Research Article

International Review for the Sociology of Sport
1–24

DOI: 10.1177/10126902251337657
journals.sagepub.com/home/irs

'No one wants to be the washed-up ex-cricketer sitting at the bar getting pissed talking of the good old days': A narrative analysis of retirement as experienced by male professional cricketers in England

James Brighton
Canterbury Christ Church University, UK

Jim Lusted
The Open University, UK

Candice Lingam-Willgoss
The Open University, UK

Alex Hoad
Canterbury Christ Church University, UK

Abstract

In spite of current literature illuminating the challenges professional athletes encounter when transitioning into new careers, very little research has focused on the experiences of professional cricketers. To rectify this situation, this study explores how a group of professional cricketers in England experienced retirement from their sport. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with former county (7) and international (3) male players who had retired within the last 15 years. Interview transcripts were then subjected to a narrative analysis that led to the identification of the following themes: *restricting, confronting, enforcement, coherence and re-imagining*. Each of

Corresponding author:
James Brighton, Canterbury Christ Church University, North Holmes Road, Canterbury, Kent CT1 1QU, UK.
Email: james.brighton@canterbury.ac.uk

these themes is discussed in detail, and the manner in which they function as narrative resources that shape the retirement experiences of the cricketers is considered. Attention is also given to how narrative repertoires amongst professional cricketers might be expanded so that multiple future selves become available to them in the process of retiring from their sport, rather than being restricted by narrowly defined career storylines.

Keywords
Cricket, career transition, retirement, narrative, identity

Retirement from sport has profound psychological, emotional and embodied impacts on elite athletes who have often unequivocally devoted their lives to their profession (Taylor and Ogilvie, 1994). Research has demonstrated that sporting retirement presents significant social and psychological upheaval causing emotional and behavioural difficulties (Grove et al., 1997; Wylleman et al., 2004) including anxiety and depression (e.g. Sanders and Stevinson, 2017), body dissatisfaction (e.g. Shander and Petrie, 2021; Plateau, et al., 2017; Papathomas et al., 2018) alcohol and substance abuse (e.g. Morse, 2013), addictive disorders (e.g. Ponizovskiy, 2013) and suicidal thoughts (e.g. Walker, Thatcher and Lavallee, 2007). These difficulties have been attributed to multiple factors, including dealing with career-ending injuries, chronic pain and surgery (Wylleman et al., 2004; Arvinen-Barrow et al., 2017; Ivarsson et al., 2018), career dissatisfaction (Schuring et al., 2017) and a loss of life structure and direction (McNee, 2013; Sutton, 2023). Significantly, for elite athletes where an exclusive sense of 'athletic identity' (Brewer et al., 1993) has been engrained, coming to terms with retirement is particularly problematic predisposing athletes to being more vulnerable to adjusting to post-retirement life (Lavallee et al., 1997; Lavallee and Robinson, 2007; Douglas and Carless, 2009; Martin et al., 2014; Torregrosa et al., 2015; Willard and Lavallee 2016).

Given the emotions experienced in coming to terms with the loss of a former self and changing relationships with others, it is unsurprising that analogies have been made between the ending of professional playing careers and feelings of grief associated with death (Lingham-Willgoss, 2023; Sutton, 2023). However, it is during this period, when athletes are in a state of bereavement over previous body-selves, that they are required to write new chapters of their professional lives and find new jobs and friendships, often under financial and familial pressures (Brown et al., 2018). Accordingly, research has also addressed the reasons for transition out of sport and the antecedents for developing more enriching post-retirement experiences. For example, the importance of distinguishing the differences between voluntary (e.g. starting a family; to study) and involuntary (e.g. deselection, injury, age) career transitions has been demonstrated as having an important impact on the quality of retirement experiences (e.g. Alfermann and Stambulova, 2007). Athletes who have agency in their retirement decision and leave 'on their terms' having accomplished their goals and/or are ready to take up new career opportunities can articulate positive transitions leading a culturally privileged narrative course (Cosh et al., 2013; Hickey and Roderick, 2023; Lavallee and Robinson, 2007; Wylleman et al., 2004). Likewise, athletes who are able to decrease the prominence

and reliance on their athletic identity prior to retirement are often able to have more rewarding and empowering experiences post-retirement (Lally, 2007). Athletic career retirement, then, is a heterogeneous and multi-faceted phenomenon experienced over time involving dynamic decision-making processes in which identities are constantly in flux (Alfermann and Stambulova, 2007; Park et al., 2013a; Haslam et al., 2024).

Whilst career transition in Olympic sport (e.g. Silver, 2021), Association Football (e.g. Barth et al., 2021; Hickey and Roderick, 2017; 2023; Barth et al., 2021; Hague and Law, 2022), Rugby Union (e.g. McKenna and Thomas, 2007; Brown et al., 2017; Hind et al., 2021) and Basketball (Turkoglu and Hosver, 2020) have been increasingly recognised, there remain few studies which specifically address retirement experiences within professional cricket. Such an omission seems amiss given that professional cricketers appear at a high risk of adverse mental wellbeing and experience anxiety and depressive symptoms whilst playing and post-retirement, many of which are attributed the unique features of the sport (Hundertmark, 2007; Schuring et al., 2017; Ogden et al., 2023). In addition, male professional cricketers are linked to a higher suicide rate in comparison to other sports (Frith, 2011; Malcolm and Scott, 2012) and are more likely to take their own lives compared to the rest of the population (McCabe et al., 2021). Tellingly, most suicides among cricketers occur post-retirement (Shah et al., 2016), which, according to McNee (2013), results from the struggles players experience with the disintegration of social regulation, what Durkheim would term anomie or 'normlessness', that had previously guided and structured their playing careers.

Such challenges are echoed by the voices of high-profile ex-professional male cricketers through published autobiographies in which themes of anxiety and depression (e.g. Trescothick and Hayter, 2009; Trott, 2016) and addictive alcohol use and suicidal thoughts (Smith and Smyth, 2019; Sutton, 2019) are pivotal in the stories that are told. Alternatively, other high-profile cricket retirements are articulated more positively, such as those of Australian Shane Warne (Warne, 2019) or England bowler Stuart Broad, who seemingly experienced smoother transitions into broadcasting careers (Broad, 2024). Such autobiographical accounts, which provide emotive insights into retirement experiences of cricketers, are important given that rich data from the voices of professional players remain sparse in current academic literature[1] with much existing research relying on the analyses of secondary sources (e.g. media representations). Furthermore, with a few exceptions, the empirical accounts that have been undertaken lack methodological rigour (McCabe et al., 2021) and, like much research into sporting career transition, tend to employ psychological theorisation (Hague and Law, 2022; Hickey and Roderick, 2023; Faulkner, 2024). Whilst useful in providing athletes with cognitive skills to prepare for retirement, such approaches overlook the social self and tend to frame identity as a fixed and unitary concept, risking homogenising the experiences of athletes (Hickey and Roderick, 2017; 2023). Significantly, Hickey and Roderick (2017: 277) caution that psychological approaches that 'mechanically regurgitate' the notion of exclusive athletic identity as central conceptual means to explore sporting career transition fail to take into account the fluctuating and diverse identities of professional athletes. Furthermore, through positioning retirement as a 'problem' to be overcome rather than 'an inevitable feature of all athletes' biographies' (Hickey and Roderick, 2023: 1050), career transitions are often pathologised as individual conditions.

Accordingly, scholars have called for further sociological theorisation in interpreting retirement experiences of professional athletes (e.g. Faulkner, 2024) and approaches that more adequately address the wider social, cultural, embodied and structural conditions that shape experience and the biographical dimensions of athletic career transition (e.g. Cavallerio et al., 2017).

Aims and objectives

Given the situation described above, the aim of this study is to explore the experiences of retirement amongst male professional cricketers in England. Reflecting the story shaped nature of athletic career transition (Cosh, 2021; Jewett et al., 2019; Mortensen et al., 2013; Ronkainen et al., 2016), we take a narrative approach to further reveal the challenges cricketers encounter in transitioning into alternative careers and reconstructing new senses of identity after their playing days come to an end. Through incorporating social theory into our analyses, we also contribute to the growing body of research that seeks to extend the disciplinary approach beyond the 'psychology centricity' of accounts of sporting retirement that are currently available. Such explorations provide further knowledge to help past and present cricketers understand retirement from playing and support them on their career transition journeys, as well as contribute to an evidence base for professional bodies such as the Professional Cricketers Association (PCA) to enhance initiatives that support players in navigating significant transitions.[2] This research is particularly timely given that cricket in England and globally is currently experiencing rapid change and significant external challenges. These include the transformations to the structure of the sport, financial insecurities currently facing County cricket, and the recent 2023 'Holding up a Mirror to Cricket' report by the Independent Commission for Equity in Cricket (ICEC) which evidenced widespread discrimination in the professional game (Report – ICEC Independent Commission for Equity in Cricket (theicec.com)) all of which are likely to have profound impact on professional cricketers' experiences of retirement. As Shah et al. (2016: 295) indicate, care and welfare should 'remain a focus of concern' and further research should be undertaken to help provide greater support to cricketers beyond retirement.

Playing professional cricket: burdens taken into retirement

As a professional sport in England,[3] cricket takes multiple formats with different structures, rules and time periods applying to each. Its longest form can last up to 5 consecutive days (around 6 h play per day) while its shortest form games take only 2–3 h to complete. These different formats require different cricket skills, so players must adapt across formats or look to become a 'specialist' in one. Cricket requires intense concentration often for long periods of time, and, as with other team sports, players face challenges of performing individually whilst contributing to a team. Pressures are further compounded by intense statistical scrutiny with averages, scoring rates, wickets and other indicators all being highly valued in measuring performance and held prominent in players gaining new contracts and being 'drafted' into lucrative franchise leagues around the world (Saikia et al., 2019). Additionally, professional cricketers like athletes

in other sporting fields such as the Olympics (Haslam et al., 2024) face significant travel, long periods away from the home, and are often in intense confinement with teammates in hotels further contributing to feelings of being lost and without purpose when they retire (McNee, 2013; Shah et al., 2016).

According to Ogden et al. (2023), these distinctive characteristics alongside the development of an exclusive athletic identity, pressures of contract renewal and the emotional 'highs and lows' experienced throughout the duration of a career, are central to exploring transition experiences out of cricket. They highlight that 'players become part of a bubble in which they are either playing, travelling, training and/or thinking about their game' (p.387). Being submerged in the 'bubble' can contribute to the neglect of aspects of identity beyond being an athlete, negatively impacting the evolution of adaptive responses when encountering significant life challenges such as career transition. Likewise, in their exploration of the attributes influencing quality of life post-retirement, Filbay et al. (2017) and Bullock et al. (2020) found that in the aftermath of their playing careers, cricketers were affected by the psychological and emotional legacy of their playing days including dealing with the 'ups and downs' of the game, experiencing more failure than success, and facing a relentless pressure to perform.

One of the few studies to provide empirical exploration exclusively addressing retirement experiences of elite-level cricketers is offered by Roberts et al. (2015). Through offering insight from 9 professional players, the authors illuminated how pressures over contract renewal, poor communication and devaluation of sport were dominant precursors for retirement. Significantly for the current study, the authors highlighted how a lack of broader professional interests (e.g. lack of control throughout career and lack of opportunity for developmental experiences), development experiences (e.g. education, effective use of the off-season, ineffective personal development programmes) and under-developed coping strategies resulted in retirement being perceived as a negative experience characterised by loss and resentment. Their research further helps explore the complex interplay between voluntary and involuntary retirement, highlighting how cricketers who were not offered new contracts or retired due to injury had lower quality experiences of retirement. Consequently, Roberts et al. (2015) call for future research to gain a deeper understanding of the multicausal factors influencing retirement experiences and a 'more robust body of empirical evidence' (p.942) to enable practitioners to prepare athletes for retirement and develop effective support mechanisms. One way of making this contribution is by adopting a narrative approach.

Conceptual framework

This study was framed by two conceptual frameworks. The first is that of social constructionism as described by Gubrium and Holstein (2008). For them, constructionists seek to highlight both the dynamic contours of social reality and the processes by which this social reality is put together and assigned meaning. The key idea here is that the world we live in and our place in it are not simply and evidently 'there' for participants. Rather, as Gubrium and Holstein argue, participants actively construct the world of everyday life and its constituent elements. For constructionists, therefore, a *relativist* ontology is adopted that conceives of social reality as humanly constructed and shaped

in ways that make it fluid and multi-faceted (Sparkes and Smith, 2014). Multiple, subjective realities, therefore, can exist in relation to any given phenomena, in our case, retirement from a sporting career. Such phenomena are given meaning by actors as they actively construct their everyday worlds in ways that have real consequences for self and others.

The second conceptual framework that informs this study is that of narrative inquiry, which, according to Spector-Mersel (2010) and Sparkes and Smith (2008), draws on constructionism and its view of social reality as constructed, fluid and multi-faceted. For Spector-Mersel (ibid.), narrative inquiry, with its focus on the storied nature of human conduct, maintains that social reality is primarily a narrative reality, and so a mutual relationship exists between life and narrative. As Smith and Sparkes (2009) state:

> We live in, through and out of narratives. They serve as an essential source of psycho-socio-cultural learning and shape who we are and might become. Thus, narratives are a portal through which a person enters the world; play a formative role in the development of the person; help guide action; and are a psycho-socio- cultural shared resource that constitutes and constructs human realities (p.3).

Importantly, as Frank (2010) emphasised, narratives *effect* action. Stories are not only performed; they perform, they *do* things, they *act* both for and on the self and *others*. This said, it is also important to emphasise that whilst people have some agency in constructing their stories, they are not free to make up any story they wish about any given event in their life, such as retirement from sport. This is because culture provides people with a menu of narrative forms and contents from which they artfully and selectively draw in an effort to line up their lived experience with the kinds of stories available to organise and express it to themselves and others (Gubrium and Holstein, 2009; Smith and Sparkes, 2009). Therefore, even when a person is recounting a unique set of individual and personal events (e.g. retirement from sport), they can only do so by drawing upon story structures and genres drawn from the narrative resources of the culture(s) they inhabit. In summarising this process, Åkesdotter et al. (2024, 28) noted that:

> Athletes do not tell stories about themselves under conditions of their own making, nor can they always deploy them for purposes of their own choosing. Various institutional orders and their representatives mandate narratives, each for different purposes and each in different forms. Likewise, when athletes tell a story about themselves, they draw upon a particular set of narrative resources that are at hand within their cultural setting and sporting environment which can be enabling or constraining.

Against this backdrop, as Smith and Sparkes (2009) noted, athletes often have a small pool of narratives to draw on, which can limit them in terms of how they frame their lived experiences during a process of either gradual or dramatic change. Significantly here, studies have revealed how limited narrative resources play an important role in shaping the career transition experiences of elite athletes for both better and worse. For example, Douglas and Carless (2009) illustrate how the *performance narrative* dominates the lives of such athletes to the exclusion of other possible narratives, and that this has a

powerful influence on how they understand, negotiate and experience the process of retirement from sport. Likewise, in their consideration of the narrative resources available to athletes in post-retirement, Cavallerio et al. (2017) also acknowledged the limited narrative resources available to them in this period of their life along with the dangers of locking into one narrative that restricts the development of their future senses of self at the expense of others that allow for the development of more valued sense of self. All of the above scholars have stressed the need to better understand the narrative resources made available to athletes in their specific sporting cultures with a view to examining how they work to both solve trouble and cause trouble for athletes during various phases of their careers. Such knowledge is necessary as a prelude to expanding their narrative resources and choices regarding how they give meaning to events and phases in their lives so that multiple possible future selves become available rather than a limited few.

Social constructionism and narrative inquiry do not prescribe the use of one specific theory or set of concepts to assist in the process of generating interpretations, and so researchers are free to operate in an eclectic manner. In this study, therefore, we chose to operate in the spirit of the researcher-as-bricoleur-theorist as described by Denzin and Lincoln. (2018). Here, researchers seek to move within and between multiple, overlapping and often competing perspectives with a view to producing a complex, quilt-like bricolage constructed or created from a diverse range of theories and concepts. For example, at certain points in our analysis, concepts forwarded by Goffman were deemed relevant and were incorporated as required. Given what we know about cricketers residing in the 'bubble' and the impact this has on lives whilst playing, Goffman's (1961) concept of the 'total institution' offers a useful lens to explore the retirement experiences of professional cricketers. Defined 'as a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time together lead an enclosed formally administered round of life' (*ibid*: 11), the impact of such regulated and isolated ways of being on retirement experiences is as yet, untheorised. Equally, given that in retirement players' identities undergo a change in conceptualisation of self and in social role in ways which could be deemed as stigmatising, Goffman's (1968) work on spoiled identities helps illuminate the interactions between stigmatised (i.e. retired players) and normals (i.e. public). Having outlined this, however, we do not offer a detailed Goffmanesque analysis of the full data as we do not see this as necessary given our desire to operate as bricoleurs who can integrate the work of Goffman along with other relevant scholars. A narrative approach is therefore well placed to explore the biographical particulars and integrate multiple social theories in offering novel insights into experiences of athletic career retirement.

Methodology

Consistent with the constructionist philosophical assumptions of narrative inquiry and recognising that what is studied is not objective or independent of us as researchers (Holloway and Biley, 2011), it is important to disclose our social position in relation to the phenomena under study and our participants. Authors 1, 2 and 4 identify as white, cisgendered males (aged 40–50) and former 'serious' cricketers having played

club cricket in England for a number of years. Given our early and ongoing participation in the sport, we recognise our previous submergence into what Bourdieu (1990) would term a cricket 'habitus' in our earlier lives, which has, at some stage has contributed to shaping our perceptions of the world and the social relations in which we engage. As detailed below, drawing on these understandings helped us gain access and develop trust and rapport with participants. Author 3 identifies as a mixed-race cisgender female (aged 40–50) who has not played cricket. She has competed and experienced retirement from international level sport[4] and has academic expertise in researching elite athletes' experiences of career transition (Lingham-Willgoss, 2023). As discussed by Dwyer and Buckle (2009: 60), these alternative insider/outsider perspectives and 'the space between' facilitated critical discussions in data collection, analysis and interpretation through questioning taken-for-granted understandings of the multiple realities experienced and social fields which participants and researchers inhabited.

Having gained institutional ethical approval, Authors 1 and 4 drew on existing social networks and trusting relationships made within professional cricket to gain access to participants. Having obtained written consent, this led to a total of 10 interviews being undertaken (5 by Author 1; 5 by Author 4) with former county (7) and international (3) male players (ages 27–50; careers lasting 2–16 years) who had undergone career transition (7 contract not renewed; 3 self-determined retirement; all retired within last 15 years) as part of a criterion-based sampling strategy (Patton, 2002). In light of the narrative research design and to do justice to the richness of data and the varied accounts of transition, an idiographic approach to sampling was employed. This involved recruiting a limited number of participants to preserve the depth, thickness and individuality of the stories told and the circumstances in which they occur (Sparkes and Smith, 2014). Such a strategy is particularly appropriate given the idiosyncratic nature of career transition from elite sport (Park et al., 2013b) by helping to explore both divergent and convergent experiences of participants (Brown et al., 2018). The interview strategy employed is best described as eliciting a cricketing 'career history'. Here, emphasis was placed on exploring athletes' career and transition experiences in relation to broader life histories over time (Cole and Knowles, 2001), which has proved particularly important when exploring transitions in and out of elite sport (Barker-Ruchti and Schubring, 2016). Accordingly, the interview guide was broken into sections that aimed to evoke stories from particular moments in the career course (early lives, introductions to cricket, becoming professional, playing careers, experiences of transition, present lives). Structuring interviews in this way encouraged the telling of stories, providing insight into the temporality of human life, encompassing past selves and imagined futures (Smith and Sparkes, 2016).

Interviews were conducted on Microsoft Teams, lasted between 1 and 2 hours and were transcribed verbatim. Pseudonyms were allocated to participants to preserve anonymisation, and transcripts were supported with observational (e.g. body language), embodied (e.g. emotions) and methodological notes (e.g. question refinement) to contextualise how events were articulated to the rest of the research team. Although the remote nature of conducting qualitative research interviews via videoconferencing presents challenges such as making it problematic to pick up on non-verbal cues and creating an atmosphere conducive to telling stories (e.g. Chen and Hinton, 1999; O'Connor et al.,

2008; Opdenakker, 2006; Hay-Gibson, 2009), this approach proved useful. For example, participants articulated being more comfortable telling stories in the private and familiar environment of their own homes, and unanticipated opportunities for data collection arose (e.g. availability of prompts such as memorabilia to facilitate storytelling (Lingham-Willgos, 2023). Interview transcripts were read multiple times separately by each member of the research team to familiarise ourselves with the data. Next, we adopted the position of *story analyst* as described by Smith (2016), Smith and Sparkes (2009) and Sparkes and Smith (2014). In this role, as noted by Åkesdotter et al. (2024: 31), the researcher 'steps back from the story generated and employs analytical procedures, strategies, and techniques in order to abstractly scrutinize, explain, and think about its certain features'. Here, the story analyst conducts research *on* narratives, where narratives are the object of study and placed under scrutiny by utilising a specific type of narrative analysis. Accordingly, the members of the research team subjected the interview transcripts to a content narrative analysis. Here, as Riessman (2008) points out, the 'what' of stories is explored, and there is an exclusive focus on their content. From this analysis, the following themes were identified, which are now discussed below: *restricting, confronting, enforcement, coherence and re-imagining*.

Findings

Restricting: formative experiences and being in the cricket 'bubble'

Participants' formative experiences in cricket were central in the embracing of an exclusive sense of athletic identity (Brewer et al., 1993) and early commitment to the performance narrative of sport (Douglas and Carless, 2009). This can be evidenced by a relentless dedication to improvement and the need to perform for team selection:

> You're always working to get better, you bring it home as well and you end up doing bowling drills in the garden and filming yourself… even in the middle of winter, I'd have wellies on. I was never happy. (Don)

> It's a highly competitive environment where people are looking at each other like, 'Well, are you good enough?' It's just that pressure to keep performing, it's just there all the time (Greame)

Such narrowing of narrative course contributed to participants making decisions that restricted their early career paths, for example by not choosing to complete school or college or 'even turn up to exams' (Joe). Indeed, many participants did not have to imagine alternative career storylines as their narratives were determined by the structural conditions of elite cricket career pathways. As Jack explains 'At 16, 17, at no point had I thought, "What next?" I'd just go, "Well, age groups academy, boom, away we go. Professional"'. Once professional, efforts remained exclusively focused on winning and improvement, confining other aspects of life, limiting the resources for constructing broader career narratives. Replicating the terminology of participants in Ogden et al.'s (2023) study, this was referred to as being in a 'bubble':

> It's so hard when you're doing it day in, day out because ultimately it defines you… Again, you look back at the bubble that you were in, you almost think you're invincible and then you don't realise what's going on in the rest of the world. (Viv)

> Literally you live in this bubble for 15 years, you turn up at the ground, everything is done for you, the lunch is cooked for you, obviously the crowd comes in and you just play, you get your salary and you do your job. Then it's on to the next. (Joe)

Players' lives were therefore structured by what Goffman (1961) would deem as the 'total institution' of professional cricket, shaping the symbolic and narrative representation of identity to others. Consequently, although participants recognised that having some sort of business interest or education 'on the side' (Peter) was beneficial for future careers, such narrative action was undermined by a necessity to adhere to performance storylines. This left little room for the development of authentic alternative career narratives, which players integrate as part of their identities. As Graeme explains:

> I think it's really good for guys to do courses and find other stuff outside of their sport, absolutely, but I think sometimes it's just like, 'Okay, that's great, what's your plan after cricket?' and we forget about the 20 years or 15 years of conditioning this human being; the conditioning is you have to be all in, if you're going to survive in pro sport for more than five years, let alone 15 or 20 years, you have to be all in, obsessed. You have to be survival, like, 'I'm going to scrap and fight for my life here.' Then expecting that person to go, 'Oh hey, do you think you could just look over here at this course?' You know what I mean? That person might go, 'Well, if it gets you off my back, yeah, I'll do it, but to be honest I've got to be back on this.'

Significantly, within the bubble time is experienced by participants cyclically, framed by everyday routines and is taken for granted (Sparkes and Smith, 2003). As Don outlines 'You're always moving from ground to ground, hotel to hotel, bus trip to bus trip'. The routinistic nature of this reality served to shape 'small' stories (Bamberg, 2006) or 'fleeting moments of narrative orientation to the world' (Georgakopoulou, 2006: 223) by players who organised lives around training, matches, tours and the structure of the season:

> It was all I knew… I never thought I was really going to be working, I just thought I'd play cricket… Maybe in the end it was a bit of a downfall for me, but I don't know if I had a sense of grounding, I was just like, 'I, a professional cricketer, this is what I do, this is what I know, I know what time of year it is, what I'm meant to be doing, what I'm meant to be feeling like (Graeme)

The problem with this for participants, referred to by Graeme here through the term 'grounding', is that there was little narrative linkage between these small stories of being a professional cricketer and longer-term career storylines. Whilst in the bubble, it is not just that participants found it problematic to develop understandings of business, organisational knowledge, and employment skills, but that they were not in a position to

generate alternative, authentic senses of self and career narratives or have the narrative resources to do so. This had profound consequences when participants were required to confront retirement and the conclusion of storylines that, up until that point, had guided their lives.

Confronting: the narrative wreckage of a playing career

Although aware of how 'it can all be taken away very quickly' (Peter), few participants had clear routes on what to do and how to do it after their playing days. In retelling their journeys towards retirement, players spoke of the difficulties in having to think about, confront, or plan for the possibility of retiring from playing:

> Well yes, that's my issue was kind of that transition period…I didn't know what to do. I didn't really have a direction (Don)

> My biggest thing was literally I wouldn't know what to do, wouldn't know where to start. I felt helpless (Jack)

Approaching the end of their playing careers, many participants found it difficult to envisage a smooth transition to retirement, risking narrative wreckage. Characterised by Frank (1995) as not being able to imagine future senses of self and feelings of vulnerability and impotence, narrative wreckage occurred when the reference point for participants lives remained in the past (i.e. playing), making it difficult to explore alternative identities and careers in the present (i.e. in transition). As Viv states:

> That's the biggest thing with coming out of it [playing first class cricket] is accepting that you're not a professional cricketer anymore… Yeah, it's fucking hard when that is all you've done… you can't imagine anything else.

Narrative wreckage was compounded by pressures to transition into another career quickly to obtain financial security and support a family. However, having positioned their athletic selves at the 'apex of their identity hierarchy' (Phoenix et al., 2005: 343), central to their very sense of existence and at the expense of all other identities, the alternative of developing another career storyline was a frightening prospect. This helps explain why players who were involuntarily released often sought to find ways to continue playing, 'hanging on' and carving out alternative playing careers by trialling at other counties or becoming club professionals around the world. Ultimately, these attempts did not last long, providing further evidence of how valued conceptualisations of the self remaining entrenched in the past act as an 'Achilles heel' (Sparkes, 1996, 1998) to the reconstruction of more enabling career narratives in the present. Lacking the narrative resources and a valued repertoire of storylines to draw on, then, reconstructing identities and careers therefore remained elusive, with many participants feeling lost and vulnerable without protection from the cricket bubble. Movingly for Shane, the bubble in which his past-self resided provided social routine and regulation, which helped him manage pre-existing addictions as a result of childhood abuse and trauma:

> My alcohol addiction was before my professional cricket career. People sometimes say, 'Did it give you a drinking problem?' but mine comes from childhood. I came into the bubble from a very working-class traumatic childhood, lots of abuse at home, and that bubble kept me quite safe for a really long time. I was told where to go, how to train, what to lift, when to lift, how many balls to bowl, my food was made for me, and it gave me the illusion that I was an adult. My trainers were being given to me, my hotels were being booked for me.

Without the performance narrative map, which had previously guided his life and helped manage his addictions, however, when confronting retirement, Simon was unable to see how life would get better, and he descended into alcoholism, depression and a desire to take his own life:

> I didn't realise until my career finished where basically it was falling off a cliff because suddenly I had to manage myself. I completely shut down, I hyper-rationalised that the world's a better place without me. Within a month everybody, even the people who care about me, they'll move on. The way that I can stop drinking and hurting people is to take myself out, therefore the best decision to make is to take my own life.

Rather than cricket contributing to issues of mental health as has previously been reported (e.g. McNee, 2013; Shah et al., 2016), for Simon, the cricket bubble provided social regulation and clearly defined narrative direction, protecting him from his addictions. However, the end of his playing days resulted in social deregulation or 'normlessness' (Durkheim, 1966), narrative wreckage and ultimately an attempt to take his own life.

Enforcement: involuntary retirement and narrating a spoiled 'cricket' identity. Consistent with previous findings in sport transition literature (e.g. Sparkes, 1996; Stephen, 2003; Martin et al., 2014), participants whose careers ended involuntarily through injury or at the hands of others experienced disappointment, anger, rejection, helplessness, and resentment. As Shane elucidates, participants' identities were so tied to being professional players that they often conflated this with their identity as a person: 'I was so wrapped up in my identity that when I failed at cricket, I felt like I was a failure as a person'. Consequently, being 'released' had a profound impact on confidence, self-worth and the ability to construct valued future career storylines. Like athletes in differing sports (e.g. American Football; Turner, 2018), many participants acknowledged the moment of being informed of release as a particularly traumatic event as it symbolised loss of control over their career storylines and professional selves in ways in which they had not ideologically (Mortensen et al., 2013) imagined:

> So I went in, our meeting lasted probably three minutes, if that, and literally sat down and [head coach] was just like, 'Yes, we're not going to sign you for next year,' So I was like, 'Okay, thanks very much, away we go.' It's out of your control. Having someone else determine when your career finishes – that's probably the worst thing… it was like, 'Well that decision is taken out of your hands'. (Jack)

Regardless of the rationales given for early release, participants whose career transitions were enforced expressed how these circumstances had a stigmatising effect on senses of self-identification impacting how their identities were narrated to others:

> I found that really hard to deal with… Now I go to someone, 'I used to play professional cricket,' 'Oh, so what happened then?' And then you say, 'I just got released,' and then they're like, 'Oh, you obviously must have been shit then.' It's like it's my fault that I got released. (Viv)

In articulating this perceived career failure, both in their own minds and in the minds of others, participants inhabited what Goffman (1963) would term a 'spoiled identity'. This is exemplified here as Viv not only questioned his own sense of self but also had his career as a professional cricketer discredited and undermined by other people's judgements of him. Having had their 'moral careers' (Goffman, 1959: 123) or 'the regular sequence of changes that career entails in the person's self and in his framework of imagery for judging himself and others' destabilised, attempting shifts in career transition became problematic. Participants whose playing careers were terminated involuntarily, therefore were suddenly confronted with what had previously been a source of esteem and pride (i.e. being a professional cricketer), to being transformed into a source of shame and embarrassment, requiring departure from the storyline that had always defined them. Without any immediate reference points available to structure future senses of self and identity, their spoiled identity often led to resentment resulting from coach perceptions, social 'cliques' (Brian), lack of opportunity, misinformation, changing trends in style of play and the financial pressures facing counties, further restricting narrative resources for development of valued future identities. Alternatively, participants who made the choice to retire themselves reported a greater sense of satisfaction with their decision and post-retirement experiences.

Coherence: closure, release and taking back control. In accordance with Alfermann et al.'s (2004) findings, participants who perceived to be more in control of their decisions to transition out of sport articulated being more at peace with retirement. Indeed, in such instances the end of a playing career often led to a sense of relief and enhanced feelings of autonomy and liberation from the strict controls and expectations of the performance narrative (Reifsteck et al., 2021; Douglas and Carless, 2009), constant surveillance (McMahon and Penney, 2013) and the physical and emotional demands of elite sport:

> When I came to the end of my career, and obviously I essentially was falling apart, but it was like when I retired … I did feel a massive sense of relief, like, 'It's over.' I can stop fighting, I can stop trying to make it work.' … it was like this survive… I have spoken to a few other lads about it and they feel the same, it was just like, 'Fight, fight, fight,' type thing (Graeme)

Recognising the contingency on the performing body (Frank, 1995) as necessary for being a professional cricketer, Joe echoes many other participants who stated that retirement liberated them from experiencing regular physical pain and the use of painkilling medication:

> I'd just had enough of taking painkillers. I think the pain every day, like, 'Why am I doing that?' I guess those little doubts, like, 'Why am I doing this?

The factors described above provided more accepting conditions for narrative closure of participants playing careers, helping them avoid the pitfalls of narrative wreckage and spoiled identity. For example, Len describes the positive feelings of being in control of his retirement decision:

> I literally just woke up one day and thought, 'I've had enough, I'm done… it was just simply a day I woke up and there was just something that just changed in my mind. I just knew that I didn't want to do it anymore. I had literally no regrets, and ever since I've retired I've not missed the game at all.

Perceptions of control and acceptance over the decision to retire were important in realising coherence between past and present senses of body and self (Smith and Sparkes, 2002), enabling participants to move on with their lives. For example, Don indicates he was ready to leave the performance narrative and was looking forward to writing future chapters of his life away from playing cricket:

> Funnily enough, it [retirement] was almost like that release of, 'I don't need to care about that anymore,' because that was a different stage of my life, a different chapter of my life that I can just park now… I was done. (Don)

Whereas participants had little control over decisions that impacted on their playing careers, they were now able to assert some control over their lives, helping decide the next chapters of their careers for themselves. Viv for example commented on how his new career in education provided routine, structure and a capacity to start planning and shaping his own storylines:

> Now actually I've got more structure to my life, I know exactly what I'm doing in December, I know exactly what I'm doing in August, as opposed to as a cricketer you can only plan seven days ahead… I have more security, I can plan holidays.

Perceptions of control over the decision to retire and feeling released from the physical, emotional and structural demands of the performance narrative then helped participants regain a sense of coherence and temporality by situating their playing days in the past and organising realities around new senses of normality. This was central in embarking on new career pathways. As Sparkes and Smith (2003: 213) establish, narrative coherence is maintained when the 'past in the past, the present in the present, and the future in the future' (p.315). In ending their playing careers by their own volition, then, participants demonstrated greater narrative coherence, resulting in self-perceptions of their identities not as spoiled, but as part of their biographical make-up.

Re-imagining: new quests, new careers, new identities

Under the narrative conditions identified above and over time, some participants were able to accept retirement, perceiving it as a 'journey' (Brian) and using it in ways that help achieve alternative ways of being. In doing so, they engage in what Frank (1995)

terms the 'quest' narrative, where the individual searches for alternative career storylines offering potential for wider reconstructions of self. For Ian, Len and Jack, new quests materialised quickly as they transitioned into coaching roles immediately following retirement. This narrative course was deemed as being important in accelerating coaching careers, providing stability for the family, and undertaking roles as a father and husband. As Ian explains:

> The club came to me and said, 'We'd like you to do this.' [take on a coaching role]. I think I had a few days to get my head round it, but it was an easy decision, it was a good opportunity for me to move into being part of the management and coaching team … The family was settled, that meant a lot to me, the kids were starting school. The wife and kids were really important, the most important thing in my life I had to make a decision that was going to support their futures as well as mine.

Striking in these transition experiences into work was their informal nature. Rather than formal qualifications or experience guiding routes into employment, there was heavy reliance on the social networks established within the cricket 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1991) and social and cultural capital accrued whilst playing to assist participants' transition, something that was endorsed by the PCA:

> I knew the guy that was here [school] from when I was playing. I go and meet him, and I ended up getting my foot in the door doing a bit of contract coaching, and then when the big job came up, the full time role, I was already a face so I was kind of a shoe in… again it was not so much what I know, it was who I knew, which is a big thing the PCA always try and push, like keep trying to build your contacts in and out of the game (Brian).

Accordingly, participants were conscious of the need to take opportunities quickly before their capital faded or narratives stagnated, making transitioning more problematic. As Graeme put it 'no one wants to be the washed-up ex-cricketer sitting at the bar getting pissed talking of the good old days having done nothing else with their life'. Rather, as Viv summarises, developing new professional identities such as coaching was important in rebuilding self-esteem and providing a sense of empowerment, helping construct future storylines:

> It was my first introduction to coaching at a performance level, was with the kids at [club] I was like 'Oh my God, this is unbelievable, I'm loving it.'.. seeing the kids that wanted to be there, having a bit of craic with them, teaching them a few things and all that… It then made me realise how much I suppose knowledge I actually have to give back, and I was like, 'I've got to be involved some way or another giving back.'

Likewise, participants who undertook alternative quests by transitioning into new professions in different fields (e.g. finance, property management, education) all recounted the need to develop valued senses of professional identity in which they found personal growth:

> 'I'm glad I took that decision to trust myself and do something different.' The easy option maybe would have… Not to say there's anything wrong with it, but the easy option would have been, 'I'll just keep going and be a coach,' … So it was trying to find confidence in a new field and trying to gain respect from not just being a cricketer but trying to gain respect in something in a new field … there's also so many other things that you're good at that you don't realise you're good at when you come out of that bubble (Joe)

Whilst social networking and the transmission of capital were useful in gaining employment in cricket, Joe here hints at the opportunities for deeper explorations of self and constructions of identity in pursuing career quests outside of cricket, which ultimately lead to greater fulfilment. These sentiments were echoed by Graeme, who commented on the value of new quests in helping 'un-condition' himself from being a professional cricketer and by Brian, who commented on the transformative benefits of re-imagining a professional identity as not reduced to a 'name on a score sheet'. Participants who embarked on quests outside of cricket then perhaps entered more radical re-storying (Brock and Kleiber, 1994) as part of what (Cavallerio et al., 2017) term a 'going forward' narrative in which they found personal growth and empowerment, often narrated as being more rewarding than continuing careers within the game.

Reflections

Retirement from sport is a distressing event in a professional athlete's lifetime, which requires coming to terms with the 'death' of a performing body and the end of the performance storyline, which up until that point, has guided their lives. Rather than essentialising these experiences as homogenous or existing solely in the mind, this study has demonstrated how career transition from professional cricket is a unique and complex phenomenon influenced by a number of biographical, social, cultural, temporal, psychological and embodied factors. Importantly, through a focus on story and the processes of negotiation between past experiences and identities, personal and cultural histories and present selfhoods, we have responded to calls to illustrate the narrative dimensions which act to enable or constrain the reconstruction of new careers and post-retirement experiences (Ronkainen and Ryba; 2017; Cavallerio et al., 2017). Specifically, we have illustrated how monological commitment to the performance narrative was required in the 'bubble' or total institution (Goffman, 1968) of professional cricket, structuring participants' lives, emotions and time itself. This resulted in the generation of small stories that were used to organise experience within the performance narrative, but remained disconnected from the broader storylines that encompassed the duration of their professional lives. A paradoxical position was created in which players were required to do everything they could to succeed in the present, yet also were asked to plan for the future.

Lacking a pool of narratives to develop alternative career storylines, unsurprisingly, some players fell into a state of narrative wreckage when their playing days came to an end, a situation exacerbated by increased financial pressures and decreasing social capital. In the aftermath of retirement, narrow senses of self and restricted exposure to the world, coupled with a fragile self-worth, left participants vulnerable in career

transition and at risk of alcohol abuse and suicide. Players whose careers were ended involuntarily were particularly at risk of perceiving their identities as spoiled (Goffman, 1963), harbouring resentment over an unfulfilled playing career. Alternatively, participants who perceived to be in control of their decisions to retire were more accepting of their contingence on the sporting body and able to grasp a sense of narrative coherence, enabling the generation of new storylines and reimaginations of self and identity as 'quests' (Frank, 1995). Retirement was seen as a challenge and part of life's journey, which was key in unlocking a repertoire of alternative narratives for constructing valued future identities and careers. Whilst participants who remained employed within cricket often reported fulfilling careers, for some, a more radical re-storying in alternative fields was narrated as valuable for personal growth. Regardless of the career route taken, participants emphasised that the quests embarked on should stress reconstructions of personal identity as central in the quality of post-retirement experience, rather than a sole focus on professional identity.

Implementations

The findings in this study provide an important empirical evidence base which can be used to complement important work being undertaken by stakeholder initiatives (e.g. the PCA Futures Week[5]) in developing education and in offering support for current and former professional cricketers in their transition journeys. *Firstly*, our study emphasises the importance of gaining a holistic understanding of an individual's life, including their personal histories, cultural locations and subjectivities in order to understand their retirement experiences, referred to by Stambulova and Ryba (2013, 2014) as the 'cultural praxis' of athletes' careers. *Secondly*, narrative analysis has revealed the embodied, cultural and temporal conditions players face when constructing new career storylines and the difficulties presented when attempting to develop valued future senses of self without narrative coherence. Attempts to realign the current self with the retired body, however, enable the generation of fulfilling retirement stories in the present. This can be supported through taking an existential-narrative approach to athletic career transition (Ronkainen and Ryba, 2017) which challenges both the metanarrative of athletic careers (e.g. normative duration; conceptualisations of ageing) and the masternarratives (Bruner, 2004) used to organise personal experience (e.g. performance narrative) instead focusing on meaning, identity and emphasising agency in the telling of more diverse and empowering personal and career stories. As Ronkainen and Ryba (2017: 154) acknowledge, offering alternatives to the performance narrative in sport is challenging, but making athletes conscious of the narratives they have lived encourages a rethinking of the role of sport in their lives and assists in making meaningful career decisions. Being exposed to alternative career narratives and encouraging a willingness to co-construct these with others (e.g. ex-players) all further enables the construction of multiple career stories in a number of fields.[6] *Finally,* our findings have revealed how retirement from professional contracts is often a traumatic event in the lives of professional athletes, with the potential to trigger declined mental health (Turner, 2018). Accordingly, trauma-informed approaches to research and strategies for co-constructing psycho-emotional support provided should be employed (see McMahon and McGannon, 2024).

Limitations and future directions

In closing, we recognise that our study has a number of limitations. Our sample only consisted of English, white male players. As has been recently established by the 'Holding up a Mirror to Cricket' report (Report – ICEC Independent Commission for Equity in Cricket (theicec.com)), this is not representative of the experiences of all players in the first-class game. Further recognition of the intersectionality of identity on experiences of career transition based on sex, gender, race, ethnicity, class and disability is therefore urgently required. Given that cricket is played around the world, further research that addresses transition experiences, particularly in Asian and Caribbean settings where the sport is culturally prominent, should be undertaken to help support players irrespective of geographical location or culturally dominant narratives that exist. Theoretically, we have illuminated the importance of Goffman's work in exploring career transition. Given how our findings have revealed the importance of managing identity through interactions with the environments inside and outside the world of professional cricket, Goffman's (1955) concept of interactional ritual and the broader symbolic nature of being a cricketer and retiree would be particularly useful in future explorations into career transition. Methodologically, we call for more ethnographic research in naturalistic settings to explore experiences of transition as they happen and further research that explores the narrative dimensions of career transition from professional cricket. Finally, as Ronkainen et al. (2023) advocate, employing longitudinal study designs addressing experiences of retirement over time is required.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the participants who have provided us with the stories that we present in this article. They would also like to thank Professor Andrew C. Sparkes for acting as a critical friend and helping them in their understandings of narrative inquiry.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy and ethical restrictions.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Ethical approval

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from Canterbury Christ Church University institutional review board (Approval number: ETH2425-0019)

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Informed consent

Written informed consent was obtained for anonymised participation information to be published in this article.

ORCID iDs

James Brighton https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7282-8558
Jim Lusted https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8916-4524

Notes

1. A situation compounded by the stigma associated with talking about emotional difficulties in traditionally male sports such as cricket where athletes more often keep their struggles silent (Souter et al., 2018). It is also worth noting therefore that the autobiographies stated were released by players *after* their retirement.
2. Such as those already in place as part of the PCA's Personal Development and Welfare Programme (PCA, 2025).
3. With one professional County club also located in Wales.
4. Downhill skiing.
5. See PCA Futures Week explores career progression – The PCA.
6. Indeed, our research has demonstrated how, as high-performing and disciplined individuals working under high pressure in unstable environments requiring repeated and immediate adaptation, professional cricketers hone a number of valuable skills which can be transferred to other high-performance settings.

References

Åkesdotter C, Kenttä G and Sparkes AC (2024) Elite athletes seeking psychiatric treatment: Stigma, impression management strategies, and the dangers of the performance narrative. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology* 36(1): 24–44.

Alfermann D and Stambulova N (2007) Career transitions and career termination. In: Tenenbaum G and Eklund RC (eds) *The Handbook of Sport Psychology*, 3rd ed. Chichester: Wiley, 712–733, https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118270011.ch32.

Alfermann D, Stambulova N and Zemaityte A (2004) Reactions to sport career termination: A cross-national comparison of German, Lithuanian, and Russian athletes. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* 5(1): 61–75.

Arvinen-Barrow M, Hurley D and Ruiz MC (2017) Transitioning out of professional sport: The psychosocial impact of career-ending injuries among elite Irish rugby football union players. *Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology* 11(1): 67–84.

Bamberg M (2006) Stories: Big or small? Why do we care? *Narrative Inquiry* 16(1): 139–147.

Barker-Ruchti N and Schubring A (2016) Moving into and out of high-performance sport: The cultural learning of an artistic gymnast. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy* 21(1): 69–80.

Barth M, Güllich A, Forstinger CA, et al. (2021) Retirement of professional soccer players–A systematic review from social sciences perspectives. *Journal of Sports Sciences* 39(8): 903–914.

Bourdieu P (1990) *The Logic of Practice*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bourdieu P (1991) *Language and Symbolic Power*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.

Brewer B, Van Raalte J and Linder D (1993) Athletic identity: Hercules' muscles or achilles heel? *International Journal of Sport Psychology* 24(2): 237–254. https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1994-03969-001.

Broad S (2024) *Broadly Speaking*. London: Hodder.
Brock SC and Kleiber DA (1994) Narrative in medicine: The stories of elite college athletes' career-ending injuries. *Qualitative Health Research* 4(4): 411–430.
Brown CJ, Webb TL, Robinson MA, et al. (2018) Athletes' experiences of social support during their transition out of elite sport: An interpretive phenomenological analysis. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* 36: 71–80.
Brown JC, Kerkhoffs G, Lambert MI, et al. (2017) Forced retirement from professional rugby union is associated with symptoms of distress. *International Journal of Sports Medicine* 38(08): 582–587.
Bruner J (2004) Life as narrative. *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 71(3): 691–710.
Bullock GS, Collins GS, Peirce N, et al. (2020) Health-related quality of life and flourishing in current and former recreational and elite cricketers. *Health and Quality of Life Outcomes* 18: 1–12.
Cavallerio F, Wadey R and Wagstaff CR (2017) Adjusting to retirement from sport: Narratives of former competitive rhythmic gymnasts. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health* 9(5): 533–545.
Chen P and Hinton SM (1999) Realtime interviewing using the world wide web. *Sociological Research Online* 4(3): 63–81.
Cole AL and Knowles JG (2001) *Lives in Context: The Art of Life History Research*. Lanham, MD: Rowman Altamira.
Cosh SM (2021) Athlete transitions into retirement. In: Agnew D (eds) *Athlete Transitions into Retirement: Experiences in Elite Sport and Options for Effective Support*. London: Routledge, 71–83.
Cosh SM, Crabb S and LeCouteur A (2013) Elite athletes and retirement: Identity, choice, and agency. *Australian Journal of Psychology* 65(2): 89–97.
Denzin NK and Lincoln YS (2018) *The Landscape of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
Douglas K and Carless D (2009) Abandoning the performance narrative: Two women's stories of transition from professional sport. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology* 21(2): 213–230.
Durkheim E (1966) *Suicide*. New York: Free Press.
Dwyer SC and Buckle JL (2009) The space between: On being an insider-outsider in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 8(1): 54–63.
Faulkner C (2024) I have a small window of time left that I'm going to do it': Transitions, risk and life-planning in the careers of mobile athletes. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, Online First: 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1177/10126902241303801
Filbay SR, Bishop F, Peirce N, et al. (2017) Common attributes in retired professional cricketers that may enhance or hinder quality of life after retirement: A qualitative study. *British Medical Journal* 7(7): e016541.
Frank AW (1995) *The Wounded Storyteller*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Frank AW (2010) *Letting Stories Breath: A Socio-Narratology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Frith D (2011) *Silence of the Heart: Cricket Suicides*. London: Random House.
Georgakopoulou A (2006) Thinking big with small stories in narrative and identity analysis. *Narrative Inquiry* 16(1): 122–130.
Goffman E (1955) On face-work: An analysis of ritual elements in social interaction. *Psychiatry* 18(3): 213–231.
Goffman E (1959) The moral career of the mental patient. *Psychiatry* 22(2): 123–142.
Goffman E (1961) *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*. New York and Toronto, ON, Canada: Random House.

Goffman E (1963) *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. London: Penguin.
Goffman E (1968) *Asylums*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
Grove JR, Lavallee D and Gordon S (1997) Coping with retirement from sport: The influence of athletic identity. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology* 9(2): 191–203.
Gubrium J and Holstein J (2009) *Analysing Narrative Reality*. London: Sage.
Gubrium JF and Holstein JA (2008) The constructionist mosaic. In: Holstein JA and Gubrium JF (eds) *Handbook of Constructionist Research*. New York: Guilford Press, 3–13.
Hague N and Law G (2022) I was really, really shocked': A sociological exploration of the transition experiences of English youth academy male footballers from school to work. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 57(2): 273–291.
Haslam C, McAulay C, Cooper D, et al. (2024) "I'm more than my sport": Exploring the dynamic processes of identity change in athletic retirement. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* 73: 102640.
Hay-Gibson N (2009) Interviews via VoIP: Benefits and disadvantages within a PhD study of SMEs. *Library and Information Research* 33(105): 1756–1086. https://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/1252.
Hickey C and Roderick M (2017) The presentation of possible selves in everyday life: The management of identity among transitioning professional athletes. *Sociology of Sport Journal* 34(3): 270–280.
Hickey C and Roderick M (2023) Career transitions from the English premier league: Cooling out the mark with possible selves. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 58(6): 1050–1072.
Hind K, Konerth N, Entwistle I, et al. (2021) Mental health and wellbeing of retired elite and amateur rugby players and non-contact athletes and associations with sports-related concussion: The UK rugby health project. *Sports Medicine* 52: 1419–1431.
Holloway I and Biley FC (2011) Being a qualitative researcher. *Qualitative Health Research* 21(7): 968–975.
Hundertmark J (2007) Cricketers and mental health concerns. *Australasian Psychiatry* 15: 509–512.
ICEC (2023) Holding Up A Mirror To Cricket: A Report by the Independent Commission for Equity in Cricket. Available at: https://theicec.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/HOLDING-UP-A-MIRROR-TO-CRICKET-REPORT-ICEC-2023.pdf (Accessed 29th November 2024).
Ivarsson A, Stambulova N and Johnson U (2018) Injury as a career transition: Experiences of a Swedish elite handball player. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology* 16(4): 365–381.
Jewett R, Kerr G and Tamminen K (2019) University sport retirement and athlete mental health: A narrative analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health* 11(3): 416–433.
Lally P (2007) Identity and athletic retirement: A prospective study. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* 8(1): 85–99.
Lavallee D, Gordon S and Grove JR (1997) Retirement from sport and the loss of athletic identity. *Journal of Personal & Interpersonal Loss* 2(2): 129–147.
Lavallee D and Robinson HK (2007) In pursuit of an identity: A qualitative exploration of retirement from women's artistic gymnastics. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* 8(1): 119–141.
Lingham-Willgoss C (2023) Negotiating identity: How elite athlete mothers navigate their journey through sport. Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Chester.
Malcolm D and Scott A (2012) Suicide, sport and medicine. *British Journal of Sports Medicine* 46: 1092–1093.
Martin L, Fogarty G and Albion M (2014) Changes in athletic identity and life satisfaction of elite athletes as a function of retirement status. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology* 26: 96–110.

McCabe T, Peirce N, Gorczynski P, et al. (2021) Narrative review of mental illness in cricket with recommendations for mental health support. *BMJ Open Sport & Exercise Medicine* 7(1): e000910.

McKenna J and Thomas H (2007) Enduring injustice: A case study of retirement from professional rugby union. *Sport, Education and Society* 12(1): 19–35.

McMahon J and McGannon KR (eds) (2024) *Trauma-Informed Research in Sport, Exercise, and Health: Qualitative Methods*. London: Routledge.

McMahon JA and Penney D (2013) (Self-)Surveillance and (self-)regulation: Living by fat numbers within and beyond a sporting culture. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health* 5(2): 157–178.

McNee S, 2013. *Suicide in Cricket: A Sociological Explanation*. Unpublished PhD Thesis. University of Chester.

Morse ED (2013) Substance use in athletes. In: Baron DA, Reardon CL and Baron SH (eds) *Clinical Sports Psychiatry: An International Perspective*. London: Wiley, 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118404904.ch1.

Mortensen J, Henriksen K and Stelter R (2013) Tales from the future: A narrative investigation of the imagined career paths of young athletes. *Sport Science Review* 22(5-6): 305–327.

O'Connor H, Madge C, Shaw R, et al. (2008) Internet-based interviewing. In: Hughes J (ed) *The Sage Handbook of Online Research Methods*. London: Sage, 271–289.

Ogden DJ, Coates JK, Plateau CR, et al. (2023) UK professional male cricketers' mental health and support experiences: A qualitative exploration. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology* 35(3): 372–391.

Opdenakker RJG (2006) Advantages and disadvantages of four interview techniques in qualitative research. *Qualitative Social Research* 7(4): 11.

Papathomas A, Petrie TA and Plateau CR (2018) Changes in body image perceptions upon leaving elite sport: The retired female athlete paradox. *Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology* 7(1): 30. https://doi.org/10.1037/spy0000111

Park S, Lavallee D and Tod D (2013a) A longitudinal qualitative exploration of elite Korean tennis players' career transition experiences. *Athletic Insight* 15(1): 65–92. http://hdl.handle.net/1893/22406.

Park S, Lavallee D and Tod D (2013b) Athletes' career transition out of sport: A systematic review. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology* 6(1): 22–53.

Patton MQ (2002) *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Phoenix C, Faulkner G and Sparkes AC (2005) Athletic identity and self-ageing: The dilemma of exclusivity. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* 6(3): 335–347.

Plateau CR, Petrie TA and Papathomas A (2017) Exercise attitudes and behaviours among retired female collegiate athletes. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* 29: 111–115. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2017.01.001

Ponizovskiy PA (2013) Addiction in retired athletes. In: Baron DA, Reardon CL and Baron SH (eds) *Clinical Sports Psychiatry: An International Perspective*. London: Wiley, 13–20. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118404904.ch1.

Reifsteck EJ, Newton JD, Smith MB, et al. (2021) Journey from control to liberation: exploring student-athletes' physical activity perceptions and experiences in the transition out of collegiate sport. *The Sport Psychologist* 36(1): 1–9.

Riessman K (2008) *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*. London: Sage.

Roberts CM, Mullen R, Evans L, et al. (2015) An in-depth appraisal of career termination experiences in professional cricket. *Journal of Sports Sciences* 33(9): 935–944.

Ronkainen NJ and Ryba TV (2017) Rethinking age in athletic retirement: An existential-narrative perspective. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology* 15(2): 146–159.

Ronkainen NJ, Schmid MJ, Hlasová H, et al. (2023) Closing a chapter? A protocol for a longitudinal mixed methods study on retirement from elite sport. *BMC psychology* 11(1): 76.

Ronkainen NJ, Watkins I and Ryba TV (2016) What can gender tell us about the pre-retirement experiences of elite distance runners in Finland?: A thematic narrative analysis. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* 22: 37–45. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2015.06.003

Saikia H, Bhattacharjee D and Mukherjee D (2019) *Cricket Performance Management: Mathematical Formulation and Analytics*. New York: Springer.

Sanders G and Stevinson C (2017) Associations between retirement reasons, chronic pain, athletic identity, and depressive symptoms among former professional footballers. *European Journal of Sport Science* 17(10): 1311–1318.

Schuring N, Kerkhoffs G, Gray J, et al. (2017) The mental wellbeing of current and retired professional cricketers: An observational prospective cohort study. *The Physician and Sportsmedicine* 45(4): 463–469.

Shah A, Sava-Shah S, Wijeratne C, et al. (2016) Are elite cricketers more prone to suicide? A psychological autopsy study of test cricketer suicides. *Australasian Psychiatry* 24(3): 295–299.

Shander K and Petrie T (2021) Transitioning from sport: Life satisfaction, depressive symptomatology, and body satisfaction among retired female collegiate athletes. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* 57: 102045.

Silver MP (2021) Adaptation to athletic retirement and perceptions about aging: A qualitative study of retired Olympic athletes. *Journal of Aging and Physical Activity* 29(5): 828–842.

Smith B (2016) Narrative analysis in sport and exercise: How can it be done? In: Smith BM and Sparkes AC (eds) *Routledge Handbook of Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise*. London: Routledge, 282–295.

Smith B and Sparkes AC (2002) Men, sport, spinal cord injury, and the construction of coherence: Narrative practice in action. *Qualitative Research* 2(2): 143–171.

Smith B and Sparkes AC (2009) Narrative inquiry in sport and exercise psychology: What can it mean, and why might we do it? *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* 10(1): 1–11.

Smith B and Sparkes AC (2016) Qualitative interviewing in the sport and exercise sciences. In: Smith AM and Sparkes AC (eds) *Routledge Handbook of Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise*. London: Routledge, 125–145.

Smith R and Smyth R (2019) *The Judge: More Than Just a Game*. London: Random House.

Souter G, Lewis R and Serrant L (2018) Men, mental health and elite sport: A narrative review. *Sports medicine-open* 4(57): 1–8.

Sparkes AC (1996) The fatal flaw: A narrative of the fragile body self. *Qualitative Inquiry* 2(4): 463–494.

Sparkes AC (1998) Athletic identity: An Achilles' heel to survival of self. *Qualitative Health Research* 8(5): 644–664.

Sparkes AC and Smith B (2003) Men, sport, spinal cord injury and narrative time. *Qualitative Research* 3(3): 295–320.

Sparkes AC and Smith B (2008) Men, spinal cord injury, memories and the narrative performance of pain. *Disability & Society* 23(7): 679–690.

Sparkes AC and Smith B (2014) *Qualitative Research Methods in Sport, Exercise and Health: From Process to Product*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Spector-Mersel G (2010) Narrative research: Time for a paradigm. *Narrative Inquiry* 20(1): 204–224.

Stambulova NB and Ryba TV (eds) (2013) *Athletes' Careers Across Cultures*. London: Routledge.

Stambulova NB and Ryba TV (2014) A critical review of career research and assistance through the cultural lens: Towards cultural praxis of athletes' careers. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology* 7(1): 1–17.

Stephen Y (2003) Repercussions of transition out of elite sport on subjective well-being: A one-year study. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology* 15(4): 354–371.

Sutton L (2019) *Back from the Edge: Mental Health and Addiction in Sport*. Barnsley: White Owl.

Sutton L (2023) *The Death of You: Life After Elite Sport*. Barnsley: White Owl.

Taylor J and Ogilvie BC (1994) A conceptual model of adaptation to retirement among athletes. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology* 6(1): 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/10413209408406462

The PCA (2025) *About the PDWP* [online]. Available at: https://www.thepca.co.uk/about-the-pdwp/ Accessed 24th February 2025.

Torregrosa M, Ramis Y, Pallarés S, et al. (2015) Olympic athletes back to retirement: A qualitative longitudinal study. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* 21: 50–56.

Trescothick M and Hayter P (2009) *Coming Back to Me: The Autobiography*. London: Harper Collins.

Trott J (2016) *Unguarded: My Autobiography*. London: Hachette.

Turkoglu H and Hosver M (2020) The retired professional basketball player—psychological aspects. In: Laver L, Kocaoglu B, Cole B, Arundale AJ, Bytomski J and Amendola A (eds) *Basketball Sports Medicine and Science*. London: Springer Nature, 1015–1018.

Turner RW II (2018) *Not for Long: The Life and Career of the NFL Athlete*. North Carolina: Oxford University Press.

Walker N, Thatcher J and Lavallee D (2007) Psychological responses to injury in competitive sport: A critical review. *The Journal of the Royal Society for the Promotion of Health* 127(4): 174–180.

Warne (2019) *No Spin: My Autobiography*. London: Ebury Press.

Willard VC and Lavallee D (2016) Retirement experiences of elite ballet dancers: Impact of self-identity and social support. *Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology* 5(3): 266–279.

Wylleman P, Alfermann D and Lavallee D (2004) Career transitions in sport. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* 5(1): 3–5.