

Conference abstract

# Adolescence to Adulthood, Managing The Key Transitions in Developing Cyclist's Sporting Careers: The Athlete's Perspective

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## 1. Introduction

The move from youth to senior competition has been shown to be one of the most difficult transitions in an athlete's sporting career. It has been highlighted that during this transition athletes face two typical outcomes; (i) stagnation in performance, and therefore a move back to participation or dropout, or (ii) which occurs less-frequently, a continuation in their sport to senior level (Stambulova, 2009).

Transitions in sport can be sub-divided by the element of predictability surrounding them. Normative transitions are predictable and anticipated (Schlosberg & Goodman, 2005) whereas non-normative transitions do not conform to a set schedule or predictable pattern (Wylleman & Lavelle, 2004). The majority of current and past transition research has been conducted on normative and non-normative end-of-career transitions (see examples: Grove, Lavalley & Gordon, 1997; Cavallerio, Wadey & Wagstaff, 2017; Guerrero & Martin, 2018), with less attention focusing on the normative within career transitions athletes face.

Recent research within cycling has highlighted that managing the transition between junior (U-19) and under-23 (U-23) categories is extremely important when future performance is considered (Cesanelli et al. 2021; Gallo et al. 2022) and those future non-performers

experience decreased success when transitioning to a higher age-category (Mostaert et al. 2021). To support this transition period, it is vital to understand these periods and what developmental structures are in place. Therefore, the aim of this study was to explore the retrospective experiences (via qualitative means) of U-23 cyclists who competed internationally to support them in their future developments during their transition points.

## 2. Material and Methods

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to assess the views of current and former international cyclists on transition periods and their experiences of developmental structures. Interview questions used were based on collective knowledge of the sport of cycling and theoretical frameworks from existing research that explored career transitions (Wylleman & Lavelle, 2004; Wylleman, Reints & De Knop, 2013). Commonalities and differences within the qualitative data were assessed and relationships between different aspects of the information were aligned. From the data collected, descriptive and/or explanatory conclusions were drawn and clustered around themes.



### 3. Results

Via convenience sampling, a total of 10 (n=10) current and former male international cyclists were interviewed (mean age=23.1, SD=0.94, mean training age=7.9, SD=2.12). Three participants were still competing at a domestic level while two were competing at a continental level. The results indicated that the transition into third level education came at a self-proclaimed pivotal point in the athletes sporting career (Age Range 17-19). In this instance the athletes perceived performance as crucial to have a further opportunity in the sport. Combined, these two transitions became a dominant hurdle that was often not adequately handled by the athlete or their support network. A mismanagement of training volume, governance, the talent development structures and selection processes along with missed social opportunities led many to develop an antipathy towards the sport. Other areas highlighted included lack of clear and transparent selection criteria, lack of life skills support, and an overall lack of communication namely for the periods before and after competition, communication during competition was seen as adequate. An absence of cohesion between club, regional and national level development was apparent across the data set also. Coaching support was a common theme highlighted by the athletes with an evident need for developmental days, educational workshops and more of a focus on interpersonal skill development to enhance the coaching provided.

### 4. Conclusion

Cohesion between club, province and national level is needed to support the holistic development of athletes within and outside of the competitive arena. With more support provided to athletes from a governance and organisational level, along with improved and transparent selection criteria and athlete development, cycling organisations should be able to enhance their effectiveness in facilitating the within career normative transition period.

In conclusion, support the development of the sport future research should include an

examination of structures within governing bodies, investigation of the female specific developmental experiences, coaching and the development of coach education structures with a focus on how best to develop the coach athlete relationship.

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**Conflict of Interest:** The authors report no conflict of interest.

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