



Forged in Competition, Enabling Effective Transitions

Exploring solutions as athletes navigate
high-performance sport and beyond



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Foreword

I have always said that the most important element in sport is the people involved. At the centre of this are the athletes.

When their sporting careers finish, their futures should not be treated simply as an ending to prepare for, but as a new stage with its own possibilities.

Since the Duty of Care in Sport Review came out nearly a decade ago, much has been done to support athletes in the transition to life after high-performance sport. This report highlights some of the good practice and good intentions across the sector.

But more needs to be done. This is a responsibility shared by all of us who care

about sport, care about athletes and have a role to play in the sporting system.

I welcome this report, to underpin the discussion with evidence and ideas. But more importantly, I welcome the ambition to encourage greater collaboration.

I challenge all of us to ask ourselves – what can we do better together? If we answer that, we will not only enhance the experience for athletes, but I believe benefit society as a whole.



Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson DBE



Executive Summary

When the competitions end, athletes do not leave behind their discipline, resilience, relationships and sense of purpose. This continues to shape who they are and what they can contribute, beyond their sporting careers.

Jacobs Futura Foundation's (JFF) 2024 report, Forged in Competition, Tested in Transition, was a step towards understanding the experiences of athletes leaving high-performance sport. This second report, Forged in Competition, Enabling Effective Transitions, takes a next step by bringing together research, athlete perspectives, and opportunities from practice.

Athlete Transition in Context

Across the sector, there is already significant commitment to supporting athletes through transition. Publicly funded bodies, player associations, clubs, charities, independent organisations, practitioners and former athletes all play important roles.

That diversity is a strength. It means athletes can access different types of support, from

wellbeing and mentoring to employability, identity development, leadership and practical guidance.

But it can also make the landscape harder to navigate, particularly for athletes who are unsure what they need, where to start or which organisation is best placed to help. Strong provision matters, but so does connection. Athletes benefit from clearer routes into support, and organisations need opportunities to understand, complement and learn from one another's work.

Thriving in Transition

This report continues JFF's work with Professor David Lavalley of Abertay University, whose academic research also informed Forged in Competition, Tested in Transition, grounding the report in a developing body of research and evidence about what shapes athlete transition.

Prof. Lavalley's review identifies four interconnected areas that shape how athletes experience transition: planning and

preparation for life after sport, access to supportive relationships, identity outside sport and involvement in future decisions. Rather than presenting these as separate steps, the report shows how they work together across the athlete journey.

Solutions in Action

This chapter highlights how organisations are putting effective athlete-transition principles into practice. The voices of athletes, practitioners and organisations identified five priorities: supporting the whole person behind the athlete, treating transition as an ongoing process, acknowledging transition is more than securing employment, improving access to appropriate support, and retaining athletes' knowledge and experience beyond competition.

The guiding principle is that effective transition support is personal, practical and connected, helping athletes prepare earlier, access the right support and carry their experience beyond competition.



Enabling Effective Transitions

Athlete transition is a shared challenge and enabling effective outcomes will require a collective response. No single programme or organisation can meet the needs of every athlete, but together the sector has significant expertise, experience and support to build upon.

The report concludes by highlighting three priority areas to focus on: expand collaboration across the sector, normalise the conversation about life beyond high-performance sport, and connect the experience for athletes to help make the landscape more visible and easier to navigate.

To catalyse further collaboration, JFF has launched an Athlete Transition Hub to begin to bring together evidence, practical resources, and information about support in one place. Over time, it can help athletes and organisations find relevant information, make connections and contribute to a more coordinated transition ecosystem.



Athlete Transition Hub

The Athlete Transition Hub is an additional open-access resource to the athlete transition ecosystem that complements and enhances the resources already available.

It has been developed to provide athletes, organisations and other stakeholders with a central point of access for information, resources and support related to athlete transition.

The vision is that for athletes, the Hub can help raise awareness of available support, provide practical guidance and signpost relevant services, resources and opportunities.

And for organisations, the Hub can offer a platform through which research, insights and examples of practice can be shared, helping to strengthen understanding of athlete transition and encourage greater collaboration across the system.

In time, the Athlete Transition Hub can serve as a focal point for learning and collaboration, helping to make existing knowledge and support more visible and accessible while contributing to a more coordinated athlete transition ecosystem.



Explore Further

Hear all athlete voices
reflect on their perspectives
of transition on the Athlete
Transition Hub.



CHAPTER ONE

Athlete Transition in Context

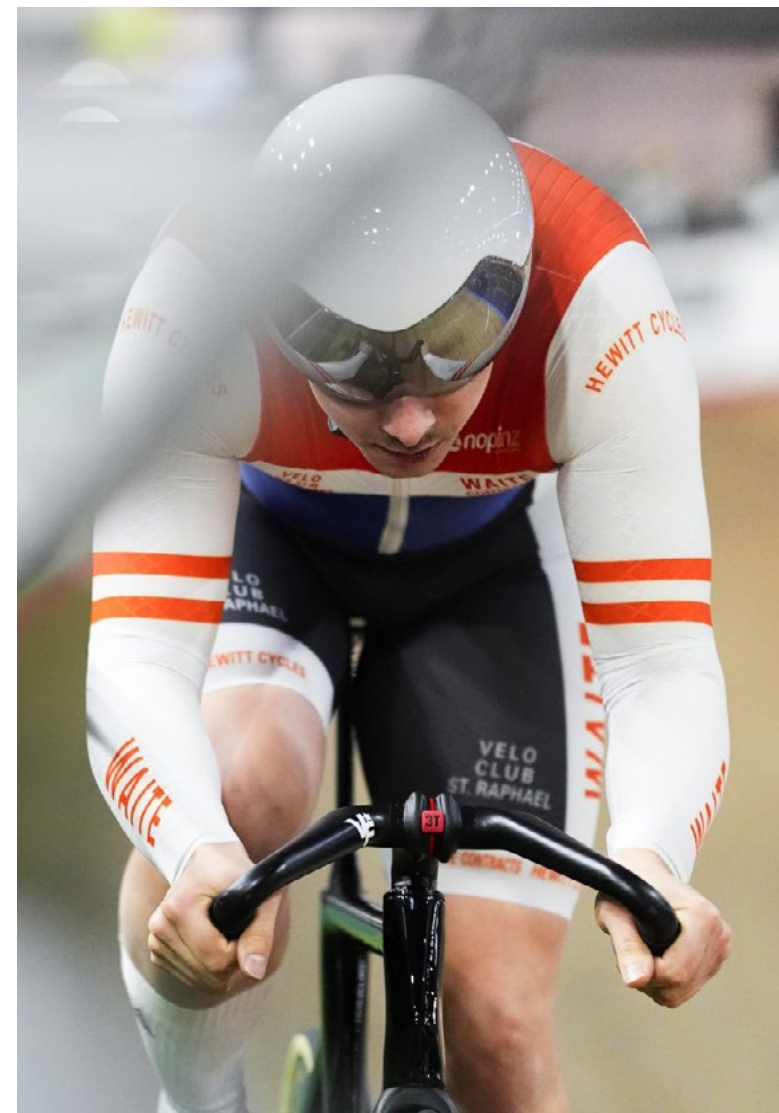
Transition is an inevitable feature of all high-performance sport. De-selection, injury, loss of funding, and eventual retirement are transitions that many athletes face more than once. Even where transitions are anticipated, the experience can be sudden and disorientating.

In 2024, the Jacobs Futura Foundation (JFF) published **Forged in Competition, Tested in Transition**, its first effort to understand what happens to athletes once they step away from high-performance sport. The report combined a landscape review, an evidence review and athlete testimonies. Together, they told a consistent story: transition out of high-performance sport is often difficult, marked by mental health strain, financial instability and a loss of personal identity.

The report highlighted the support that exists through publicly funded bodies, player and athlete associations and independent support providers. This support can help athletes navigate transition and use the skills, experiences and attributes developed through sport to make meaningful contributions beyond their sporting careers.

Funding and Support Landscape

Publicly funded provision through UK Sport and the UK Sports Institute (UKSI) continues to play an integral role for Olympic and Paralympic athletes. Across the high-performance system, athletes can access a range of support services reflecting an understanding that sporting performance is influenced by a wide range of interconnected physical, psychological and human factors.



Josh Dunham
Image courtesy of The True Athlete Project

The ongoing investment into high-performance sport and continued evolution of athlete support services, including the UKSI Performance Lifestyle Team and Performance Lifestyle Futures programme, reflect an ongoing commitment to supporting athletes both during and beyond their competitive careers.

At the same time, like most publicly funded provision, UK Sport and UKSI must balance finite resources across a complex and demanding system. As a result, support is largely concentrated within the World Class Programme environment, which serves approximately 1,200 athletes from an estimated UK elite athlete population of around 10,000. Provision can also vary across sports and stages of the athlete journey. While this support provides an important foundation for athletes within the high-performance system, many elite athletes continue to navigate career development and transition with varying levels of awareness, access and engagement with available support.



This highlights the important role of the wider athlete transition ecosystem in complementing and extending the support available within the high-performance system.

Within the professional sport landscape, many player associations and well-established clubs have developed dedicated teams that support their athletes' personal development, welfare and career transition, complementing this with financial guidance, education bursaries and mentoring, for example, the Rugby Players Association's (RPA) Gain Line programme. While the scale and nature of provision varies across sports, some player associations and clubs can act as a trusted point of support for athletes. Some work closely with governing bodies as part of an integrated support network, while others operate more independently to provide dedicated athlete services. In some cases, this can result in overlapping support offers, while in others it expands the system's overall capacity and provides athletes with additional routes to access support.

Finally, a growing ecosystem of independent organisations, charities and non-profits has emerged to support athletes through the

challenges associated with transitioning beyond high-performance sport. These organisations deliver a wide range of programmes spanning career development, employability, education, mentoring, identity, wellbeing and personal development, often providing specialised support tailored to different aspects of the transition experience. However, they typically operate with limited resource and reach a relatively small proportion of the athlete population. Awareness of available programmes, understanding the differences between support offers, and knowing where to access the most appropriate support can also present challenges for athletes.

JFF Learnings

Since the 2024 report, JFF has funded several initiatives to support athletes and learn more about the transition landscape. Several themes emerged:

Athletes benefit from personalised support and opportunities to learn from people with lived experience of transition.

For example, through mentoring, and spaces where they could explore both the practical and personal aspects of transition.

Demand for wellbeing-focused support was especially notable, reinforcing that transition is not simply a career challenge, but involves questions of identity, purpose and belonging.

*Leon Greenwood, Team GB Bobsleigh,
Mintridge Ambassador*



Flexible and ongoing opportunities for engagement matter because athletes have different levels of readiness and changing needs.

Athletes engage with transition support at different moments, with varying levels of readiness. JFF observed that support is most valuable when available at the point athletes are ready to access it, with some moving between different forms of support as their needs evolve. This reinforces the importance of viewing transition as a journey rather than a single event.

267

Number of athletes supported by JFF to date

81

Number of different sports represented

Greater collaboration can make support more visible, accessible and easier to navigate through trusted relationships, referrals and signposting.

Athletes need to be aware of opportunities and be able to access them at the right time. Delivery partners highlighted the importance of trusted relationships, referrals and effective signposting in helping athletes engage with support. These reflections reinforce a theme from the 2024 report: that alongside strengthening provision itself, there is value in helping athletes navigate and access the support that already exists.

Participants engaging with support often reported higher wellbeing, greater confidence in their future outside sport and a more positive financial outlook than those yet to begin a programme. These findings are based on a relatively small sample and should be interpreted with caution. Identity development also emerged strongly, although changes over time may not be fully attributable to programme impact.

The indications are that effective athlete transition support is likely to be personalised, relational and delivered through a connected landscape in which organisations complement one another's strengths.

The chapters that follow bring together research, examples from practice and athlete perspectives to strengthen understanding, highlight solutions and provide a basis for continued dialogue and collaboration.

SPOTLIGHT

Athlete Support Network

JFF established the Athlete Support Network as a platform for its grantee partners to share insight and explore opportunities to work together.

The network has enabled organisations to signpost athletes towards different or complementary services and has contributed to new partnerships and programmes. While these examples remain relatively early in their development, they demonstrate the potential of organisations working together to design and deliver support that draws on complementary expertise and experience and avoids duplication. Shared learning has also helped identify that support provision alone is not enough; athletes must be aware of available opportunities, understand their relevance, and feel able to engage with them.



CHAPTER TWO

Thriving in Transition

Athlete transition is not a single moment at the end of a sporting career. It is a process of adjustment that often begins while athletes are still competing and can continue long after they leave high-performance sport.

Every athlete's experience is different. Yet despite differences in sport, background and circumstance, the evidence points to common conditions that can help athletes adjust, grow and build a meaningful future after competition.

Understanding the Evidence

To understand these conditions more clearly, Professor David Lavallee of Abertay University reviewed published research on athlete career transition through a qualitative meta-synthesis.

The review brought together evidence from 17 published qualitative and mixed-methods reviews, covering approximately 2,800 athletes across 108 primary studies.

This builds on Professor Lavallee's earlier research, which underpinned JFF's previous

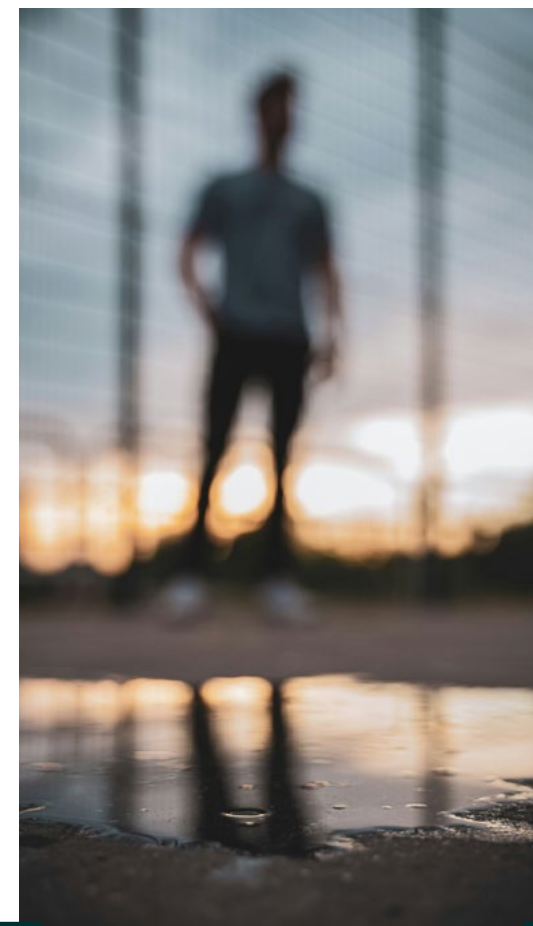
report, *Forged in Competition, Tested in Transition*. The earlier report examined the experiences of athletes transitioning from high-performance sport and opportunities for support. This analysis looks more closely at lived experience, helping explain how athletes experience transition and what appears to support successful adjustment and longer-term thriving.

What Does It Mean to Thrive?

Thriving after sport means more than finding work or appearing to adjust to retirement. It means building a meaningful and sustainable life after competition, while carrying forward the strengths, experiences and relationships developed through sport.

Athletes who thrive may experience:

- A sense of continuity, where life after competition feels like the next chapter rather than a separate life.
- Confidence in what comes next, with a growing sense of direction and belief in the future.



Learn more about
Professor Lavallee's
research on the Athlete
Transition Hub.



- The ability to carry sport forward, drawing on skills, relationships and experiences in new areas of life.
- Continued growth, with opportunities to learn, develop and pursue new ambitions beyond performance sport.

Thriving does not mean transition is always easy or predictable. It reflects an athlete's ability to adapt to change, maintain or rebuild a sense of purpose and continue developing after their sporting career.

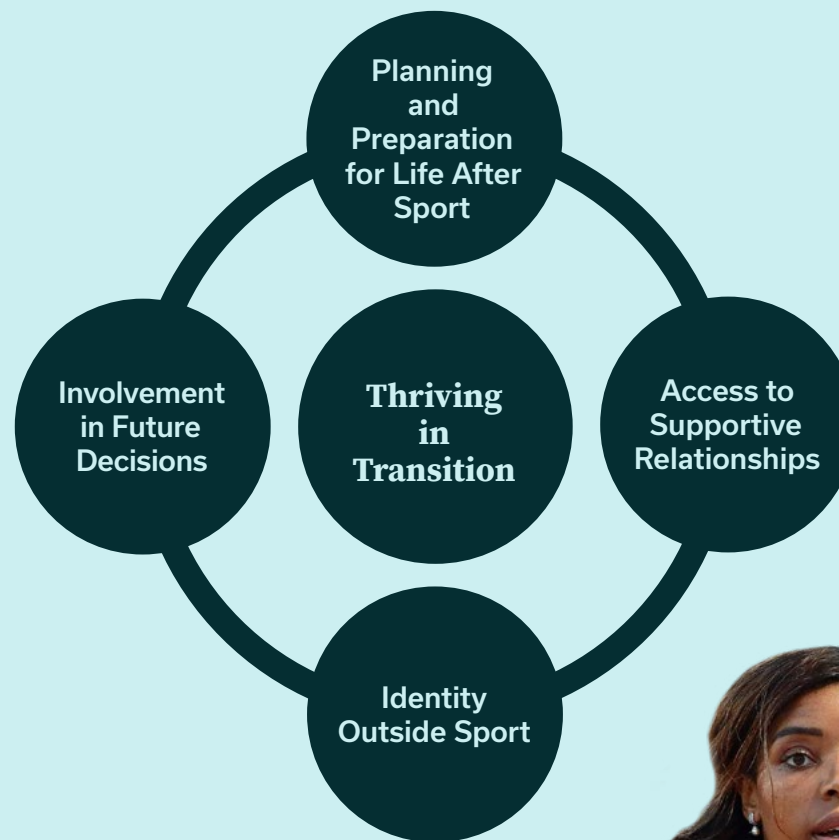
Four Interconnected Areas

Professor Lavalée's analysis identifies four areas that consistently shape how athletes experience transition:

- **Planning and Preparation for Life After Sport**
- **Access to Supportive Relationships**
- **Identity Outside Sport**
- **Involvement in Future Decisions**

These areas are not separate steps or a checklist. They interact and reinforce one another.

Sporting, Social and Organisational Environment



“Transition sounds like it should be a really smooth process, but it’s actually a very rocky, messy, sad and happy journey.”

Abigail Irozuru, Olympian and former long jumper

© Image credit: Matthieu Tourault





Hear perspectives on athlete transition from
Ama Agbeze MBE, former international netball player

“You’re so goal oriented. You’re training for this competition and this is what I need to do to get there. And then that just falls out of your life. It’s really difficult not to have a purpose or a direction.”

Ama Agbeze MBE, former international netball player

provide additional perspectives on how these themes are experienced. Academic research and lived experience are complementary and together help build a richer understanding of athlete transition.

A trusted relationship may give an athlete the confidence to explore the future. Early preparation can create greater choice and agency. Opportunities outside competition can help build a broader identity. Together, these conditions can support adaptation and continuity after sport.

Athletes do not create these conditions alone. Sporting, social and organisational

environments play a major role. Their structures, cultures and relationships can either create space for athletes to develop beyond performance or make future-focused conversations harder to begin.

The four areas are grounded in Professor Lavalée’s review of the wider evidence base. The athlete voices featured throughout this chapter are separate from that research but

1. Planning and Preparation for Life After Sport

Looking Ahead Helps Athletes Prepare for What Comes Next

Planning and preparation consistently shape how athletes experience transition. Opportunities to think about the future, explore possibilities and build experiences

outside sport can help athletes feel more confident and better equipped to navigate change. Planning is not simply practical; it can reduce uncertainty and build readiness.

Preparation works best when it is built into the athlete journey, not introduced only at retirement. Exposure to career pathways, financial awareness, work experience and opportunities outside sport can help athletes gradually build skills, experiences, confidence, and feel more prepared and better equipped to manage change when transition occurs.

Many athletes felt they would have benefited from starting earlier. Most understood that sport would eventually end, but conversations about life after sport often began only once transition was underway.

Planning and Performance Do Not Have to Compete

Athletes can feel tension between preparing for the future and committing fully to sport. Some worry that exploring life outside sport could be seen as reduced commitment to performance.

A stronger approach treats planning as a normal part of athlete development. When sporting environments encourage future-focused thinking alongside performance, athletes can prepare for what comes next while continuing to pursue sporting ambitions.



Hear perspectives on athlete transition from Rachel Cartwright, former ice hockey player

“A good transition would feel like you are supported. It doesn’t mean that everything’s happy, but that you feel safe to feel your feelings, to talk about them, and have a safe space around you and support.”

Rachel Cartwright, former ice hockey player



Hear perspectives on athlete transition from
David Hill, Paralympian, former swimmer and triathlete and
Gemma McGuinness, former international footballer

2. Access to Supportive Relationships

Having the Right People Around You Can Make Transition Easier to Navigate

Trusted relationships can reduce uncertainty, provide reassurance and create stability when other parts of life feel unfamiliar or disrupted. Support may be emotional or practical, but athletes need people they trust when guidance is required.

The Quality of Support Matters as Much as Its Availability

Athletes may benefit from coaches, teammates, family members, mentors, wellbeing practitioners and former athletes at different points. They are more likely to engage when they feel understood, respected and able to speak openly. Trusted relationships can also give athletes confidence to explore future options, develop interests outside sport and make decisions about what comes next.

“I’ve realised that I don’t need to let go of my identity as an athlete. Being an athlete will always be part of who I am. The challenge is not replacing that identity, but broadening it.”

David Hill, Paralympian, former swimmer and triathlete



3. Identity Outside Sport

Developing a Sense of Self Outside Sport Supports Positive Transitions

Identity strongly shapes how athletes experience transition. Athletes who develop interests, relationships and roles outside sport often report greater confidence when exploring new opportunities and less disruption to their sense of self when a sporting career ends.

A broader identity does not make athletes less committed to sport. It helps them understand who they are beyond performance results, selection decisions and sporting achievements. Education, work, community activities and other interests can create continuity into life after competition.

Sport Shapes Identity. So Can Opportunities Outside It.

High-performance environments help athletes develop a strong sporting identity through training, competition, routines, relationships and shared goals. These qualities support athletes during their careers, but questions about identity, purpose and direction can become more difficult when those environments change.



Hear perspectives on athlete transition from
Eilidh Gibson, former international canoe slalom athlete and
Jem Campbell, former boxer

“Just because someone looks like they’ve transitioned on paper doesn’t necessarily mean that they feel like they have in themselves.”

Eilidh Gibson, former international canoe slalom athlete

Sporting environments also influence the extent to which athletes are exposed to, and supported in developing, roles and identities beyond sport. Where athletes are encouraged to pursue education, work, interests and relationships alongside their sporting careers, they may be better positioned to navigate the transition out of competition.

Athletes contributing to this project reflected on the value of interests, experiences and ambitions alongside sport. These could provide perspective during injury, confidence during uncertainty and reassurance that sport was only one part of who they were.

4. Involvement in Future Decisions

Agency and Ownership Help Athletes Shape What Comes Next

Athletes are more likely to experience positive transitions when they are involved in shaping what comes next. This sense of agency can create ownership, confidence and direction during periods of change. Even where transition is involuntary, athletes can be supported to influence decisions within the circumstances they face.



**Hear perspectives on athlete transition from
Victoria Kingstone, Paralympian archer and
Abigail Irozuru, Olympian and former long jumper**

“A positive transition is one where you’re able to look back with satisfaction, be proud of what you’ve achieved, take the lessons you’ve learned and move them forward into the next stage of life.”

Victoria Kingstone, Paralympian archer

Many Transitions Are Involuntary

Some athletes retire on their own terms, but many leave sport because of injury, deselection, funding changes or wider life circumstances. Professor Lavallee's original research reported in JFF's 2024 report found that more than half of athletes experienced an involuntary transition from sport.

Athletes cannot control every part of transition. Early support, trusted guidance and opportunities to reflect on options can help them regain a sense of agency and ownership even when change is unexpected. The same event can feel very different depending on confidence, relationships, identity and wider circumstances.

Together, these four areas help explain why some athletes are better able to navigate change and build meaningful futures beyond competition.

The next chapter explores how these areas are being reflected in practice through the experiences of athletes, practitioners and organisations working across the athlete transition landscape.

Explore Further

Hear all athlete voices reflect on their perspectives of transition on the Athlete Transition Hub.



CHAPTER THREE

Solutions in Action

The previous chapter explored four areas that help athletes thrive after sport: planning and preparation, supportive relationships, identity outside sport and involvement in future decisions.

To understand how those areas are being applied in practice, JFF engaged athletes, practitioners and organisations working across athlete transition. Alongside UK perspectives, conversations with Australian Athletics and the New Zealand Olympic Committee offered additional reflections on practice.

Supporting the Person Behind the Athlete

Transition is more than a career change following retirement from high-performance sport. For many athletes it is a personal experience involving changes to identity, confidence, purpose, relationships and self-perception. Effective support starts with understanding the person and adapting to individual circumstances.

Five practical insights emerged:

- Supporting the Person Behind the Athlete
- Transition is Not just a Retirement Conversation
- More than Just Employment, Preparing for Life Beyond Sport
- Helping Athletes Connect with the Right Support
- Carrying Sport Forward Beyond Competition



“We’ve had people say I don’t want to reach out because I don’t want to admit that I’m struggling, because of the culture around sport, not to show that vulnerability.”

Rob Young MBE,
Chief Executive, Switch the
Play Foundation



Psychologically safe environments can encourage athletes to engage openly and create the conditions for honest conversations before challenges escalate. Athletes may avoid seeking help because they worry it signals vulnerability, weakness or a lack of focus on performance. Space for honest conversations can help **normalise transition as part of the athlete journey**, rather than something to avoid or postpone. In turn, it can also normalise athletes accessing transition support. This is particularly important in high-performance environments, where athletes may feel pressure to appear resilient, focused and fully committed to athletic performance.

For many athletes, transition is also accompanied by the **loss of a close-knit community of teammates, coaches, practitioners and support staff**. As a result, creating opportunities for athletes to stay connected with others, particularly those

“They need the space to open up and have it reflected back to them.”

Laurence Halsted,
Olympian and former fencer

“We were humans before we became athletes. Transition is about finding and discovering the human after we’ve been an athlete.”

Rick Cotgreave, Founder, Human First Athlete Transitions

SPOTLIGHT

Human First Athlete Transitions



Creating Space to Understand Life Beyond Sport

Human First supports athletes through the personal and psychological challenges that can accompany transition. Rather than starting with career planning or employment, its programmes focus on helping athletes understand who they are beyond sport and navigate the loss, uncertainty and identity change that can occur when a sporting chapter comes to an end.

Before athletes can focus on what they will do next, many first need support to understand who they are without sport. Human First creates opportunities for athletes to reflect, build self-awareness and connect with others experiencing similar challenges.

The residential retreats create space to explore identity, purpose and future direction through reflection, conversation and shared experience. By stepping away from the pressures of performance, athletes can spend time considering who they are, what matters to them and how they want to approach the future.

Explore Further

Learn more about Human First Athlete Transitions’ approach on the Athlete Transition Hub.



who have experienced similar transitions, can play an important role in reducing isolation, maintaining a sense of belonging and supporting adjustment beyond sport.

In practice, **transition support is often as much about self-discovery as career planning.** Before athletes can focus on what they will do next, many first need support to understand who they are without sport. Time to explore who they are beyond performance, connect with others and explore different perspectives can help athletes approach future decisions with greater confidence and clarity. This is particularly important given the evidence that suggests that changes in identity are one of the most influential factors shaping transition experiences.

Rather than focusing immediately on career decisions, many programmes begin by helping athletes understand their values, interests and aspirations.

Organisations reflected on the importance of resisting the urge to move too quickly to

solutions as **athletes engage with support at different levels of readiness.** Some athletes are ready to explore future opportunities immediately. Others need time before focusing on practical next steps. Importantly, access to support does not automatically lead to engagement. Athletes may be aware of available opportunities, but often need time, trust and the personal readiness to accept and engage with support before it can be effective.

Rather than asking athletes to fit a programme, the strongest approaches start by understanding where an athlete is in their journey and what type of support is most relevant at that moment.

Transition is Not Just a Retirement Conversation

All athletes experience transitions throughout their sporting careers. Whether through injury, deselection, progression through talent pathways, coaching changes or wider life events, periods of change are a normal part of athlete development. While individual

experiences vary, supporting athletes through these moments can help build confidence, resilience and readiness for future transitions.

Stakeholders consistently champion the idea that **transition support should begin in the early stages of an athlete's career, and continue throughout,** rather than reserving it as a difficult discussion at the end of a career. By introducing age- and stage-appropriate conversations, experiences and support throughout the athlete journey, organisations can help athletes build readiness for future change. These conversations may evolve over time, which aligns with the evidence that transition is a process rather than a single event.

Integrated support helps normalise transition conversations. Many organisations highlighted the benefits of embedding transition support within existing athlete development and wellbeing structures. When conversations about wellbeing, identity, future aspirations and life beyond sport become part of everyday athlete support, they feel more relevant and less stigmatised.

“No one goes to the gym once and is immediately stronger. Sport is built on repetition, so we shouldn't be afraid to have repetitive messages over and over again.”

Tim Lawler MBE, Chief Executive, SportsAid



“We talk about exit at entry because a career-threatening injury can come at any point. We want athletes to have the resilience, support and confidence to navigate change whenever it occurs.”

Melanie Purkiss,
former international track athlete
and Athlete Wellbeing & Engagement
Manager, Australian Athletics

Explore Further
Learn more about Australian
Athletics' approach on the
Athlete Transition Hub.



SPOTLIGHT

Australian Athletics

Building Transition Readiness Through Athlete Wellbeing

Australian Athletics embeds transition within a dedicated wellbeing function that sits alongside its performance and talent pathway programmes. Rather than treating transition as a retirement issue, the organisation positions it as a normal part of athlete development.

Athletes receive support through recognised change points, including progression through pathways, injury, deselection, coaching changes and retirement. By introducing support early and revisiting it over time, the organisation aims to help athletes build confidence and resilience before major transitions occur.

Dedicated wellbeing staff work within the performance environment, helping normalise support-seeking behaviours and ensuring athletes can access guidance throughout their journey.

Athletes are more likely to engage with support that is visible, familiar and reinforced throughout their journey, rather than introduced only when a transition occurs.

More than Just Employment, Preparing for Life Beyond Sport

Preparing for life beyond sport is not simply about finding employment. It means helping athletes build the confidence, skills and awareness they need to navigate a future beyond competition.

Athletes develop valuable skills, experiences and attributes throughout their sporting careers, including resilience, adaptability, teamwork, discipline and the ability to perform under pressure. However, many **do not always recognise these strengths themselves or feel confident communicating** how their experiences can translate beyond high-performance sport.

As a result, organisations highlighted the importance of helping athletes identify, articulate and apply the qualities they have

developed through sport, and translate their experiences, skills and attributes into language that employers and wider audiences can understand and value.

While athletes possess many of the qualities employers value, many have **limited exposure to workplace environments** and expectations.

Placements, internships and employer engagement initiatives give athletes workplace exposure and can build confidence while helping employers understand the skills, experiences and potential that athletes can bring to their organisations.

Practical support can help athletes navigate responsibilities and systems outside the sporting environment. This might include financial literacy, pensions, workplace expectations, personal administration and other everyday responsibilities that may feel unfamiliar after years in highly supported performance environments. Building confidence in these areas throughout an athlete's career can reduce uncertainty and help athletes be more prepared for life outside of sport.



“Getting athletes prepared for things like mortgages, pensions and the practical realities of life beyond sport can make a real difference.”

Beth Durant, former professional netball player

SPOTLIGHT

ACT Community



Building Careers, Not Just Securing Jobs

ACT Community supports elite athletes through career exploration, skills translation and employer engagement.

Through profiling, strengths assessments and tailored support, athletes explore future opportunities, develop a clearer understanding of their transferable strengths and build confidence in communicating the value they can bring outside sport.

Recognising that long-term change depends on employer participation, ACT Community also works with organisations to improve understanding of athlete talent and create pathways for lasting success. By working with both athletes and employers, it aims to strengthen recruitment outcomes, career progression, retention and fulfilment over time.



Explore Further

Learn more about ACT Community's approach on the Athlete Transition Hub.



“They can work in teams, they can communicate, they can time plan, the discipline, the focus. They’ve proven that.”

Andy Moore, former Wales rugby captain and Co-Founder, ACT Community

“ACT played an important role in bridging that gap. They understand athletes, but they also understand business and know how to connect the two effectively.”

Marilyn Okoro, Olympian and former middle distance athlete and ACT Community participant

Helping Athletes Connect with the Right Support

Support already exists across the athlete transition ecosystem.

Collectively, organisations offer a wide range of expertise, programmes and services. However, such a range of options can create complexity. **Athletes are not always aware** of what is available, how support differs, who it is designed for or how to access it. Support delivered outside the organisations athletes interact with most regularly, such as governing bodies or UK Sport-funded programmes, can be particularly difficult to discover, with many athletes only learning about opportunities through personal recommendations or after a challenge has already emerged.

To help athletes engage, signposting and referral pathways can help, particularly when referenced by trusted people in an athlete's network. Discovery conversations and triage approaches can also help direct athletes towards the most appropriate support.

Connecting athletes with the right support may be as important as the support itself.

Athletes are not all seeking or needing the same support. As highlighted earlier, understanding an athlete's circumstances is critical before recommending a particular service or programme.

SPOTLIGHT

Switch the Play Foundation



Helping Athletes Navigate the Support Landscape

Switch the Play Foundation provides education, wellbeing, career and personal development support to athletes across all sports.

Recognising that transition is a personal experience and athletes do not always know where to start, what support they need or which organisation is best placed to help, Switch the Play Foundation developed its Discovery Call model. The personalised conversation provides a safe space to explore individual circumstances, discuss options and identify appropriate next steps.

The Discovery Call acts as an entry point into both Switch the Play Foundation's services and the wider athlete transition landscape. Rather than directing athletes into a single pathway, it takes a person centred approach and aims to connect them with the support most relevant to their needs and circumstances. Over the past 12 months nearly 90% of athletes who had a Discovery Call went on to access further support through Switch the Play or another organisation they were signposted towards.

Explore Further

Learn more about Switch the Play Foundation's offer on the Athlete Transition Hub.



“Just start with a call with someone who can create a safe space, talk you through your options and understand where you're at.”

Rob Young MBE, Chief Executive, Switch the Play Foundation

Carrying Sport Forward Beyond Competition

Athletes are exposed to unique experiences, knowledge and perspectives throughout their careers. Consequently, speaking to someone who has experienced similar pressures, challenges and decision points first-hand can be valuable. By sharing lessons from their own experiences, former athletes can help nurture future talent, while also supporting others to navigate transitions throughout their sporting journeys and beyond high-performance sport.



“Athletes need to hear from athletes... they have been there and done it.”

Simon Berghan, former international rugby player and mentor, The True Athlete Project

“Over and over again, mentors tell us how meaningful it is to be given the responsibility of mentoring a younger athlete. It creates a sense of purpose, and a very ‘live’ opportunity to reflect, practice new skills, and grow.”

Sam Parfitt, former tennis player, Founder and CEO, The True Athlete Project

SPOTLIGHT

The True Athlete Project Global Mentoring Programme



Creating Value Through Athlete-to-Athlete Mentoring

Through The True Athlete Project's Global Mentoring Programme, former athletes are matched with younger and aspiring athletes through year-long mentoring relationships. The programme creates opportunities for athletes to learn from lived experience, while helping mentors continue contributing beyond their own sporting careers.

Younger athletes gain confidence, perspective and the opportunity to learn from people who have experienced elite sport first-hand. For mentors, the programme provides an opportunity to share lessons learned through sport, recognise the continuing value of their experience and contribute to athlete development.

The programme highlights the distinctive role former athletes can play in supporting future generations. It also demonstrates how mentoring can create purpose and connection for athletes who are navigating life beyond competition themselves.

Explore Further

Learn more about The True Athlete Project's Global Mentoring Programme and athlete-to-athlete mentoring on the Athlete Transition Hub.



Athletes bring lived experience that can inform decision-making, shape policy, strengthen programmes and help organisations better understand the realities of high-performance sport. For example, roles in leadership, governance, mentoring and advocacy – whether in sport or elsewhere. There may be value in viewing athlete transition not only as a process of moving on from sport, but also as an opportunity to retain and harness the expertise developed through it.

“The real opportunity is enabling athletes to use their voice when decisions are being made about the issues that affect them.”

Eilidh Gibson, former international canoe slalom athlete and Athlete Programmes & Relationship Manager, Women’s Sport Trust

Explore Further

Learn more about the Unlocked Programme and athlete leadership opportunities on the Athlete Transition Hub.



SPOTLIGHT

Women’s Sport Trust Unlocked Programme



Building Leadership and Influence Beyond Competition

Through its Unlocked leadership programme, the Women’s Sport Trust helps elite female athletes develop leadership skills, expand professional networks and influence change within and beyond sport.

A key feature of the programme is its Activator model, which connects athletes with senior leaders working in areas they are passionate about influencing. Through these relationships, athletes can extend their networks, develop leadership experience and explore ways to use their voice and expertise beyond competition.

International hockey player Tess Howard MBE joined the first Unlocked cohort with a desire to improve inclusivity in sport and school uniform policy. Tess’s Activator supported her in developing her work in this area. This led to Tess starting her social enterprise, Inclusive Sportswear, and contributing to legislative changes in girls’ PE kit regulations.

The example demonstrates how leadership development and access to wider networks can help athletes build purpose and future pathways, while enabling athlete experience to inform policy and decision-making.



“There are a lot of transferable skills, but not every company is able to take the risk, take the time, because as much as there are transferable skills, most people, particularly coming from sport, are just going to have such a small amount of technical expertise. What we are trying to articulate is that the learning curve of people have performed at the top of elite sport can be really high and the upside of this investment can be great for the companies who do take that risk.”

David Denton, former international rugby player and Vice President, UK Wealth, BlackRock

“Most athletes will get a job, but that doesn’t necessarily mean it’s a career. It may not be fulfilling or offer long-term prospects. A career is something that you can build on, layer over time and be successful in for the long-term.”

Andy Moore, former Wales rugby captain and Co-Founder, ACT Community

“There could be a fantastic programme in place, like the best funded, the best organised programme, but they don’t always recognise that they need it or that they could use it before it’s potentially too late.”

Gabby Marshall, Development Manager, Netball Players Association



SPOTLIGHT

New Zealand Olympic Committee



Creating Pathways for Athletes to Lead Beyond Competition

The New Zealand Olympic Committee has developed a range of initiatives that help athletes continue contributing long after competition ends. Alongside transition and wellbeing support, athletes can engage in leadership programmes such as the Wāhine Toa Women in Sport Leadership Programme, mentoring opportunities, education ambassador roles and the Athlete Collective, which connects athletes with paid speaking engagements, commercial opportunities and professional networks.

By creating pathways into leadership, governance and advocacy, this shows how athlete transition can be viewed not only as a process of moving on from competition, but also as an opportunity to retain athlete experience, strengthen the sporting system and create lasting impact beyond the field of play.

“Wāhine Toa participants are matched with mentors, sometimes outside sport, and benefit from networking opportunities with alumni and sector leaders, which are seen as key to personal and professional development.”

Cathleen Bias, Legacy & Athlete
Programmes Manager, New Zealand
Olympic Committee

Explore Further

Learn more about the New Zealand Olympic Committee's athlete leadership and transition initiatives on the Athlete Transition Hub.



Building a More Connected Approach

The five insights in this chapter show how organisations are supporting athletes more effectively in practice. Realising their full potential, however, will require action beyond individual programmes or providers. These perspectives point to a shared responsibility across the sector: to align around a clearer purpose, strengthen collective learning and work together towards better outcomes for athletes.

This chapter shows that effective transition support is already taking shape across the sector.

The next chapter considers how JFF and the wider sector can build on this work by improving connection, strengthening shared learning and keeping better outcomes for athletes at the centre.



“Can we pool some of our knowledge together to collectively look at common outcome measures, a framework that we can all work to in our own flavours?”

Rob Young MBE, Chief Executive, Switch the Play Foundation

“It’s not the sole responsibility of ‘the system’. I don’t think many sectors owe someone their next career. It’s not that binary... I think it’s a shared endeavour.”

Tim Lawler MBE, Chief Executive, SportsAid

“How do you create a single, clear strategic purpose that can then be applied by everybody in a way that is consistent and avoids duplication but also enables them to feel ownership and have a stake?”

Tim Hollingsworth OBE, Professor in Practice (Sport) at University of Bath

CHAPTER FOUR

Enabling Effective Transitions

As the report highlights, every athlete's transition is different, but the opportunity is shared.

Valuable support, expertise and commitment already exist. The opportunity now is for the sector to come together to collaborate, learn more effectively from what works, reduce the stigma of transition and make support easier to access.

Expand the Collaboration

The sector is fortunate to have so many actors working on transition – for different athletes, sports and its specific aspects.

No single organisation can cater for all athletes or all the needs of athletes. The sector, and most importantly, athletes would benefit from each organisation coming together to share learnings and collaborate. It will take time to figure out how this can be best done in practice but with the wealth of knowledge and experience among organisations and a willingness to work

together, greater collaboration offers a real opportunity to deliver better transitions for athletes.

Normalise the Conversation

To do this, stakeholders across the sector should reflect and consider how they can positively influence transition in their roles. How is transition currently approached? What could be done differently to reduce its stigma? A collective approach to normalising the conversation can enable transition to become a matter which is increasingly considered throughout the athlete journey rather than the end.

Connect the Experience for Athletes

Athletes currently face a complex landscape when navigating athlete transition support – there is an opportunity to simplify this, so that athletes can access the right support at the right time.



To address this, the athlete perspective and experience need to be better understood and placed at the centre of how the landscape is shaped. As a starting point, it is crucial that athletes can easily find where to access support for the first time from whoever that might be. Dialogue between stakeholders is needed to increase the awareness of what each other is doing and identify how they can refer athletes to different organisations as appropriate to their needs.

Transition is a shared challenge; it is also a shared opportunity for the sector to address as a collective. Joint action on these priorities will create the conditions for better outcomes for athletes, and ultimately for sport and society – as athletes are assets to society for their entire lives, not just their sporting careers.

JFF aims to contribute by supporting promising work, learning from evidence and lived experience, and creating opportunities for organisations to share knowledge, strengthen connections and extend the reach of effective practice.

Explore Further

Learn more about research, athlete perspectives, practical resources and organisations on the Athlete Transition Hub.



Eleanor Brinkhoff, GB Rowing
Image courtesy of The True Athlete Project

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