



TRANSITION OUT OF SPORT AND
ROLE ADJUSTMENT:
A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF PAST AND
PRESENT NATIONAL TRACK AND FIELD
ATHLETES OF MALAYSIA

BY

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ABSTRACT

Transition out of sport is rarely studied in Malaysia because not many researchers prefer to look into the post-sport events. Generally, nobody knows what had happened to these retired athletes after they disengage from sport domain. The aim of this research is to explore the process of transition out of sport for the track and field athletes and their adjustment in the new situations. Second, to study how former athletes' adopt new roles in society after retiring from sport. Third, assessing the impact of their previous identity as sportsperson in their current role. Case study method was applied to study the problem because it explored the former athletes' experiences and provided detailed information about their role. As such in-depth interviews with open-ended questions were conducted to understand their transition process in facing their new role in society. However, the first five case studies consisted of the past generation athletes who stopped their active participation from sports by the mid 1970s. Their involvement in sports was only as hobby and recreation as sport was not a full-fledged career. The other five case studies looked into the present generation athletes who retired by mid 2000s. They however, were privileged to have sport as profession because the National Sports Council Malaysia (NSC) introduced a full-time training programme. The two different timelines was chosen in order to assess the difference in transition and role adjustment process that these former athletes have gone through. The findings of this study had concluded that the former track and field national athletes from the past and present generations in Malaysia had navigated smoothly in their transition out of sport and had adjusted their lives after sport with least trauma where it did not reflect the typical findings that usually associated with negative experiences.

ملخص البحث

الدراسة عن الرياضيين في ماليزيا بعد اعتزالهم من الساحة الرياضية تعدّ نادرة وقليلة، لقلة الباحثين المهتمين بالنظر إلى ما بعد الحدث الرياضي. فبشكل عام لا أحد يعلم ما الذي حدث لأولئك الرياضيين المتقاعدين بعد انسحابهم من عالم الرياضة. والهدف من هذا البحث دراسة عملية الخروج من الساحة الرياضية لدى الرياضيين في ألعاب القوى وتكيفهم للوضع الجديد. ثانياً: دراسة كيفية تكيف الرياضيين المعتزلين في المجتمع بعد اعتزالهم حياة الرياضة. ثالثاً: دراسة مدى تأثير المكانة الرياضية التي كانوا يتبوؤونها على وضعهم ودورهم الحالي. وتركز الدراسة على استجلاء الجوانب السلبية في هذه الحالة، لأنها تحاول استكشاف خبرة الرياضيين المتقاعدين وإبراز معلومات دقيقة عن أدوارهم. ولتحقيق ذلك تم إجراء مقابلات شخصية بعرض أسئلة مفتوحة للتعرف على سير تحولهم تجاه أدوارهم الجديدة في المجتمع. الدراسة تشمل عشر عينات دراسية. العينات الخمسة الأولى تتكوّن من الرياضيين القدماء الذين توقفوا عن الرياضة في منتصف السبعينات من القرن الماضي، وتعتبر اشتراكهم في الرياضة مجرد هواية وتسلية ذاتية، لأن الرياضة لم تكن مهنة مستقلة، أما بقية العينات الخمسة فتتكوّن من الرياضيين الجدد الذين استقالوا عن الرياضة في منتصف العقد الأول من عام 2000م، ويتمتع هؤلاء عن سابقهم بالتفرغ الكامل للبرامج الرياضية كمهنة مستقلة بعد أن أوجدت هيئة الرياضة الوطنية بماليزيا هذه المهنة الرياضية. وكان اختيار هاتين الفترتين المختلفتين للتعرف على الفوارق لدى أولئك الرياضيين المتقاعدين عند تحولهم عن الرياضة والأدوار الجديدة التي أصبحوا يسيرون فيها. ونتيجة الدراسة تتلخص في أن هؤلاء الرياضيين في ألعاب القوى سواء من الأجيال القديمة أو الجديدة استطاعوا أن يجتازوا مرحلة الانتقال والخروج من عالم الرياضة ثم التكيف مع الحياة الجديدة بأدنى تأثير سلبي على أنفسهم، وهذا يختلف عن النتائج النموذجية من الدراسات السابقة التي غالباً ما تربط بين هذه الخبرات والجوانب السلبية.

ABSTRAK

Proses transisi sukan jarang sekali dikaji di Malaysia kerana ramai pengkaji tidak berminat untuk meneliti kehidupan para atlit selepas berakhirnya penglibatan aktif mereka dari dunia sukan. Maka, tidak ada sesiapa yang mengetahui apa yang telah berlaku kepada bekas atlit-atlit ini. Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk mengenal pasti proses transisi bagi atlit olahraga dan penyesuaian mereka terhadap situasi baru. Kedua, memahami bagaimana bekas atlit-atlit ini mengambil peranan baru dalam masyarakat selepas bersara dari bidang sukan. Ketiga, menilai impak identiti sebagai bekas ahli sukan berlandaskan peranan mereka kini. Kajian kes amat sesuai diaplikasi bagi mengkaji masalah pengalaman bekas atlit secara mendalam dan terhadap peranan mereka. Oleh itu dengan mengutarakan soalan terbuka dalam temuramah ia memberikan ruang kepada bekas atlit berkongsi pengalaman mereka dalam proses transisi dan berhadapan dengan peranan baru dalam masyarakat. Walau bagaimanapun, lima kajian kes pertama merangkumi generasi atlit lepas yang tidak lagi aktif dalam acara sukan sejak pertengahan tahun-tahun 1970-an. Penglibatan mereka dalam sukan cuma sebagai hobi atau rekreasi kerana sukan tidak dianggap sebagai kerjaya sepenuh masa. Lima lagi kajian kes yang lain telah mengambil generasi sekarang yang telah bersara dari arena sukan sejak pertengahan tahun-tahun 2000-an. Atlit generasi sekarang telah menjadikan sukan sebagai profesyen kerana Majlis Sukan Negara Malaysia (MSN) telah mengendalikan program latihan sepenuh masa. Dua era generasi yang berbeza dipilih bagi menilai perbezaan dalam proses transisi dan penyesuaian diri yang dilalui oleh bekas para atlit ini. Penemuan kajian ini telah menyimpulkan bahawa bekas atlit kebangsaan olahraga sama ada dari generasi lepas atau generasi sekarang di Malaysia telah melalui proses transisi sukan secara lancar dan berjaya menyesuaikan diri tanpa menghadapi masalah serius dimana tidak seperti penemuan kajian-kajian lepas yang sering dikaitkan dengan pengalaman yang negatif.

APPROVAL PAGE

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Abstract in Arabic	iii
Abstract in Bahasa Malaysia	iv
Approval Page.....	v
Declaration	vi
Copyright	vii
Acknowledgements	viii
List of Tables	xii
List of Diagrams	xiii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Statement of Problem	4
1.3 Research Questions	5
1.4 Objectives	6
1.5 Significance of Study	8
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE	11
1.1 Introduction	11
1.2 Transition Out of Sport	11
1.3 Finance	29
1.4 Injury	30
1.5 Significant Others	33
CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY	37
3.1 Introduction	37
3.2 Theoretical Framework	37
3.3 Concepts and Terms	
3.3.1 Transition	42
3.3.2 Disengagement	43
3.3.3 Retirement	44
3.3.4 Identity	45
3.3.5 Track and Field	46
3.4 Methodology	49
CHAPTER FOUR: CASE STUDY OF THE PAST GENERATION ATHLETES	53
4.1 Introduction	53
4.2 Past Generation	53
4.2.1 Case Study 1	
4.2.1.1 Introduction	53
4.2.1.2 Involvement	54
4.2.1.3 Process of Transition	57
4.2.1.4 Adjustment	58

4.2.1.5	Impact of Identity	59
4.2.1.6	Institutional Support	59
4.2.2	Case Study 2	
4.2.2.1	Introduction	60
4.2.2.2	Involvement	61
4.2.2.3	Process of Transition	63
4.2.2.4	Adjustment	63
4.2.2.5	Impact of Identity	64
4.2.2.6	Institutional Support	65
4.2.3	Case Study 3	
4.2.3.1	Introduction	65
4.2.3.2	Involvement	66
4.2.3.3	Process of Transition	67
4.2.3.4	Adjustment	67
4.2.3.5	Impact of Identity	68
4.2.3.6	Institutional Support	69
4.2.4	Case Study 4	
4.2.4.1	Introduction	70
4.2.4.2	Involvement	70
4.2.4.3	Process of Transition	72
4.2.4.4	Adjustment	74
4.2.4.5	Impact of Identity	75
4.2.4.6	Institutional Support	75
4.2.5	Case Study 5	
4.2.5.1	Introduction	76
4.2.5.2	Involvement	77
4.2.5.3	Process of Transition	80
4.2.5.4	Adjustment	80
4.2.5.5	Impact of Identity	82
4.2.5.6	Institutional Support	83

CHAPTER FIVE: CASE STUDY OF THE PRESENT GENERATION		
ATHLETES		84
5.1	Introduction	84
5.2	Present Generation	84
5.2.1	Case Study 6	
5.2.1.1	Introduction	84
5.2.1.2	Involvement	85
5.2.1.3	Process of Transition	86
5.2.1.4	Adjustment	87
5.2.1.5	Impact of Identity	88
5.2.1.6	Institutional Support	89
5.2.2	Case Study 7	
5.2.2.1	Introduction	91
5.2.2.2	Involvement	91
5.2.2.3	Process of Transition	92
5.2.2.4	Adjustment	93
5.2.2.5	Impact of Identity	94
5.2.2.6	Institutional Support	94

5.2.3	Case Study 8	
5.2.3.1	Introduction	95
5.2.3.2	Involvement	96
5.2.3.3	Process of Transition	97
5.2.3.4	Adjustment	98
5.2.3.5	Impact of Identity	99
5.2.3.6	Institutional Support	99
5.2.4	Case Study 9	
5.2.4.1	Introduction	101
5.2.4.2	Involvement	102
5.2.4.3	Process of Transition	102
5.2.4.4	Adjustment	103
5.2.4.5	Impact of Identity	103
5.2.4.6	Institutional Support	104
5.2.5	Case Study 10	
5.2.5.1	Introduction	105
5.2.5.2	Involvement	106
5.2.5.3	Process of Transition	107
5.2.5.4	Adjustment	108
5.2.5.5	Impact of Identity	109
5.2.5.6	Institutional Support	110

CHAPTER SIX: TRANSITION OUT OF SPORT AND ROLE	
ADJUSTMENT	112
6.1 Introduction	112
6.2 Involvement	113
6.3 Process of Transition	116
6.4 Adjustment	121
6.5 Impact of Identity	124
6.6 Institutional Support	127
CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION	134
7.1 Conclusion	134
7.2 Relevance of Role Exit Theory Model	139
7.3 Suggestions	143
7.4 Limitations	145
BIBLIOGRAPHY	146

LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table No.</u>		<u>Page No.</u>
6.3a	Voluntary Exit of Track and Field Athletes	118
6.3b	Involuntary Exit of Track and Field Athletes	120

LIST OF DIAGRAMS

<u>Diagram No.</u>		<u>Page No.</u>
3.2	Ebaugh's model modified by Drahota and Eitzen (1998: 276) in bold boxes	41
3.3.5	Track And Field Events	48
7.2a	Role exit model of Drahota and Eitzen (1998) applied for past generation athletes	140
7.2b	Role exit model of Drahota and Eitzen (1998) applied for present generation athletes	141

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The word sport is derived from the Latin root *des-porto* and literally means “carry away” (Brasch, 1970: 1). Sport is defined by scholars as “institutionalized competitive activities that involve rigorous physical exertion or the use of relatively complex physical skills by participants motivated by internal and external rewards” (Coakley, 2007: 6). Sport also has a variety of manifestations such as traditional sport, mass sport and high performance sport (Heinemann, 1993: 139). It dramatizes and reinforces the values that are importantly based on their cultures due to the benefits of society as well as the individual (Coakley, 1993: 36). According to Coakley (2007: 29):

Sociologists study sports as parts of culture and society...in terms of their importance in people’s lives and their connections to ideology and major spheres of social life...sociology of sport helps us understand sports as social constructions created by people for particular purposes...related to historical, political, and economic factors...sociologists study sports in society, they often discover problems based in the structure and organization of either sports or society.

Moreover, sport has a special meaning in a particular society where the ideas and beliefs of a culture play a major role in their social life. This is because it is an integral part of their social and cultural contexts that explains and evaluates their experiences towards the connections with their environment. According to Riordon (1993: 175), “sport in developing societies is a serious business with serious functions to perform”. It is because the state controls, encourages and shapes a specific ideology such as in Asia, Latin America and Africa. These countries associate sport with

“hygiene, health, defence, patriotism, integration, productivity, international recognition, cultural identity and nation building” (Riordon, 1993: 175).

The sociology of sport went through a great deal of difficulty to establish and gain respect from the academic community. This is because sociology of sport is a ‘young’ discipline that only obtained recognition as a sub discipline in sport related courses in late 1960s in United States (Armour and Jones, 2000: 4). The pioneers in this sub discipline put their academic reputation on stake to embark on their interest in non-serious activity that was seen by their colleagues and other academicians (Yiannakis, 2000: 114). Even though this field is still considered as underdeveloped there is an increase in the number of sport studies based on the theoretical context (Washington and Karen, 2001: 188). It is because the presence of sport could be felt ‘everywhere’ and this provides the significance of sociologists (Mewett, 2000: 404). Sport can be analyzed from multiple perspectives such as ethnicity, gender, social class, participation and spectatorship (Leonard, 1998: 17). This clear indication shows that sport is a part of society and mirrors the numerous scopes in the larger social world (Mewett, 2000: 404). Moreover, it provides an opportunity for the developing nations to be recognized and respected in the world publicity (Riordon, 1993: 178). But generally the study of sport in society is based on four aspects which are “social and cultural contexts, connections between those contexts and sport, social worlds that people create as they participate in sport and the experiences of individuals and groups associated with those social worlds” (Coakley, 2007: 32).

Recently, sport sociologists are looked at seriously by the sport authorities because they are seeking help from these specialists in understanding sport in society and society in sport (Armour, Jones and Kerry, 1998). Besides that, modern societies had created new forms of sports due to the technological innovations. At the same

time, new social relations and interactions are developed with new sport cultures and subcultures (Breivik, 1998: 104). It is due to the diversification of life styles where sport forms are represented in different sport cultures (Breivik, 1998: 116). Thus, through the study of sport sociologist we can better understand the different aspects of society such as economic, social and cultural (Mewett, 2000: 404). In addition, sociology of sport also wants to “promote social justice, expose and challenge the exploitative use of power and empower people that may resist and transform oppressive social conditions” (Coakley, 2007: 32).

The emergence of sport sociology in Malaysia is struggling because this sub discipline has not gained recognition in the sociological world. However, the sports science community had accepted the importance of sport sociology as a complementary form of their study in helping out the athletes, sport institution and society. It is also to understand the interference of external factors that bring positive and negative values towards the society and individual.

The present research would concentrate on the transition out of sport and role adjustment of the past and present generation athletes in understanding how both generations of athletes had adjusted their lives back into the society. This is because the past generation athletes did not have as many opportunities as the present generation athletes. In other words, by comparing both these generations we are able to foresee the hardship that the past generation athletes had gone through due to the scarcity of resources. It is an important topic to be studied because not many researchers prefer to look into the comparative post-sport events in Malaysia. These events are no longer important to the respective sport authorities. This is because after the athletes disengage themselves from the competitive sport, most of them do not play any role in the sport world. So, nobody knows what happened to these retired

athletes. Many fans wonder what they do with their lives after pulling out from the sport domain. Sad to say, not much attention is given to them after they step back from the limelight.

When we visit the back regions of the former track and field athletes many issues regarding their post-sport career remain undiscussed. It stimulates us to ask questions and undertake further study (McPherson, Curtis and Loy, 1989: 1). We must also realize that successful athletic career is limited to several years and not many of these athletes would be able to translate their success in their post-sport careers (Eitzen and Sage, 1993: 313-314). Throughout their lives, they had sacrificed many things in achieving their goal in the quest to become all they can be in sport (Hughes and Coakley, 2001: 361-362).

1.2 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Transition out of sport, disengagement, retirement and career termination convey the same meaning or connotation that is withdrawing or leaving from sport. It is rarely studied in Malaysia especially when it is a comparative study in transition out of sport and role adjustment of the past and present generation athletes. The retired past generation athletes had given a good name to Malaysia by not only performing very well but achieving international fame. Those past generation athletes who had retired went through great lengths of difficulties because they did not receive adequate support from the sports organizations compared to the present generation athletes who retire. These present generation athletes who disengage themselves from the sport arena have much better future compared to the veteran sportsperson. Unfortunately, most of the retired present generation athletes did not perform well in their games and

could not achieve victory even though they are better off where good coaches, facilities, equipment and training programmes are concerned.

Track and field sport is selected as the area of the present research because of its golden era during 1960s, 1970s and 1980s when it brought name and fame to Malaysia. Unfortunately, this sport has lost its appeal among the young Malaysians. It was reported that Malaysia would not be able to produce outstanding athletes in the coming years (Sivam, 2008: 56). It definitely indicates that this particular game which had produced at one time well-known athletes who won international medals had lost its 'magic' touch. Perhaps there exists certain external problems that may have prevented these athletes from taking up track and field events as their sport. So, by examining the retired track and field athletes we would be able to understand the transitional process that these athletes confronted.

The present research is conducted to study the track and field athletes who had disengaged themselves voluntarily and involuntarily from the sport milieu and faced various transitional processes in order to settle in life. Thus, this is an important phenomenon to be explored on how they had adjusted themselves in the world outside sport. Furthermore, other matters may arise such as the impacts of their previous sport identity on their new life.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The scientific study of transition out of sport raises numerous questions. As such, the present study proposes to explore the following research questions:

1. How did the past and present generation of athletes involve themselves in their sporting events?

2. What were the circumstances under which these athletes stopped taking part in active sport and took to retirement?
3. What was the nature of the transition process that the athletes under study encountered?
4. How had the athletes under study adjusted with the new situation and adopted new roles in society?
5. How was the previous identity of the athletes as sportspersons maintained, changed and modified?

1.4 OBJECTIVES

The comparative study of the transition out of sport and role adjustment in the past and present generation of national track and field athletes of Malaysia will concentrate on five main objectives:

1. To study the situation that led the past and present generation athletes to involve themselves in sport and develop commitment to it
2. To assess the process of transition out of sports by the athletes under study and the factors that cause the transition
3. To find out how the athletes under study had adjusted to the new situation after retirement and adopted new roles
4. To assess the impact of transition out of sport on the identity of athletes under study as sportspersons
5. To assess the sport institutional support system in facilitating the former athletes' life after withdrawing from active competition

First, to study the situation that led the past and present generation athletes to involve themselves in sport and develop commitment to it. It is to look into how these former athletes got involved in their events seriously. Most would describe their experiences that they had gone through such as their sacrifices in spending enormous time in their sports to be where they are today.

Second, to assess the process of transition out of sports by the athletes under study and the factors that caused the transition. These athletes would stop active participation in sport voluntarily or involuntarily. From here, it is indicative whether the athlete faced a smooth or difficult transition out of sport. It is because most of the athletes had spent so much of their time and concentration in their preparation and training for their games and thus, may have neglected other aspects of their lives. Moreover, due to their demanding schedule they may not have learned skills that could be utilized after withdrawing from sport.

Third, to find out how the athletes under study had adjusted to the new situation after retirement and adopted the new role. Generally when the athletes disengage themselves from sport, they would go through a transformation in adapting to a new situation. This matter is very rarely discussed especially in Malaysia because the former athletes normally would 'disappear' from public view after they retire from their competitive games if they do not reappear in other sport roles. Therefore where they are and what they do for living are almost never known.

Fourth, to assess the impact of transition out of sport on the identity of athletes under study as sportspersons. It is to view whether playing sports had limited or expanded their identities and relationships in their social life. Some former athletes may be happy that they are recognized by the public and receive verbal recognition

from them. Meanwhile, some ex-athletes may not be enjoying such privileges because they are not given credit for their non-sport work or being a public figure.

Fifth, to assess the sport institutional support system in facilitating the former athletes' life after withdrawing from active competition. In Malaysia, there was no institution that financially supported past generation athletes to 'survive' after retiring from sport compared to the opportunities that the present generation is receiving. In fact, there is no proper channel where the former generation athletes could go and ask for any help. Sport organizations have to play an active role in easing the burden of these former athletes by looking after their welfare when they disengage from the sports arena.

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

The present comparative study on transition out of sport and role adjustment is significant from the following perspectives.

First, it explores the Malaysian track and field athletes' experiences after disengaging from active participation in sport. The finding of the research will be useful to several parties such as the athletes, parents of the athletes, sport organizations and academicians. This case study will furnish detailed information about the positive and negative effects of sport. It would help athletes to understand the transition process that they would be going through in future. Moreover, parents too feel anxious about their children's life after sports. These parents are worried because in Malaysia there is no bright prospect in sports like in the Western countries. It is because only athletes who win in the world competition would be given cash prizes, allowances and incentives.

Second, the respective sports organizations have to play a key role in ensuring the well-being of their athletes. They must not only exploit or use the athletes' potential for the country's need and later abandon them when they are terminated. This causes a serious problem in the athletes' lives because they are no longer sheltered after disengaging from sport. So, the sport organizations have to plan out these athletes' needs so that they would have something to hold on to after leaving their competitive games. It also gives a sense of security to the athletes and parents that their welfare is taken care by the sport organizations. These athletes would also feel a sense of belonging and would appreciate the concern of the sport organizations. Besides, Malaysia Amateur Athletics Union (MAAU) would benefit from these research findings and could improve the current athletes' transition process by assessing their progress from the past to the present former athletes on how well they took care of their needs beyond sports life. The track and field sport is losing its glitter in schools (Sivam, 2008: 56-57) and will cause shortage in the long run for international sporting events. Therefore, it is necessary to encourage young persons to join the sport by providing them adequate security and protection.

Third, the Sports Science Academy in Malaysian public universities is offering sociology of sport programmes for their undergraduate students. This information about course structure was posted on their respective universities' official website. It indicates a strong presence of sport sociology in Malaysia. Due to the acceptance of this sub discipline by the sports science community, this research on transition out of sport and role adjustment would make valuable contribution to Malaysian sport studies and provide adequate material in sports research. It would also help in understanding the transitional process of the athletes who disengage themselves from sport. This would be an initial step for the sport authorities to realize how important it

is to plan out the current athletes' life after sports when they quit from active competition.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Review of literature is an important step to narrow down the problem, identifying scopes that have already been covered and looking at what needs to be investigated. It would allow refining the initial questions and preventing repetition of the same research. It involves a range of resources such as books, journals, internet, electronic journals, abstracts and microfiche (Barron, 2006: 162). The literature review in this research is divided into four components which is transition out of sport, finance, injury and significant others. Each of the components varies in its number of research articles due to the availability of resource material.

2.2 TRANSITION OUT OF SPORT

Swain (1999) used case study approach to describe the experiences of professional athletes leaving their careers into three phases which are the beginning, middle and end of the story. These athletes withdrew from sport over time because they knew that their career would probably last about five years. The beginning phase of the story is about the athletes realizing that to become a professional is very difficult because of the demanding selection process due to the seasonal changes in sport. Moreover, the athletes may have deteriorated in their health, performance and relationship with the management. All these could contribute towards career termination. They became aware based on their personal experiences of their own career that could be analyzed through the declining of health, performance and opportunity because they were traded to minor league. This indicates a downward mobility in their career. Personal