their organisation. While the support given varied by player, coach, and sport, much of it included raising awareness of the qualifications that could help them achieve whatever they wanted to do next. Coaching therefore has a role not just working with an athlete to understand their broader "interests, passions, values" but also to help them consider how these "meet up with their behavioural skills and strengths". This includes working more practically to give advice on CV writing, networking and thinking about future career options.

How: Fitting the Environment

The context of elite sport also emerged as an important theme that needed to be understood. Referred to unprompted by nine of the participants as a 'bubble', and validated as a concept by the tenth, the research highlighted sport as a unique setting given the particular performance pressures, reality of what it is to be elite, and requirement for laser-focus. Encompassing three of the categories that emerged, this theme recognises the particular environment athletes experience while pursuing a career in elite sport, both on the perimeters of the bubble – as they enter as a young sportsperson with potential, or later as they leave their playing career behind them - and the precious moment in between, when performance is at its peak. In doing so, it acknowledges there is a time, which can vary in length, when all athletes feel the need to focus on a single identity to reach their potential, despite an emerging argument that a broader understanding of self can actually enhance performance.

Sport Trusts Sport

That a high proportion of those interviewed had previously had a playing career themselves, or come up through a parallel avenue, such as sports science, highlighted the importance of coaches not just understanding the environment, but having had some form of lived experience of it.

> *Working with the players is a really closed shop, it's a really difficult area to break into because you've not played yourself…they go to people they know.*

This was as much about being able to make a connection as understanding the finer points of the sport in question. As a result, for those working outside of elite sports organisations, much of their work came through well-known and trusted referrals, with gatekeepers playing an important role, while those inside spoke of the importance of engaging with the athletes in their own environment, often informally, in order to build the relationship.

The Sporting Bubble

This closed world of sport was emphasised by the repeated use of the word 'bubble' both to describe the broader context of elite sporting environments and the point of peak performance within them, with participants believing that as athletes turn professional, or enter a World Class Programme, they become:

> *Surrounded by people who make them feel brilliant, and who make them think they can walk on water, and who want them in this bubble of continuing to play sport.*

Tunnel vision was seen by many as a pre-requisite as athletes reached their peak, with a belief that thinking about broader identity could be a distraction since the moment of optimal performance can be short: "you've got to be locked into what you do and why you're doing it."

Identity Work Can Enhance Performance

A narrative exists within elite sport that thinking about what comes next could hinder performance, causing young players to learn early not to consider their later careers, selves or opportunities.

However, a counterview is growing that identity work is not only not damaging, but can, in fact, help performance.

> *We know that the science says that an athlete that sees themselves as more than just an athlete, will actually do better, will be better at performing.*

This performance benefit is seen as significant by those who subscribe to it and that the result is "not just marginal gains, it's substantial gains".

When: Throughout the Journey

Transition is often seen as a fixed point in an elite athlete's life, when they make the move from playing and competing in their sport as their primary function, to identifying as something different, and another career, outside of it. However, it became clear during research that this was not the case, and that the earlier coaches began working with athletes, the easier the transition at the end, given the support received and greater sense of identity and possible selves the athletes therefore possessed, irrespective of whether they had also gained additional skills or education along the way. For this reason, theoretical sampling led to a greater number of participants being interviewed who worked with young and developing athletes, identified as having potential but not yet being professional or 'elite', reducing selection bias (Barbour, 2001) and leading to a consideration of the different moments at which coaching can play a role on an athlete's journey. The final theme to surface from the findings therefore considers 'when' and is, again, comprised of three categories. While not the core theme, it is arguably the most significant, given the influence it has on the evidence-based model, and its contribution to practice.

Starting Early

It became clear early in the research that work to ensure a successful transition ideally begins a lot earlier than one might expect, at the start of an athlete's career. Those coaches working with this younger, 'pre-elite' group identified that the dynamic of working with undeveloped athletes, often children, is clearly different, and more informal,

> *I do a lot of it in the gym with them and join in as it helps build relationships, you get a bit more buy-in. It's not the same kind of environment and that's the difference between the coaching and mentoring piece. It's just a bit different in that sense, they don't really know we're working together but we are'.*

A lot of this work is done quite informally. As a result, most of the coaches working inside a club or team, and with younger athletes, did not follow a full coaching process, especially since contracting felt too formal. Instead of holding the athlete's agenda, as a traditional coach might, they saw their role as beginning with exploration, identity, and stories, and then moving on to goals if they were still working together.

Included in this was both a recognition that introducing other hobbies or education becomes harder as athletes progress, and that, if conversations concerning broader identity are left too late, athletes assume they conceal a de-selection agenda. Conversely, mentioning "the subject often enough so it's not taboo and not specific to certain athletes" makes it easier to draw on as required.

The Right Support at the Right Time

The concept of a journey also emerged as relevant for athletes who have already left sport but who had not yet carried out overt identity work. Similarly, Group 2, the external coaches, recognised they still had a role to play with those athletes who had done the identity piece prior to engaging them, or who were 'big names' arguably not as lost or in need of immediate income. In these instances, instead of spending time focusing on possible identities, the sessions considered how

best to articulate the athlete's personal brand for the next stage of their career and led to more formal relationships.

Whatever form their support took, the coaches all recognised the value their relationships added:

> *Sometimes you've got athletic egos. You think you're all alone and no one has ever felt like this before in the history of athletics and you don't want to talk to anyone about it.*

However, the participants also recognised that help should not come from them alone, and sports coaches, friends and family who provide "the psychological support and emotional support that is needed when you are transitioning" were also important.

By Choice or By Force

One reason for being prepared is that injury can take you by surprise. Another is that, while there is a general acceptance that athletes know when they are underperforming, they do not always recognise what this means, and leaving by force, however it happens, can bring difficult emotions:

> *When it's by choice, you're more prepared, when it's by force, you think 'what if?'. If your career ends by force you are mad, you're upset, you're angry because it didn't work out the way you thought it was going to work out, you couldn't control it. Now this identity crisis is even harder for you, it's harder for you to swallow that pill.*

Evidence-based Theory

In bringing together the four main themes that emerged from this piece of research, I arrived at an evidence-based model born out of the grounded theory methodology. This considers all aspects of the role of coaching - both in terms of the work done with athletes to enable psychological and physical mobility ('what'), as well as 'when' and 'how' this work should take place. The resulting model provides this study's contribution to research, starting to address the gaps in the literature, and highlighting the need to consider the full journey elite athletes go on, as opposed to a single moment of transition. In doing so, it draws attention to the different ways coaching can help, as well as in what setting, and what form, as elite athletes' transition to a second career.

Consolidating Model

The consolidating model showcases this journey, in which the context of elite sport is represented by two bubbles: an outer boundary signifying the time from an athlete's entry into a sporting setting to the moment they leave to pursue a second career; and an inner one of peak performance. Within this, the evolving role of coaching can be seen. While the coaching focus is primarily concerned with the future point of transition, and so centred on identity work until this moment approaches, the way in which it is delivered evolves with the athlete. Therefore, we see coaching initially most effectively delivered by a mentor, in an internal setting, working inside, and paid for by, a club or team, and doing work that is largely informal in its nature, with young athletes at the beginning of their career. There is a break at the point of peak performance, when coaching arguably has less of a role, before a more formal, external coaching relationship, engaged and paid for by the athlete, and focusing on the immediate what next, gains a role as the moment of transition nears or passes (see Fig.2 below).

Fig. 2: An Evidence Based Model of the Role of Coaching in an Elite Athlete's Transition to a Second Career
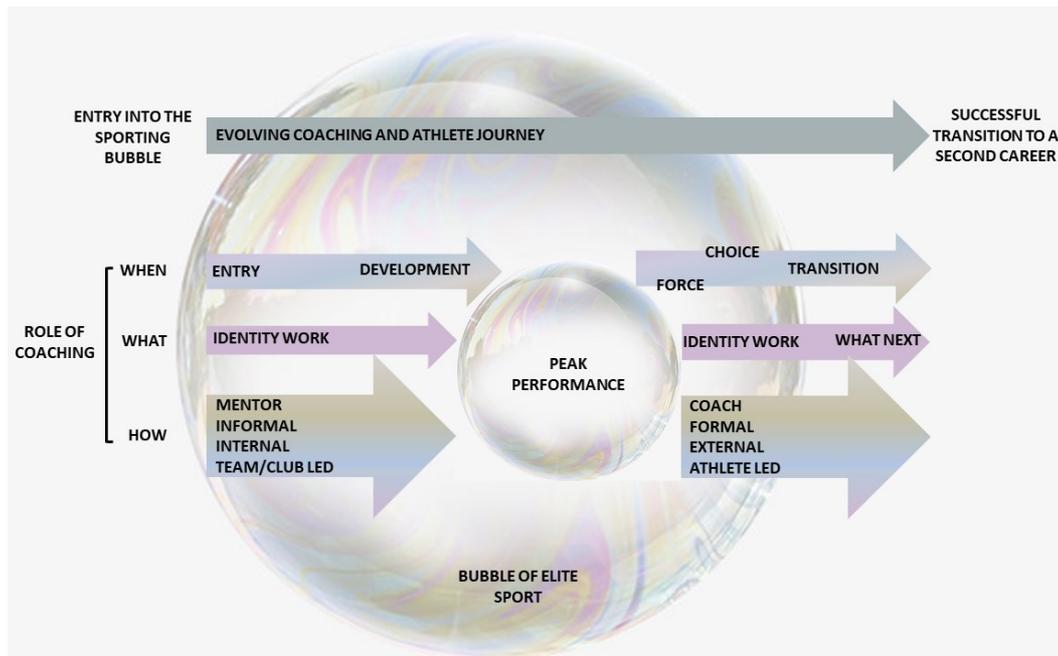
The Role of Coaching: Implications for Practice

As shown by the consolidating model, this study concludes that, despite neither being well-established nor more widely researched in this setting, there are several roles for coaching in an elite athlete's transition from their playing to their second career. To understand the potential implications for practice, when, what and how coaching can be utilised on this journey needs to be examined.

When: Throughout the Journey

The consolidating model illustrates both the wider context of elite sport, and the smaller moment of peak performance within it. As such, it mirrors Bloom's (1985) three stages of talent development which Moore (2005) subsequently reapplied to sport: young athletes being identified as having potential and entering the elite sport bubble; training and development; and peak performance or mastery. While the theorists' models end here, the one which has emerged from this research continues past the peak to the inevitable transition out into the wider world of work, by choice or force, and shows that, with a possible break during peak performance, there is a role for coaching in working with athletes on their future transition throughout.

While literature exists which looks to understand athlete identity and the issues surrounding retirement, and much is written on the broader context of career change, general transition and liminality, through its use of Charmaz's (2006) GTM and theoretical sampling to build this evidence-based model, this is the first to recommend that coaching, in some guise, begins from the moment athletes as young as eight years old enter the world of elite sport in academies or foundation stages.

What: Identity Work and Preparing for What Next

The research highlighted that this coaching should initially be delivered in an informal, mentoring capacity, as part of the internal support provided by the club or team, before growing in stature

alongside the athlete throughout their journey. The core theme to emerge from participants was the role coaching can play in conducting identity work with athletes, enabling them to understand their multiple selves. The earlier this is carried out, the easier it is to establish, lessening the bump if a career ends prematurely through injury or de-selection, and enabling athletes to gain a broader understanding of who they are over and above their sport.

When discussing their respective segmentations of the boundaryless and Protean career models, Arthur and Sullivan (2006) and Hall and Briscoe (2006) highlighted identity as a key factor in those looking to significantly shift career being able to transition successfully. This theme is picked up by other theorists (Brown, 2015; Burns, 2015; Ibarra, 2004) who argue that, to move on to do something different, you first need to reduce any identity boundaries (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996), 'reframe' (Brown, 2014) or 'reimagine' (Burns, 2015) who you are, or 'reconfigure' (Ibarra, 2004) your work identity among the possible selves available to you. Part of this process involves gaining greater self-awareness and self-knowledge, two of the aspects of consciousness-raising seen as a significant process for those looking to create change (Moore, 2005). This is in keeping with what the interviewees in this study disclosed: no matter when they worked with athletes, where, or with whom, ensuring that they understood that there was more to them, and life, than their current occupation was a huge part of the journey.

Where the findings of this study differ from the literature is on the emphasis put by many of the participants, and particularly those working with the younger athletes, on understanding non-work interests as part of this exploration. While Savickas, Nota, Rossier, Dauwalder, Duarte, Guichard, Soresi, Esbroeck, and van Vianen argue 'career itself is built by engaging in activities and then reflecting on the outcomes' neither they, nor other theorists, expressly include hobbies and pastimes as part of the identity work discussed, focusing instead on 'tangible experiments' within a work context and 'learning from peers' (Ibarra, 2004, p. 122) to help reveal one's next working identity. This makes sense given that literature surrounding career change theory, liminality and work transition is exclusively concerned with adults, as opposed to the younger people identified by some of the respondents and is generally focused on the actual point of transition from a given career to a new one. This contrasts with much of the work being done by those interviewed within sports organisations, who see a need for young athletes to ensure they are not pigeon-holed – by themselves or others – into being what they do.

While some of the participants, and many ex-athletes informally interviewed for the purpose of triangulation, believed this work could not continue during the performance peak given the need to focus, others presented an emerging school of thought that identity work could enhance performance. Whether done early, or after an athlete's peak, the model shows understanding their broader identity is crucial if athletes are to begin to prepare for what next, enabling them to avoid the void, or period of liminality, that can accompany significant change. This echoes Bridges' (1980) three-stage transition model of ending, void and new beginning, and work by Van Gennep (1909) before him. However, Bridges argues that no matter the order, all three stages need to be experienced for a transition to be complete, something not found in this study where, conversely, the participants either stated, or intimated, that paying due attention to identity early might enable the limbo stage to be bypassed. As such, the participants did not appear to agree with the premise that liminality is potentially a path to identity growth (Ibarra and Obodaru, 2016) instead suggesting that, by working on this growth early, there would be no void.

Where this research and the literature do come together again though is in the updated concept of liminality provided by Ibarra and Obodaru (2016). By giving a more fluid definition of liminality than originally proposed (Turner, 1969), they not only argue it can be self-created, something the participants also highlighted, but also agree it can vary in time, length and form.

A secondary role for coaching became apparent in this study once athletes are comfortable in who they are outside of what they do. At this point, coaches can work with them as they consider the more practical elements of transition, including networking, CV creation and gaining a greater

understanding of what it means to work in a different career and setting. Being adaptable, requires an understanding of who you are, but also confidence in what you are going to next and the ability to project your future into different contexts (Savickas et al, 2009), which is where the more traditional careers coaching alluded to by some respondents comes in. While most did not focus as much on these specifics as they did identity, there was a recognition that a secondary role of coaching was helping with the 'what' as well as the 'who'. These elements are more directional than one might expect from coaching, but this has been argued to be appropriate within careers coaching (Hazen & Steckler, 2018) and this form of support is certainly evident in the roles played by the coaches interviewed. Indeed, Savickas' Career Adapt-Abilities scale, which can be segmented into five pillars of: concern (how prepared you are); control (responsibility taken); curiosity; confidence and commitment (Savickas et al, 2009), is arguably a good summary of the areas in which coaching, in different guises and at different points along the journey, can play a role in an elite athlete's transition to a second career.

How: Fitting the Environment

The research identified that the sporting bubble is a unique environment bringing athletes into an elite setting, often from primary school age, and holding them until they inevitably leave by choice or force.

This concept of a 'bubble' was clearly articulated by all participants, and yet no reference to this term, or concept, could be found in the academic literature reviewed. As well as describing the bigger bubble of elite sport, encompassing the entire experience from identification as a youth to the moment of transition back into the wider world, the interviewees also referenced a smaller, arguably more intense, bubble of peak performance within it. Wylleman, Alfermann and Lavallee (2004) argue that athletic careers are comprised of several mini-transitions, their description of which has similarities to the 'bubble within a bubble' suggested by these findings, and particularly the identification of three stages of talent development, based on Bloom's (1985) model, including the 'mastery or perfection stage in which athletes reach their highest level of athletic proficiency' as a separate phase of their journey (2004, p.10). As discussed above, the findings show a role for coaching at all stages in this journey, but the participants clearly identified that different approaches were needed along the way. Children and young athletes are unlikely to request, or respond to, a formal coaching setting or to work with external practitioners as they enter what they hope will be their primary career. However, a clear role emerged from research for practitioners, ideally with sporting backgrounds and coaching qualifications, to act as support within clubs and teams, interacting with the athletes informally and in their setting, arguably as mentors, helping them consider their wider identity and the hobbies and skills they might wish to pursue outside of their sport.

Conversely, while those at the point of transition and leaving their sport may still interact with internal support, at this point of exit, a role also emerged for more formal coaching, complete with the goal setting and contracting that brings, paid for, and engaged by the athletes and delivered outside of their previous work setting. Here, the focus may again be on identity work but may also involve storytelling techniques and a more practical emphasis on careers, with the agenda set by the client.

Conclusion

This research has highlighted that the role of coaching in an elite athlete's transition to a second career evolves with the athlete, and environment, over time, maturing from an internal, informal mentoring relationship with those just starting out to a more formal, external, coaching relationship with traditional client-coach contracting and processes later on. It recommends that elite sport organisations either engage internal coaches to act as mentors, working in an informal manner with

young athletes from the moment they arrive in order to help them develop and understand their multiple identities, or follow the examples of the football clubs and English Institute of Sport in training their practitioners in coaching skills and creating this provision. It also recognises the role external coaches, and particularly those with a sporting background themselves, can play by working individually and externally with athletes at the point of transition, and recommends practitioners look to raise awareness of the work they can do in this space, either by engaging with sports organisations or through their own resources.

Future Research

One barrier to coaching becoming more established in helping athletes' transition is a lack of awareness and understanding of its role in this unique context, and despite much cross over between the experience of athletes and literature concerning career change, transition and liminality, no specific theory exists relating to this group over and above the learnings from this research. The prevalence of the concepts of identity and liminality in the interviews conducted showcases a real need to explore these ideas further within elite, and pre-elite sport settings, not least because a high-performance lens makes the themes found in the literature feel even more pronounced.

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