

1 Conference Abstract

2 Adolescence to Adulthood, Managing The Key 3 Transitions in Developing Cyclist's Sporting 4 Careers: The Athlete's Perspective

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9 Abstract

10 1. Introduction

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

18
19 Transitions in sport can be sub-divided by the element of predictability surrounding them.
20 Normative transitions are predictable and anticipated (Schlosberg & Goodman, 2005)
21 whereas non-normative transitions do not conform to a set schedule or predictable pattern
22 (Wylleman & Lavelle, 2004). The majority of current and past transition research has
23 been conducted on normative and non-normative end-of-career transitions (see examples:
24 Grove, Lavallee & Gordon, 1997; Cavallerio, Wadey & Wagstaff, 2017; Guerrero &
25 Martin, 2018), with less attention focusing on the normative within career transitions
26 athletes face.

27
28 Recent research within cycling has highlighted that managing the transition between
29 junior (U-19) and under-23 (U-23) categories is extremely important when future
30 performance is considered (Cesanelli et al. 2021; Gallo et al. 2022) and those future non-
31 performers experience decreased success when transitioning to a higher age-category
32 (Mostaert et al. 2021). To support this transition period, it is vital to understand these
33 periods and what developmental structures are in place. Therefore, the aim of this study
34 was to explore the retrospective experiences (via qualitative means) of U-23 cyclists who
35 competed internationally to support them in their future developments during their
36 transition points.

37 2. Material and Methods

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39 Semi-structured interviews were conducted to assess the views of current and former
40 international cyclists on transition periods and their experiences of developmental
41 structures. Interview questions used were based on collective knowledge of the sport of



42 cycling and theoretical frameworks from existing research that explored career transitions
43 (Wylleman & Lavelle, 2004; Wylleman, Reints & De Knop, 2013). Commonalities and
44 differences within the qualitative data were assessed and relationships between different
45 aspects of the information were aligned. From the data collected, descriptive and/or
46 explanatory conclusions were drawn and clustered around themes.

47

48 **3. Results**

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

66

67 **4. Conclusion**

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

74

75 In conclusion, support the development of the sport future research should include; an
76 examination of structures within governing bodies, investigation of the female specific
77 developmental experiences, coaching and the development of coach education structures
78 with a focus on how best to develop the coach athlete relationship.

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84 JMCA, & TH completed a re-analysis to cross-reference SY and compiled the abstract
85 presented here. JMCA & TH provided feedback on the introduction, methods, and results
86 of this study.

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

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