-athletes, as many show greater identity foreclosure compared to general college students (Linnemeyer & Brown, 2010). The commitment required for participation in athletics and the resulting strong sense of athletic identity may limit student-athletes from exploring career, educational, and lifestyle options outside of athletics (Brewer et al., 1993; Brown, Glastetter-Fender, & Shelton, 2000).

Identity has both a self-identity component—how one views oneself—and a social identity component—how the self is viewed by others (Beamon, 2012). For many student-athletes, these viewpoints are one and the same. Individuals develop self-identities rooted in their sport and perceive a social identity in which others view them solely as athletes (Beamon, 2012). As such, foreclosure to the athletic identity may be brought on by individual choices or environmental demands and expectations (Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1993).

Premature submission to the athlete role creates several potential challenges for student-athletes both during and after college. For one, significant investment in the athlete role is often accompanied by a sacrifice of the student role (Miller & Kerr, 2003). The opportunity cost of time spent at practices, games, and other sport-related activities is often the exploration of extracurricular activities outside of athletics (Beamon, 2012).

Additionally, identity foreclosure is associated with dependent decision-making, whereby important decisions are deferred to others (Murphy et al., 1996). Student-athletes with foreclosed identities may therefore entrust life-altering decisions to parents, coaches, or other influential mentors due to the stress and time commitment of athletic competition.

Intercollegiate Athletic Retirement: Transition from Student-Athlete to Non-Athlete

Retirement is commonly recognized as taking place in the later stages of life, after one's values, interests, and beliefs are largely established. Varsity athletic retirement differs, as it typically occurs in the young adult years. While no decisive definition for athletic retirement exists in literature, for the purpose of the current study retirement refers to the definitive end of one's varsity intercollegiate athletic experience due to reasons including—but not limited to—personal choice, exhaustion of eligibility, deselection, or injury.

Retiring student-athlete research confirms a correlation between the cause of retirement and the ease of the transition. Specifically, a major distinction is made between those freely choosing retirement and those forced into retirement by external circumstances such as deselection or injury (Webb, Nasco, Riley, & Headrick, 1998).

The following sections expand upon the various reasons for retirement in relation to forcibility and foreseeability.

Unforced and foreseeable retirement. Individuals who choose to end their athletic careers undergo an end to intercollegiate athletic participation both unforced and foreseeable. Student-athletes in this category are found to generally experience calmer transitions in relation to other student-athletes (Webb et al., 1998), and as such little discussion surrounds this group in the literature. An individual may decide to discontinue athletic participation for any number of reasons: rigorous academic demands, loss of enjoyment for the sport, or a desire to get involved in additional extracurricular activities.

Forced and unforeseeable retirement. Lockhart (2010) stated, “Identity based on athletic performance is, by its very nature, unstable and prone to variability” (p. 27). Athletic participation inevitably includes an element of unpredictability and risks a crisis if one’s identity is placed solely in athletics. Forced retirement may arise through a number of scenarios, each creating an inescapable end to one’s athletic career. The unforeseeable nature of this type of retirement is often abrupt, leading to increased retirement difficulties. Such experiences are generally more common for individuals with high athletic identities. Athletes forced into retirement find themselves in sudden circumstances of limited control with little preparation toward life after retirement (Webb et al., 1998). The two most common ways forced and unforeseeable retirement occurs is through either deselection or injury.

Forced and unforeseeable retirement caused by deselection. Deselection is the first means by which an individual may be forced to withdraw from varsity athletic competition. Deselection occurs when an individual has the ability and desire to

participate but is not chosen for a particular team. In some cases, athletes are aware of the possibility of deselection based on comparatively low-skill level and develop alternative future plans (Blakelock, Chen, & Prescott, 2016; Webb et al., 1998). Unfortunately, this is not always the case. According to Blakelock and colleagues (2016), the first month of deselection may generate symptoms of anxiety, depression, loss of confidence, and social dysfunction. In a study of four males deselected from a highly competitive high school football club, the development of a strong athletic identity was found to contribute to significant emotional and psychological disturbances (Brown & Potrac, 2009). This deep relationship was further described as a “symbolic loss,” in which athletes experienced feelings similar to that of losing a loved one (Brown & Potrac, 2009, p. 143).

Additionally, participants reported feeling shock, anxiety, humiliation, anger and despair after receiving news of their deselection (Brown & Potrac, 2009). Several participants referred to feelings of failure associated with deselection, suggesting some student-athletes perceive deselection as an event caused by personal insufficiency (Brown & Potrac, 2009). While many athletes struggle to create a new sense of self following deselection, some athletes may experience limited to no psychological distress, thereby signifying the level of variation in individual reactions to deselection (Blakelock et al., 2016).

Forced and unforeseeable retirement caused by injury. Injury is an additional means by which an individual may be forced to retire from athletic participation. Athletic injuries, especially those with career-ending implications, are thought to disrupt the self-identity of individuals lacking self-worth and self-identification outside of sport

(Brewer et al., 1993). As with deselection, the unexpected nature of injuries allows no time for student-athletes to prepare for the end of their career. Such an event may result in a state of confusion when processing a new life without athletic competition. Furthermore, the implications of a career-ending injury may not immediately be recognized by optimistic student-athletes. This combination of unforeseeability and ambiguous prognoses for recovery can make injury-related retirements more challenging than other forms of retirement (Webb et al., 1998).

The desire to return to competition may lead to rehabilitation over adherence, which can cause additional negative effects for student-athletes. Over adherence is defined as “the behaviors and underlying beliefs of athletes who engage in rehabilitation efforts that exceed practitioner-recommended guidelines” (Podlog et al., 2013, p. 372). The high level of importance placed on competition leads many student-athletes to view injuries negatively, occasionally involving a sense of grief. As a result, over-commitment to rehabilitation protocol may appear to be an attractive way to expedite the healing process and more quickly return to play (Hilliard, Blom, Hankemeier, & Bolin, 2017). The danger with this mindset is the possibility of a premature return to activity, thereby risking additional and preventable injuries (Podlog et al., 2013).

Forced and foreseeable retirement. The majority of athletes competing at the intercollegiate level conclude official competition and training following graduation. This complex, dual-natured retirement is both forced, as the student-athlete’s intercollegiate eligibility concludes, yet foreseeable, as the student-athlete knows the end is imminent. Despite this foreseeable end, one study conducted by Beamon (2012) reported 100% of participants experienced difficulty transitioning out of the

intercollegiate student-athlete role. Similarly, ten female athletes at a Division I institution described a general feeling of sorrow and uneasiness in regard to moving on from intercollegiate play: “the general sense about moving on was the sadness associated with leaving something that they have invested so much time, energy, and identity into as well as the uncertainty the future brings” (Saxe, Hardin, Taylor, & Pate, 2017, p. 36). Students may also experience a loss of social support among the athletic community and consequently struggle to develop schedules in the absence of structured training routines (Ohashi, 2018).

A qualitative study by Lally (2007) observed an alternative outcome for a group of retiring university student-athletes. All seven athletes involved in the study anticipated a stage of halted identity following retirement; however, only one student-athlete experienced this difficult stage of transition. All six of the athletes escaping the anticipated identity crisis had one thing in common: diminished reliance on the athletic role through serious exploration of other identities prior to retirement. The student-athlete who did experience serious retirement difficulties chose not to lessen his level of athlete identification prior to the end of his career. The research suggests student-athletes initiating self-identity redefinition prior to foreseeable retirement are expected to be better prepared to cope with the loss of the athlete role (Lally, 2007).

Available Resources for Retiring Athletes

Retirement from intercollegiate athletics is a highly complex and individualistic process. Unfortunately, programs specifically designed to help student-athletes navigate retirement are typically not in place in most athletic departments (Moreland-Bishop, 2009). This deficiency of current resources for student-athletes is supported throughout

literature, indicating a need for further research to better facilitate preparation for the retirement process. According to Melendez (2010), “Developing a more balanced student-athlete identity stressing both academic and athletic pursuits may play a key role in the improvement of the college adjustment experience for student-athletes” (p. 357). Amid the desire for additional research and programs, a number of current resources do exist.

Positive transitions model. One of the most effective resources currently available is the Positive Transitions Sport Retirement Model. Originally designed in 1966, the research-based model emphasizes reality therapy by holding student-athletes responsible for addressing retirement from sports rather than dwelling on what could have been. The model uses the transferable skills gained in athletics as teaching tools to build student-athletes’ confidence in their skills and abilities beyond athletics (Stankovich et al., 2001).

A textbook based on the model is divided into three major categories: Personal Assessment or Identity Development, Life Skills or Athletic Transferable Skills, and Career Exploration (Meeker, Stankovich, & Kays, 2000). Taking the form of a workbook, lessons are laid out with space for students to answer open-ended questions.

Developmental frameworks. Additionally, notable resources include the Life Development Intervention (LDI) framework (Danish et al., 1993) and the NCAA Life Skills development program (NCAA, 2018a). The LDI perspective provides enhancement strategies to student-athletes prior to retirement, support strategies to student-athletes in the midst of retirement, and counseling strategies for student-athletes after retirement (Danish et al., 1993). The NCAA Life Skills program exists to equip

student-athletes with holistic life skills to use throughout the college experience and following graduation (NCAA, 2018a).

The intercollegiate coach. The intercollegiate coach constitutes a significant resource when considering the extensive amount of time student-athletes commit to intercollegiate athletics. The nature of the relationship between intercollegiate coaches and student-athletes offers space for significant whole-person development throughout the collegiate years. Bjornsen and Dinkel (2017) stated, “Coaches may harbor unique perspectives about what works and what is needed for an optimal student-athlete experience, both during and beyond the college years” (p. 251).

According to the NCAA (2015), 56.5% of all NCAA student-athletes wish coaches and administrators would spend more time discussing preparation for a career after college. This incongruity may partially account for the 43% of all NCAA student-athletes who are optimistic their job after college will involve sports (NCAA, 2015). Despite the significant weight placed on the impact coaches have on the intercollegiate student-athlete experience (Bjornsen & Dinkel, 2017; NCAA, 2015; Saxe et al., 2017), little research exists on how sufficiently student-athletes perceive their needs to be met by coaches.

Conclusion

Student-athletes comprise a group of individuals balancing rigorous demands both academically and athletically (Woodruff & Schallert, 2008). Athletic success may emerge early in a child’s life, creating a reliance on athletics to shape one’s identity from a young age. By the time student-athletes arrive on college campuses, their athletic identities are often quite strong and highly attached to their overall self-image.

The literature supports strong implications between participation in athletics and a loss of identity following retirement from intercollegiate athletic competition. However, the concept of athletic identity is insufficiently explored with regard to the post-college adjustment process (Melendez, 2010). The two major starting points for understanding the phenomenon of student-athlete retirement include the sense of athletic identity as well as the foreseeability of retirement. As such, student-athletes ending their careers through deselection or injury more likely experience psychological disturbances and high levels of stress than those with greater retirement foreseeability (Webb et al., 1998).

Although association with the athlete role is often strong, Brewer and colleagues (2000) suggested the development of a multidimensional self-concept is more than feasible due to the malleability of athletic identity. While additional programs still merit exploration, a number of resources currently exist for students anticipating or experiencing difficulties in retirement from intercollegiate athletics. Among these resources are the Positive Transitions Sport Retirement Model, the LDI framework, the NCAA Life Skills program, and the intercollegiate coach. Such resources should first aim to aid student-athletes in their ability to cope with transitions and should also increase student-athletes' ability to grow through the retirement experience (Danish et al., 1993).

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of the study was to understand the impact, if any, of the intercollegiate coach on a student-athlete's retirement from varsity athletic participation. Current research on intercollegiate athletic retirement focuses primarily on elite, Olympic-bound, or NCAA Division I athletes (Beamon, 2012; Murphy et al., 1996; Poucher & Tamminen, 2017). Subsequently, limited research focuses on student-athletes at the NCAA Division II, NCAA Division III, and NAIA levels. The current study added depth to research in the field by evaluating the impact of collegiate coaches at the NAIA level.

Design

Due to the foundational evidence provided by previously conducted studies, the use of a descriptive quantitative approach to the research was appropriate. Creswell (2014) defined quantitative research as, "an approach for testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables" (p. 4). Explicitly, the research utilized survey instrumentation to provide a cross-sectional representation of the athletic retirement experience of intercollegiate student-athletes as well as the collegiate coaches role therein. A survey design was chosen to ensure efficient distribution in hopes of garnering a sizeable participant pool. According to Creswell (2012), a correlational research design provides an opportunity to "describe and measure the degree of

association (or relationship) between two or more variables or sets of scores” (p. 338).

Both descriptive statistics and correlational analysis were employed to obtain a comprehensive view of the data.

Procedure

Approval for the study was requested through an Institutional Review Board (IRB) application and was subsequently approved by the institution’s Office of Institutional Research. Following approval, a list of potential participant names and email addresses was requested from the institution’s alumni relations office. Once the list was composed, an invitation was sent to all prospective participants via a blind copy email (see Appendix B). Participants accepted the invitation to participate by clicking on a link within the invitation email and by advancing through the first page of the online survey. Furthermore, by clicking through the first page of the online survey participants confirmed being at least 18 years old. The survey link remained open for three weeks, during which two reminder emails were sent.

Participants

Data collection occurred at a small, faith-based liberal arts institution in the Midwest. The institution offers ten varsity sports made up of just over 300 athletes, all of whom compete at the NAIA level. Participants consisted of retired athletes from the institution’s graduating classes of 2014-2018. For the study, a retired student-athlete was defined as one who has exhausted all intercollegiate athletic eligibility. Individuals participating in or pursuing participation in professional athletic competition were therefore considered ineligible for participation in the current study.

The survey was electronically administered to 270 alumni student-athletes of the ten varsity sports offered at the institution. One hundred twenty-three surveys were completed for a response rate of 45.6%. Of the 123 surveys returned, one survey was omitted due to incomplete data, and one survey was omitted due to the respondent's continued participation in professional athletics. The 121 eligible participants ranged in age from 22 to 28 (mean age 24.26) and included 66 females and 55 males. The majority of participants identified as Caucasian (95%) and attended the university for four years (87.6%). The breakdown of participants by sport is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Distribution by Sport

<u>Sport</u>	<u>Participants</u>	<u>Percentage of Total</u>
Baseball	13	10.7%
Basketball	14	11.6%
Cross Country	20	16.5%
Football	1	0.8%
Golf	9	7.4%
Soccer	22	18.1%
Softball	8	6.6%
Tennis	13	10.7%
Track and Field	6	5%
Volleyball	15	12.4%

Instrument

The research utilized an adapted version of the Athlete Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) to evaluate the constructs of athletic identity and preparation for

retirement. AIMS is a 10-item, 7-point Likert-scale instrument designed to measure an individual's athletic identity (Brewer et al., 1993). Composite scores range from 10 to 70, with higher scores indicating a higher association with the athlete identity. The scale was assessed by undergraduate research assistants and former student-athletes to ensure accuracy in measuring strength and exclusivity of identification with the athlete role (Brewer et al., 1993). The accuracy of the scale is evident through a test-retest reliability measurement of 0.89 over a two-week period (Brewer et al., 1993). The use of AIMS, the most widely implemented instrument among athletic identity literature, added consistency and efficiency to the research and facilitated effective contribution to the work of previous scholars.

Ten items were added to AIMS with permission from the AIMS developers. Nine of the items remained consistent with the 7-point Likert-scale format, while the final item was left open for additional comments. The purpose of the modified survey was to measure the current athletic-identity level of retired student-athletes, their perceived level of preparation for retirement from intercollegiate athletics, and the level of impact, if any, of intercollegiate coaches on the retirement process.

Data Analysis

Data gathered from the survey was first transferred to an excel document to be scored and cleansed. From there, the data was analyzed through SPSS to explore descriptive statistics and correlational analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to assess the degree to which participants experienced difficulties following retirement, as well as the perceived level of preparation participants received from their collegiate coaches.

A simple correlation was used to analyze possible relationships between difficult experiences in retirement with regard to both athletic identity and perceived preparation for retirement by a collegiate coach. Answers from the single open-ended survey question were coded for themes but did not necessitate the use of qualitative data collection processing.

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of the study was to explore the impact, if any, of collegiate coaches on student-athletes' retirement from intercollegiate athletic competition. The results include both descriptive and correlational components, describing the participant pool makeup and the relationship, or lack thereof, between various survey responses.

Descriptive Statistics

The first 10 survey items composed the Athlete Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS). AIMS is a 10-item scale measuring the degree to which an individual identifies with the term *athlete* (Brewer et al., 1993). Scores range from 10, indicating no association with the athletic identity, to 70, indicating a strong association with the athlete identity. The mean AIMS score for the sample was 41.5, including a minimum score of 22 and a maximum score of 60.

The 10 items added to the AIMS scale sought to evaluate student-athletes' difficult experiences, or lack thereof, retiring from intercollegiate athletic competition. In response to the statement, "Following retirement from intercollegiate athletic competition, I experienced difficulties defining my identity," 47 participants (38.84%) strongly agreed, agreed, or somewhat agreed, while 67 participants (55.37%) strongly disagreed, disagreed, or somewhat disagreed. The remaining 7 participants (5.79%) neither agreed nor disagreed. This finding suggests the majority of students were able to

transition away from intercollegiate athletic competition without significant struggles in identity development. Female student-athletes reported greater difficulties defining identity following retirement than did male student-athletes (see Figure 1). Table 2 provides a breakdown of responses to this item by sport.

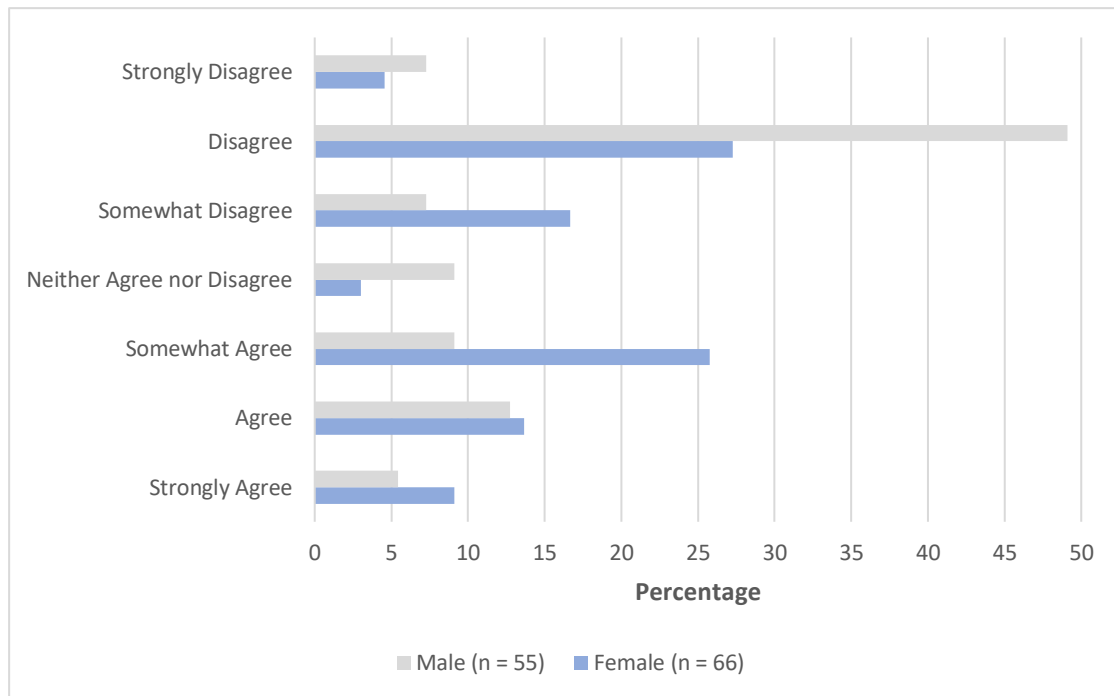


Figure 1. Responses to “Following retirement from intercollegiate athletic competition, I experienced difficulties defining my identity” by Gender

Table 2

Responses to “Following retirement from intercollegiate athletic competition, I experienced difficulties defining my identity” by Sport

<u>Sport</u>	<u>Strongly agree</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Somewhat agree</u>	<u>Neither agree nor disagree</u>	<u>Somewhat disagree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Strongly disagree</u>
Baseball	1	2	1	2	0	6	1
Basketball	1	1	0	1	2	9	0
Cross Country	0	3	7	2	1	6	1
Football	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Golf	0	1	0	0	3	5	0
Soccer	4	3	3	0	4	8	0
Softball	1	2	1	0	1	1	2
Tennis	0	1	2	1	1	6	2
Track and Field	1	2	1	1	0	1	0
Volleyball	1	1	7	0	3	2	1

In response to the statement, “My collegiate coach prepared me for retirement from intercollegiate athletics,” 63 participants (52.07%) strongly agreed, agreed, or somewhat agreed while 41 participants (33.88%) strongly disagreed, disagreed, or somewhat disagreed. The remaining 17 participants (14.05%) neither agreed nor disagreed. In response to this statement, male participants reported feeling more prepared by their coaches for retirement than female participants (see Figure 2). Table 3 provides a breakdown of responses to this item by sport.

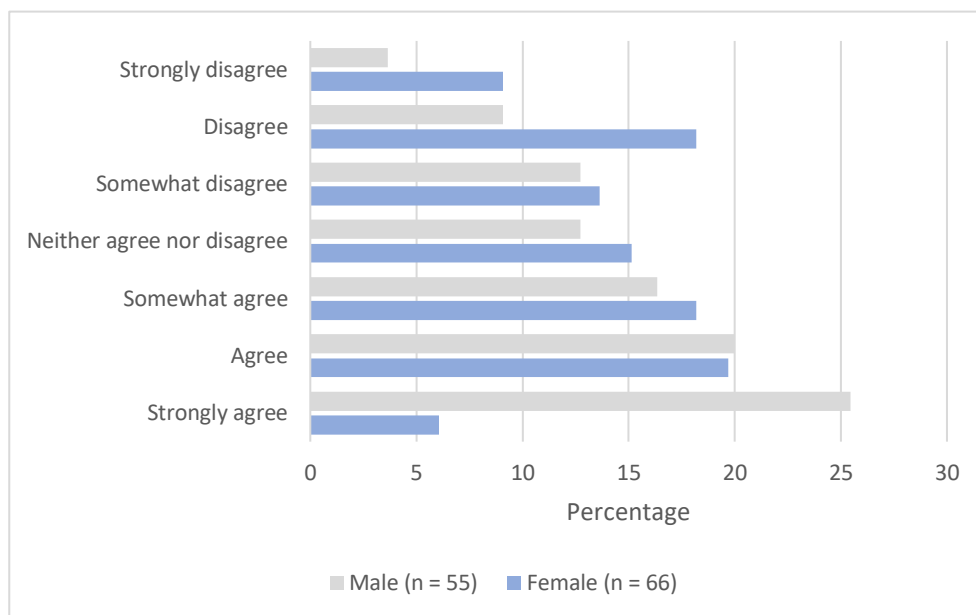


Figure 2. Responses to “My collegiate coach prepared me for retirement from intercollegiate athletics” by Gender

Table 3

Responses to “My collegiate coach prepared me for retirement from intercollegiate athletics” by Sport

<u>Sport</u>	<u>Strongly agree</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Somewhat agree</u>	<u>Neither agree nor disagree</u>	<u>Somewhat disagree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Strongly disagree</u>
Baseball	2	3	3	2	3	0	1
Basketball	8	4	0	0	2	0	0
Cross Country	2	3	5	5	3	2	0
Football	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Golf	0	3	1	2	0	1	2
Soccer	4	5	3	1	3	3	3
Softball	1	2	2	4	1	4	0
Tennis	0	2	2	4	1	4	0
Track and Field	0	0	1	1	0	3	1
Volleyball	1	2	5	2	2	3	0

The remaining eight survey items further explored the concept of the collegiate coach's role in the retirement process. Response data for each item is shown in Table 4, excluding the final survey item which was reserved for additional comments. The mean score for items 3-9 suggests student-athletes perceive their coaches as highly relational, caring, and invested individuals. The implication of item 2, however, creates a discrepancy. Despite reporting seemingly healthy and beneficial player-coach relationships, student-athletes on average did not report feeling effectively prepared for retirement by their collegiate coaches.

Table 4

Survey Items Addressing Preparation for Retirement

<u>Survey Item</u>	<u>Range</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Std. Deviation</u>
1. Following retirement from intercollegiate athletic competition, I experienced difficulties defining my identity.	6.0	3.63	1.84
2. My collegiate coach prepared me for retirement from intercollegiate athletics.	6.0	4.41	1.86
3. My collegiate coach cared about me beyond my athletic performance.	6.0	6.00	1.46
4. My collegiate coach was willing to meet with me one-on-one.	5.0	6.31	1.0
5. My collegiate coach related my athletic participation to experiences beyond athletics.	6.0	5.90	1.42
6. My collegiate coach encouraged me to be involved in social networks outside of my athletic team.	6.0	4.79	1.68
7. My collegiate coach took interest in my career aspirations.	6.0	5.64	1.51
8. My collegiate coach helped me explore and deepen my faith.	6.0	5.95	1.38
9. I consider my collegiate coach a mentor/role model.	6.0	5.38	1.92

Test Statistics

A simple correlation analysis was used to explore both the relationship between difficult experiences in retirement (Table 4, item 1) and AIMS scores, as well as difficult experiences in retirement (Table 4, item 1) and perceived level of preparation by a coach (Table 4, item 2). For the purpose of the research, results were analyzed based on the following degrees of association: coefficients of 0.20-0.35 signified slight or low relationships; coefficients of 0.35-0.65 signified limited or moderate relationships; coefficients of 0.66-0.85 signified good relationships; and coefficients of 0.86 or above signified very strong relationships (Creswell, 2012).

A low-moderate positive relationship (.344) was found between AIMS scores and difficulties in retirement. This suggests student-athletes associating highly with the athlete identity experience increased difficulty in retirement from intercollegiate athletics. A low-moderate negative correlation (-.310) was found between difficulties in retirement and perceived preparation by a coach. This finding suggests student-athletes reporting increased difficulty in retirement feel less prepared for retirement by their collegiate coach. Of the 55.37% of participants responding strongly disagree, disagree, or somewhat disagree to experiencing difficulties in retirement, 61.19% strongly agreed, agreed, or somewhat agreed they were well-prepared by their collegiate coach. Conversely, of the 38.84% of participants responding strongly agree, agree, or somewhat agree to experiencing difficulties in retirement, just 44.68% strongly agreed, agreed, or somewhat agreed they were well-prepared by their collegiate coach. These results suggest both the influence of a collegiate coach as well as association with the athlete

identity are moderately but nonetheless related to the level of difficulty student-athletes experience during retirement from intercollegiate athletics.

Summary

The survey responses demonstrated relatively equal positive and negative experiences following retirement from intercollegiate athletic competition, illustrating the complexity of the retirement process and specific differences for each individual athlete. While responding in ways that imply strong player-coach relations, participants reported feeling less than prepared for retirement by their collegiate coaches. This discrepancy as well as other findings are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The literature affirms the complex nature of athletic identity and the student-athlete experience (Etzel et al., 1996; Melendez, 2010; Woodruff & Schallert, 2008), as well as the difficulties associated with the end of official athletic competition (Brewer et al., 1993; Brown & Potrac, 2009; Webb et al., 1998). Furthermore, Bjornsen and Dinkel (2017) suggested intercollegiate coaches play a significant role in the retirement process of student-athletes.

The current study combined elements of athletic identity, retirement, and the influence of collegiate coaches to explore the impact, if any, of collegiate coaches on a student-athlete's process of retirement from intercollegiate athletics. Based on the literature and the results of the study, intercollegiate coaches try admirably yet unsuccessfully to prepare student-athletes for the end of their collegiate athletic careers. The following discussion highlights relevant findings, implications for practice, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

Identification with the athlete role often begins early on during formative and critical points of adolescent development (Lau, Fox, & Cheung, 2005) and may influence one's cognitive, affective, behavioral, and social development (Murphy et al., 1996). According to Moreland-Bishop (2009), high athletic identity may translate into a sense of deep loss following retirement for some intercollegiate student-athletes. That

sense of loss was not the case for over half (55.37%) of participants in the current study, all of whom strongly disagreed, disagreed, or somewhat disagreed to experiencing difficulties defining identity following retirement. However, the remaining 44.63% of participants responded on the contrary, which signifies a need for improved methods to appropriately support retiring student-athletes.

The process of better preparing student-athletes for retirement may start with collegiate coaches. Student-athletes communicate with coaches throughout their collegiate careers during practices, games, training sessions, or individual meetings. This level of interaction provides ample time for meaningful mentorship to occur, which the results of the current study suggest transpires in positive ways. However, the results of the study also suggest the development of sincere player-coach relationships may not provide adequate preparation for retirement.

The NCAA (2015) reported 56.5% of all NCAA student-athletes wish coaches and administrators spent more time discussing preparation for a career after college. While 82.64% of participants in the current study strongly agreed, agreed, or somewhat agreed their collegiate coach took interest in their career aspirations, over one third (33.91%) strongly disagreed, disagreed, or somewhat disagreed that their collegiate coach prepared them for retirement. To this point, the responses of several participants in the current study are summed up well by the following statement:

In my personal experience, my coach didn't talk specifically about life after sports but he always made it known that he was there to mentor us to be good people not only at [this institution] but beyond it. I think retirement is something that should

be talked about more because no one knows how they are going to feel until they are there. I was surprised how much I missed playing. (24-year-old female)

Moreover, participant responses suggest student-athletes seek a more pragmatic approach to post-intercollegiate athletic preparation. Along these lines, one participant stated,

I was encouraged in words to allow [my] sport to make me into the person I wanted to be, but in actions I received a different message. The coaching staff did invest in us through training that extended beyond collegiate sports (mission trips, character building, etc.), however those often felt, for me, separate from our sport. I personally felt very unprepared for life post-collegiate athletics. (23-year-old female)

This response suggests a need for intercollegiate coaches to incorporate more practical tips and strategies to prepare student-athletes for retirement. While the importance of first developing relationships should not be disputed, student-athletes additionally want to discuss what life will look like after retirement and how to deal with the potential difficulties that may arise.

Implications for Practice

The results of the study suggest several significant implications for collegiate coaches and intercollegiate athletic administrators. Although survey responses suggested collegiate coaches are highly invested in student-athlete's lives, willing to meet one-on-one, and considered role models or mentors, student-athletes did not report feeling prepared for retirement by their coaches. Considering the unique perspective collegiate coaches have as both athletic instructors and mentors, intercollegiate athletic administrators should encourage programs and practices with more practical steps to

prepare student-athletes for retirement. Specifically, such steps could include partnership with career development services on campus. Regular meetings with career development personnel would help student-athletes thoughtfully consider suitable careers to pursue after college. Identifying academic skills and vocational interests would build student-athletes' confidence in their abilities beyond graduation, thereby diminishing a reliance on their athletic identity.

Institutions should also strive to implement resources such as the NCAA Life Skills development program (NCAA, 2018a), which provides a foundation for improving student-athletes' preparation for life post-graduation. In the Life Skills program, the NCAA and its 1,200 member institutions strive to help student-athletes develop balanced lives by learning skills applicable to the college experience as well as experiences after graduation (NCAA, 2018a). The program utilizes symposiums, student-athlete advisory committees, internships, and scholarships to help foster a sense of development beyond the athletic realm. The tactics employed by the Life Skills program should be used to model similar practices within institutional athletic departments. Courses specifically designed for student-athletes may be helpful, particularly when designed for junior or third-year students preparing to manage the myriad of emotions associated with the transitional senior year.

In addition to understanding and incorporating best practices, intercollegiate athletic departments should seek to understand the needs of their student-athletes. Even the most well-planned program may fall short if not shaped to the specific needs of the institution's student-athlete population. Feeling adequately prepared for retirement will likely be nuanced for individual athletes, which warrants intentional focus to

understanding the collective needs of the athletic community. Gathering information through individual meetings, team-wide surveys, or focus groups will help athletic administrators to divide time, energy, and other resources more efficiently to prepare student-athletes better for retirement.

Limitations

The current study harbors some limitations. First, data was gathered at a faith-based, predominantly White institution in the Midwest. As such, the participant pool lacked ethnic diversity, as 95% of participants most closely identified as White or Caucasian. Furthermore, the faith component may have influenced student-athletes to answer in ways remaining consistent with the institution's beliefs and values. For example, 88.43% of participants strongly agreed, agreed, or somewhat agreed with the following statement: "My collegiate coach helped me explore and deepen my faith."

Second, the study centered on the impact of a single coach on the student-athlete retirement process. However, many student-athletes are coached by more than one individual over the course of their collegiate career. Furthermore, 43.8% of participants reported experiencing a coaching change during their intercollegiate careers. Due to the quantitative nature of the survey, participants could not specify if answers referred to one or multiple coaches. Such a challenge was reflected in several additional comments left by participants, including the following:

For athletes who went through coaching changes, it is hard to answer the last set of questions. Perhaps make an option to list multiple coaches and answer questions about each of them to get a fuller scope of an athlete's experience. (26-year-old female)

The issue of multiple coaches was specifically reported for transfer student-athletes who stated their responses for the coach of the institution from which they transferred differed from the responses they gave for their current coach.

A third limitation was the voluntary nature of participation. Participants chose to engage in the survey via an email link, which created a potential for participation bias in which primarily individuals with strong opinions may have chosen to participate. Such bias could have skewed survey results by painting an unrealistic picture of the student-athlete population based on individuals with extremely positive or extremely negative experiences at the institution. Almost all (97.52%) participants strongly agreed, agreed, or somewhat agreed to the statement, “I consider myself an athlete.” This suggests the majority of participants in the study still valued their sport or athletics in general in some capacity and could have skewed results.

A fourth and final limitation was the researcher’s own bias. The researcher previously participated in intercollegiate athletics at the institution where data was collected and therefore carried a personal narrative of the student-athlete experience. Furthermore, the researcher was admittedly passionate about this topic and holds ambitions to pursue a career in intercollegiate coaching. As a result of the personal interest in this topic, the researcher hoped to uncover a connection between positive experiences in retirement and the impact of an intercollegiate coach. However, the quantitative survey design helped mitigate the risk for misinterpretation by the researcher and allowed for an honest analysis of the data.

Implications for Future Research

Given the limited focus of the study on a four-year faith-based university, future research could include multiple faith-based institutions or various types of institutions such as public or two-year institutions to gain a greater breadth of perspectives. Based on findings of increased difficulty defining identity in retirement for female student-athletes, future research could explore the reasons behind such a finding as well as what specific difficulties this particular subject pool may endure. Similar research divided by individual sports could prove helpful, as well as studies examining the difference in retirement difficulties for student-athletes participating in individual sports versus team sports.

Additional research could also explore student-athletes' definition of "feeling prepared" for retirement from intercollegiate athletics. Such findings would help intercollegiate coaches and athletic administrators better tailor programs and practices to meet student-athletes' needs. Furthermore, in response to the relatively high percentage of student-athletes who experienced a coaching change, future research might explore the impact of a coaching change on a student-athlete's perceived level of preparation for retirement or difficulties experienced in retirement.

A third area of future research could include exploring the impact of career-ending injuries on athletic identity and the retirement process. More specifically, additional research could seek ways for collegiate coaches to guide student-athletes better through the difficult recovery process. The forced and unforeseeable nature of a career-ending injury provides the individual no time to prepare for the end of his or her career,

as the prognosis of a career-ending injury may occur days, weeks or even months after one's last game.

Several respondents alluded to the difficulties associated with injuries, including one particularly related comment: "I got injured during college ending my athletic career. I wish I was aided through the process more than I was by my coach" (25-year-old female). The same may be true of student-athletes who endure a potentially career-ending injury but return to competition. While they may seem to escape some of the mental difficulties, they may struggle with thoughts of "what could have been" prior to their injury. The potential room for growth in helping these student-athletes is great and warrants attention in future research.

Conclusion

The athlete role and eventual process of retirement are noteworthy components of the intercollegiate student-athlete experience. According to NCAA (2018b) and NAIA (2018) statistics, roughly 525,000 student-athletes compete at a varsity level on college and university campuses. The significant majority, an estimated 99% (Stankovich et al., 2001), will not compete at a professional level but will turn the page on their official athletic careers with the conclusion of their collegiate-level careers.

Transitions of any kind involve changes to relationships, routines, assumptions, roles, or other aspects of life (Goodman et al., 2006), and the process of retiring from intercollegiate athletics is no exception. The changes to daily schedules, workout routines, and social networks constitute a considerable transition through which one must navigate. The study sought to explore not only the student-athlete retirement process but, more specifically, the role of collegiate coaches therein.

The results of the study suggest collegiate coaches play a meaningful role in preparing student-athletes for retirement and limiting the difficulties associated with the transition. While the evidence suggests collegiate coaches adequately invest in student-athletes' lives, such efforts could be redirected in ways that more practically prepare student-athletes for experiences beyond intercollegiate athletics. By collaborating with student-athletes to identify primary areas of concern regarding retirement and to understand their needs better, intercollegiate student-athletes, coaches, and athletic administrators alike can work together to provide excellent experiences both during the college years and far beyond.

References

- Beamon, K. (2012). "I'm a baller": Athletic identity foreclosure among African-American former student-athletes. *Journal of African American Studies*, *16*, 195–208.
doi:10.1007/s12111-012-9211-8
- Bjornsen, A. L., & Dinkel, D. M. (2017). Transition experiences of Division-1 college student-athletes: Coach perspectives. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, *40*, 245–268.
- Blakelock, D. J., Chen, M. A., & Prescott, T. (2016). Psychological distress in elite adolescent soccer players following deselection. *Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology*, *10*(1), 59–77. doi:10.1123/jcsp.2015-0010
- Brewer, B. W., Van Raalte, J. L., & Linder, D. E. (1993). Athletic identity: Hercules' muscles or Achilles heel? *International Journal of Sport Psychology*, *24*, 237–254.
- Brewer, B.W., Van Raalte, J. L., & Petitpas, A. J. (2000). Self-identity issues in sport career transitions. In D. Lavallee & P. Wylleman (Eds.), *Career transitions in sport: International perspectives* (pp. 29–48). Morgantown, WV: Fitness Information Technology, Inc.
- Brown, C., Glastetter-Fender, C., & Shelton, M. (2000). Psychosocial identity and career control in college student-athletes. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *56*(1), 53–62.
doi:10.1006/jvbe.1999.1691

- Brown, G., & Potrac, P. (2009). "You've not made the grade, son": De-selection and identity disruption in elite level youth football. *Soccer & Society, 10*, 143–159. doi:10.1080/14660970802601613
- Chickering, A., & Reisser, L. (1993). *Education and identity* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Creswell, J. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Creswell, J. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Danish, S. D., Petitpas, A. J., & Hale, B. D. (1993). Life development intervention for athletes: Life skills through sports. *The Counseling Psychologist, 21*, 352–385. doi:10.1177/0011000093213002
- Etzel, E. F., Ferrante, A. P., & Pinkney, J. W. (1996). *Counseling college student-athletes: Issues and interventions*. Morgantown, WV: Fitness Information Technology.
- Giannone, Z. A., Haney, C. J., Kealy, D., & Ogrodniczuk, J. S. (2017). Athletic identity and psychiatric symptoms following retirement from varsity sports. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry, 63*, 598–601. doi:10.1177/0020764017724184
- Goodman, J., Schlossberg, N., & Anderson, M. (2006). *Counseling adults in transition: Linking practice with transition*. New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company.

- Hilliard, R. C., Blom, L., Hankemeier, D., & Bolin, J. (2017). Exploring the relationship between athletic identity and beliefs about rehabilitation over adherence in college athletes. *Journal of Sport Rehabilitation, 26*, 208–220. doi:10.1123/jsr.2015-0134
- Lally, P. (2007). Identity and athletic retirement: A prospective study. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 8*(1), 85–99. doi:10.1016/j.psychsport.2006.03.003
- Lau, P. W. C., Fox, K. R., & Cheung, M. W. L. (2005). Psychosocial and socio-environmental correlates of sport identity and sport participation in secondary school-age children. *European Journal of Sport Science, 4*(3), 1–21. doi:10.1080/17461390400074301
- Linnemeyer, R. M., & Brown, C. (2010). Career maturity and foreclosure in student-athletes, fine arts students, and general college students. *Journal of Career Development, 37*, 616–634. doi:10.1177/0894845309357049
- Lockhart, B. D. (2010). Injured athletes' perceived loss of identity: Educational implications for athletic trainers. *Athletic Training Education Journal, 5*(1), 26–31. doi:10.4085/1947-380X-5.1.26
- Meeker, D. J., Stankovich, C. E., & Kays, T. M. (2000). *Positive transitions for student-athletes: Life skills for transitions in sport, college & career*. Scottsdale, AZ: Holcomb Hathaway Publishers.
- Melendez, M. C. (2010). Psychosocial influences on college adjustment in Division I student-athletes: The role of athletic identity. *Journal of College Student Retention, 11*, 345–361. doi:10.2190/CS.11.3.c
- Miller, P. S. & Kerr, G. A. (2003). The role experimentation of intercollegiate student-athletes. *The Sport Psychologist, 17*, 196–219. doi:10.1123/tsp.17.2.196

- Moreland-Bishop, L. (2009). *The impact of transition out of intercollegiate athletics* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from Tiger Prints All Dissertations. (397)
- Murphy, G. M., Petitpas, A. J., & Brewer, B. W. (1996). Identity foreclosure, athletic identity, and career maturity in intercollegiate athletes. *Sport Psychologist, 10*, 239–246. doi:10.1123/tsp.10.3.239
- National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics. (2018). About the NAIA. Retrieved from <https://www.naia.org/about/about-us>
- National Collegiate Athletic Association. (2015). *Results from the 2015 GOALS study of the student-athlete experience* [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from https://www.ncaa.org/sites/default/files/GOALS_convention_slidebank_jan2016_public.pdf
- National Collegiate Athletic Association. (2018a). NCAA life skills. Retrieved from <http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/leadership-development/life-skills>
- National Collegiate Athletic Association. (2018b). Student-athletes. Retrieved from <http://www.ncaa.org/student-athletes>
- Ohashi, A. (2018). *Transitioning out of sport: Perspectives of student-athlete support or development services* (Master's thesis). Retrieved from Scholar Works Boise State University Theses and Dissertations. (10.18122/td/1406/boisestate)
- Petitpas, A. J., Brewer, B. W., & Van Raalte, J. L. (2009). Transitions of the student-athlete: Theoretical, empirical, and practical perspectives. In E. Etzel (Ed.), *Counseling and psychological services for college student-athletes* (pp. 282–302). Morgantown, WV: Fitness Information Technology.

- Podlog, L., Gao, Z., Kenow, L., Kleinert, J., Granquist, M., Newton, M., & Hannon, J. (2013). Injury rehabilitation over adherence: Preliminary scale validation and relationships with athletic identity and self-presentation concerns. *Journal of Athletic Training, 48*, 372–381. doi:10.4085/1062-6050-48.2.20
- Poucher, Z. A., & Tamminen, K. A. (2017). Maintaining and managing athletic identity among elite athletes. *Revista de Psicología del Deporte, 26*(Suppl. 4), 63–67. Retrieved from https://www.rpd-online.com/article/view/v26-n6-poucher-tamminen/Poucher_Tamminen
- Saxe, K., Hardin, R., Taylor, L., & R. Pate, J. (2017). Transition blues: The experience of female collegiate student-athletes. *Journal of Higher Education Athletics and Innovation, 1*(2), 25–48. doi:10.15763/issn.2376-5267.2017.1.2.25-48
- Shachar, B., Brewer, B., Cornelius, A., & Petitpas, A. (2004). Career decision-making, athletic identity, and adjustment difficulties among retired athletes: A comparison between coaches and noncoaches. *Kinesiology Slovenia, 10*, 71–85. Retrieved from https://www.kinsi.si/mma/04334_102.pdf/201805221116320101/
- Stankovich, C. E., Meeker, D. J., & Henderson, J. L. (2001). The positive transitions model for sport retirement. *Journal of College Counseling, 4*(1), 81–84. doi:10.1002/j.2161-1882.2001.tb00186.x
- Stephan, Y., & Brewer, B. W. (2007). Perceived determinants of identification with the athlete role among elite competitors. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 19*(1), 67–79. doi:10.1080/10413200600944090

- Watson-Jones, R. E. & Legare, C. H. (2016). The social function of group rituals. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 25, 42–46.
doi:10.1177/0963721415618486
- Webb, W. M., Nasco, S. A., Riley, S., & Headrick, B. (1998). Athlete identity and reactions to retirement from sports. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 21, 338–362.
- Woodruff, A. L., & Schallert, D. L. (2008). Studying to play, playing to study: Nine college student-athletes' motivational sense of self. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 33(1), 34–57. doi:10.1016/j.cedpsych.2007.04.001

Appendix A

Instrument

Athlete Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS)

Please mark an “x” in the space that best reflects the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement in relation to your own sports participation.

1. I consider myself an athlete.

Strongly Agree : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : Strongly

Disagree

2. I have many goals related to sport.

Strongly Agree : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : Strongly

Disagree

3. Most of my friends are athletes.

Strongly Agree : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : Strongly

Disagree

4. Sport is the most important part of my life.

Strongly Agree : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : Strongly

Disagree

5. I spend more time thinking about sport than anything else.

Strongly Agree : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : Strongly

Disagree

6. I need to participate in sport to feel good about myself.

Strongly Agree : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : Strongly

Disagree

7. Other people see me mainly as an athlete.

Strongly Agree : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : Strongly

Disagree

8. I feel bad about myself when I do poorly in sport.

Strongly Agree : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : Strongly

Disagree

9. Sport is the only important thing in my life.

Strongly Agree : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : Strongly

Disagree

10. I would be very depressed if I were injured and could not compete in sport.

Strongly Agree : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : Strongly

Disagree

Coaches' Impact on Retirement Assessment

Please mark an "X" in the space that best represents your intercollegiate athletic
experience.

*For the purpose of this survey, "retirement" refers to the definitive end of one's varsity
intercollegiate athletic experience due to reasons including but not limited to injury,
exhaustion of eligibility, deselection, or personal choice.*

1. Following retirement from intercollegiate athletic competition, I experienced difficulties defining my identity.

Strongly Agree : _____:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____: Strongly

Disagree

2. My collegiate coach prepared me for retirement from intercollegiate athletics.

Strongly Agree : _____:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____: Strongly

Disagree

3. My collegiate coach cared about me beyond my athletic performance.

Strongly Agree : _____:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____: Strongly

Disagree

4. My collegiate coach was willing to meet with me one-on-one.

Strongly Agree : _____:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____: Strongly

Disagree

5. My collegiate coach related my athletic participation to experiences beyond athletics.

Strongly Agree : _____:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____: Strongly

Disagree

6. My collegiate coach encouraged me to be involved in social networks outside of my athletic team.

Strongly Agree : _____:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____: Strongly

Disagree

7. My collegiate coach took interest in my career aspirations.

Strongly Agree : _____:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____: Strongly

Disagree

8. My collegiate coach helped me explore and deepen my faith.

Strongly Agree : _____:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____: Strongly

Disagree

9. I consider my collegiate coach a mentor/role model.

Strongly Agree : _____:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____: Strongly

Disagree

10. Please list any additional information you feel would be helpful in this research.

Appendix B

Sample Email Correspondence

Good evening!

My name is Kayla Hunter, and I'm a 2017 graduate of Taylor University and current student in TU's **Master of Arts in Higher Education & Student Development (MAHE)** program.

As part of the program, I'm conducting a thesis research project which seeks to answer the question: "**What impact, if any, do collegiate coaches have on the student-athlete retirement process?**"

You've been selected as a potential participant in this research based on your participation in athletics at Taylor University and graduation from the institution. I would sincerely appreciate your collaboration in this research by completing the **5-10 minute survey** at the link below.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/KWRXL9T>

The goal of this research is to provide intercollegiate athletic departments with the knowledge and tools to better prepare student-athletes for experiences following intercollegiate athletic competition. More specifically, your help in this research may provide insight as to how adequately intercollegiate coaches are equipping student-athletes for retirement from college sports.

Your participation in this research is greatly valued! Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Thanks!

Kayla Hunter

Appendix C

Informed Consent

INFORMED CONSENT

You are invited to participate in a research study on athletic identity and the coaches impact, if any, on student-athletes' retirement from intercollegiate athletics. You were selected as a potential participant because of your involvement in Taylor University varsity athletics. Thank you for taking interest in this research. Your feedback is extremely valuable. The study is being conducted by Kayla Hunter and Taylor University, and is supervised by Dr. Todd Ream.

STUDY PURPOSE

The purpose of the study is to measure the influence, if any, of intercollegiate coaches on the student-athlete retirement process. This short survey begins with eight optional demographic questions followed by two main survey sections of 10-items each. If you have any questions while taking the survey, please feel free to contact Kayla Hunter at kayla_springer@taylor.edu.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF STUDY

Your participation in this research is voluntary, and efforts will be made to keep your personal information confidential.

SUBJECT'S CONSENT

By advancing to the next page, you are agreeing to participate in the survey and consenting to being at least 18-years-old.

