

Interview

Life after Sport



How's best to be ready for **life after the game?**

We are introduced to it slowly through our junior years, acclimatised to the pressure, and supported by our passion for the game. But what happens when the stadium lights are turned off on our careers and when the fans find someone new to cheer for?

As the 17/18 season has kicked off, does our training and academy system help or hinder players in preparation for life after professional football?

Professional Player finds out more from **Life After Sport**...



Over the past two years we have spoken to dozens of recently retired or retiring players and athletes and in the comfort of our quiet conversations, away from the perceived judgement of the real world, there are four main themes in all transitions that athletes tell us about that they tend not to admit to anyone else:

- 1 It's unknown
- 2 It takes time
- 3 It needs your investment and planning
- 4 It is made easier by talking about it

For many players who have been the best in their chosen field, it is hard to admit this to anyone, as our egos want to protect themselves from the reality that things have changed, that we have a long way to get back to the top in our new adventures.

What makes it more difficult is that we don't feel we can talk to our new peers or colleagues because they aren't experiencing it and think athletes have lived the blessed life. We can't talk to our friends who are still playing because they are still in the bubble.

For all players, it's not a matter of 'If' but 'When', so if you believe as we do that knowledge is the precursor to experience, then through this article, we will help you identify the 'What' so you can plan the 'How'.

1. Life after sport is unknown

If making it to the top of sport is tough, then transitioning to a successful life after sport is equally so.

For most elite athletes, passion for your sport and the confidence gained from your abilities developed naturally. You didn't have to question it, you just knew that you loved your chosen sport and your confidence in it had been built over many years by many small victories and compliments.

Life after sport can be the total opposite...

Athletes have to consciously question what they are interested in, where their strengths lie and create their own confidence in a hostile environment where they are often working their way from the bottom up.

They have to rebuild or renovate their identity and self-worth to adapt to their new challenges and environments... as many have come to realise with so many life factors this is really tough!

2. The transition takes time

In our experience, a successful transition will take between two and three years, and an unsuccessful one can last a lifetime.

This may seem like a long time, but if you compare it to the time it takes to transition from a young aspiring athlete to reach elite level, usually 5 to 10 years... it is very manageable. The trick is knowing your destination; what sort of life are you aspiring to?

The reason it takes so long is because you are adapting to massive changes in your life; career, financial, relationships, physical, mental.

For most people, a significant change in one of these areas would take time to adjust to, whereas players are often facing changes in every area all at once.

Prioritising which one or two areas are most important to you can speed up the transition process and help avoid that overwhelming feeling, and all can be made easier by planning and taking action during your playing career.

3. The transition takes your investment and planning

Whether players/ athletes don't earn much from their sport or the big earners, you've been used to an environment where things have been planned for you and structured. You've not had to worry about it until this stage comes, however once you do inevitably step out that bubble access to professional guidance is now available which once wasn't for so many.

However, for any sports professional, there are costs involved that need to be thought through with stepping away from sport which may surprise you, and include;

- **Money formerly earned from the game compared to whatever new career/ direction lies ahead**
- **Costs associated with that time of life: e.g. children, mortgages etc**
- **Re-skilling yourself and associated further education**

The cost of lost earnings is obvious, but can be significant for athletes in popular sports, with up to a 75 to 80 percent reduction in income for most athletes, and even higher for the absolute superstars.

Compound this with paying for your own gym memberships, doctors and physio bills (which can be ongoing depending how your body has held up), and the reality that most of your meals are no longer covered, and it all starts to add up. Your sport and sponsors no longer give you clothes and shoes, and in most jobs you can't just wear the same outfit to work every day, so you'll need to buy some threads.

Mortgages and children can quickly eat up a large portion of your budget, and without proper planning can add serious stress to most transition experiences.

For most athletes, transition happens between the ages of 25 and 35, the time that many people look to start families, purchase property and make serious life decisions. Mortgages and children can quickly eat up a large portion of your budget, and without proper planning can add serious stress to most transition experiences.¹⁰

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At the same time as all of this is happening, many athletes will be required to upskill or retrain themselves to enhance their opportunities in the 'real world'.

Generally speaking, short courses, certificates and diplomas, university qualifications all carry significant financial investment and the usual coaching route which is the traditional way for players is no different.

A failure to apply relevant courses/ higher education to your true desires or incorrectly aligning them to what you want to do within or outside sport shouldn't be left to chance and professional guidance to explore your full range of options will optimise your potential as often there could be avenues you haven't previously considered which your skill set would thrive in. The lesson to all sports professionals is that all of this can be prepared while you are still competing.

Sport can be a cruel travel companion at times and put many unexpected bumps in our road, so the ability to plan your life outside of sport not only prepares you for transition, it also puts you in the driver's seat regardless of what life throws at you.



4. It's made easier by talking about it

By keeping the challenges of transition to ourselves and failing to admit they are real, many sports professionals imprison themselves in their own thoughts.

We often hear athletes say they thought they were the only ones struggling and, because of that, they thought something was wrong with them. Trained in a world where injury is a form of weakness, our past can torment our thinking and make it hard to ask for help.

This can be exacerbated by what we witness as the greatest source of anger for many athletes in retirement: a feeling of betrayal. This is borne out of the perception that the sport that asked for their hearts, their bodies and their minds for 15 years of their lives, now can't even find the time to call them to ask: "Are you okay?"

For any athlete experiencing these feelings, they are completely normal and are the observations that we have heard over and over again talking to athletes going through this process, and so you are not alone.

The solution? Talk to past athletes, coaches, managers. Talk to people who have walked in your shoes and gone through the same challenges.

Even better, talk to people in the fields you are now working in or want to work. Find mentors in work, mentors in life and even just mentors in transition. This can be done ahead of retirement through networking and work experience; by building an identity alongside of sport.

Many of these people will explain how to re-frame these experiences into strengths in your new adventures.

Now there's professional help, you're no longer alone...

For most of us, anxiety about any future event is simply a fear of the unknown. For players, this is amplified by a comparison to their known past; the fact that they were outstanding at something in their life. Refusing to take action and admit the reality of your future is just procrastination, a way of protecting yourself and living in the past.

People often refer to a feeling of relief, excitement or renewed motivation once they have faced up to their particular career change issue and taken some positive action. It is an end but also a new beginning. These positive feelings will help you to look for relevant and related career advice. However, some people look for personal help and input and therefore their aim is to find a trained career consultant whom they can share their career journey and experiences with.

So what will get you out of bed after you finally hang those boots up??

You are unique and just because former professionals have gone down a certain route after the game does it mean it's right for you too? Career transition requires real professional expertise, our objective isn't just to get you into a job to fill the void but to optimise what options are best for you that you may never have even considered without the benefit of professional advice from experts that will take you through the journey from where you



are to where you want to be and not just end up by chance... This is the very reason why **Life After Sport** was devised for the sports professional...

Life After Sport addresses issues pertaining to whatever's next after sport by delivering holistic solutions that improves our clientele's lives within professional sport. These main services include career coaching, confidential advice and early engagement academy workshops, all available on an individual or organisational basis. We also uniquely offer independent and confidential counselling available at any time during your career to compliment our services for your needs. @



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