Cardiff School of Sport

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‘Does Social Support Contribute to the Transition out of Professional Football’

(Dissertation submitted under the title of Psychology)

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Acknowledgements

Firstly, to Christian, I am sincerely grateful for your consistent help and efforts throughout this process. Not only have you been a great tutor but a good friend and motivator. My appreciation is endless.

To Mum, Dad, and Polly, thank you for your support throughout the past 3 years, your love and guidance have made this all possible.

To Ria, your gentle ongoing reminders have kept me on track. Thank you for your Love and persistence throughout the 3 years.

To my teammates, and housemates. The banter has encouraged me throughout, and never failed to keep my spirits high.

Lastly to the participants, without you this wouldn’t have happened, for that I am eternally grateful.
Abstract

This study explored a ‘within-career’ (deselection) transition of five elite footballers (n=5). More specifically, the study examined the deselection out of the professional game, looking at how the deselection affected each participant, how their own self-identity was affected, and the role of social support during the transitional process. Qualitative methods were adopted in the form of a focus group in order to explore personal experiences of each participant. The focus group was then analysed, extracting useful information applicable to the study. Results showed that both positive and negative feelings were encountered during the transition phase. Additionally, results explained that a high athletic identity is positively correlated with negative feelings during transition, however the deselection process can also provide the athlete with a chance to identify themselves with something new. Furthermore, the role of emotional support was deemed to be the most appropriate to assist an athlete in transition, with participants also suggesting that financial and informational support is a suitable support network needed. The importance of further research and the examination of the football apprenticeship have been noted, in order to assist athletes in a negative transition, and provide future strategies for a positive transition.
Chapter One

Introduction


1.0 Introduction

It can be argued that within the field of sports psychology there is growing interest within the topic of ‘Career Transitions’ (Taylor and Lavalle, 2010). Indeed, the literature that currently explores career transitions has largely focused on retirement and career termination, which has been at great aid to many athletes and coaches dealing with this process in their career (Wyleman, Lavalle, and Alfermann, 1999). Until Pummell, Harwood, and Lavalle’s (2008) study however, there was very little research investigating ‘within-career’ transitions. In acknowledging such a statement, this study will examine ‘within-career transition’ of five ex-elite footballers. Furthermore, the study will seek to explain how the five players dealt with being released from the professional game (the deselection process), how the process affected their self-identity and what intervention strategies such as social support they used to make the process as easy as possible.

As explained by Taylor and Ogilvie (1994), the research of an athlete’s career transition has progressed hugely over the past two decades into a more systematic enquiry as opposed to initial methods of imprints gained by professionals examining athletes. Early scholarly writings such as McPherson (1980), and Ogilvie and Howe (1982) were able to identify potential concerns linked with career transitions. The involvement of Schlossberg’s (1981) model however, allowed for both a positive and negative adjustment (Crook and Robertson, 1981). As research evolved researchers began to re-appraise the termination of an athletic career as a transitional process, rather than a singular event. Transitions were soon to be seen as in terms of Voluntary and Involuntary transitions. However, most of the literature available looks at involuntary transitions. An involuntary transition can be caused by career termination due to Age, Injury, or deselection, and these topics have been examined by psychologists in order to further knowledge around these areas, in order to give athletes the best information to deal with these transitions.

As previously highlighted this study will look to explore the field of professional football. The nature of professional football provides players with constant pressures throughout their careers, which is allied by a study conducted by Nesti and Littlewood (2011). Here, they examined premiership footballers and argued that the literature has not focused upon the daily experiences of players and has opted to focus on career termination. Results revealed that dealing with transitions successfully is vital to survive in such a challenging industry such as professional football. In light of Nesti and Littlewood’s (2011) statement
that literature has not focused on the daily experiences of players, and looked more towards career termination, it is clear that there is a gap in the research for within-career transitions. In addition, the environment of professional football is one that needs further research as Nesti and Littlewood (2011) allude to it being an environment with constant pressures. This study will primarily focus upon young players at either apprenticeship level, or first year professional level. It will seek to explain the deselection process of young players as they are released from the professional game, looking into identity issues with the outcome of determining ways in which future players can prepare for and deal with the transition, and how it can be helped. Parker (1995) provided further motivation for the present study with his case study of English professional football by stating that a football apprenticeship is not about feelings or personal dignity, it’s about opinions, domination, and respect for professional reputation.
Chapter Two

Literature Review
2.1 Introduction

There is a growing interest towards the issue of ‘career transitions’ within sport (Baillie and Danish, 1992). Although many studies have revealed that distressful career transitions can be dealt with in many dysfunctional ways, several studies also seek to explain minimal difficulties allied to the transition process (Lavalle, 2007). Subsequently, this review of literature will seek to explain the transitional process, drawing upon the different types of transitions, and models of adaptation. In addition, there will be an exploration of self-identity issues caused by a distressful transition. Relatedly, there will be an insight into the intervention strategies that can be implemented to assist an athlete in transition with the focus on the area of social support.

2.2 The transitional process

The period of transition within sport is an area that is vital to have an in depth understanding of if we are to act correctly when dealing with this process. Transitional experiences of an athlete’s career can be an obstacle in future development and may act as a barrier to future performance, as they may provide severe difficulties (Lavalle, 2007). Salter (1997) has pinpointed the importance of meeting the demands of the encountered experience of transition, especially within elite athletes in order to keep them at the top for as long as possible. Similarly, Schlossberg (1981) described transition in terms of the changes of the thoughts, and behaviour of a person due to an event or an absence. Although many studies seek to explain the transitional process due to injury, Nesti and Littlewood (2011) suggest that transition research has focused primarily on retirement or career termination as it represents a clear example of a major and irreversible change. Likewise, Lavallee and Wylleman (2000) state that since 1950 there has been over 226 studies on these topics. However, career transitions within sport can be found to be functioned by voluntary and in-voluntary reasons. Voluntary retirement from sport is the most appealing transition out of sport. It should not however, be assumed that it eases the career transition process (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998). Indeed, Allison and Meyer (1988) explain that Voluntary transition may happen as a result of personal, social and psychological reasons such as financial complications, their overall life satisfaction or simply to spend more time with their family and friends. Most psychological research into transitions primarily focuses on involuntary transitions. Work, explores involuntary reasons such as Mihovilovic’s (1968) study of retirement due to age, and Pearson and Petitpas’
(1990) study into deselection as a transition. Lavallee (2006) however, explains the lack of research on voluntary transitions to be as a result of an athlete’s own decision to make the transition, which rarely draws many issues with career planning. Likewise, the work of Alfermann and Gross’ (1997) study suggested that individuals that retire for voluntary reasons experienced significantly more positive reactions during the adjustment period. It can be revealed that the adaptation process becomes easier and runs smoother when the career is terminated for voluntary reasons (Alfermann, 2000). Early research (e.g. Ogilvie and Howe, 1986) regards career termination as a devastating life event and primarily focused upon the adaptation to the post career). In relation to such work, Zaichkwosky, Lipton, and Tucci (1997) highlighted the transition of collegiate-student athletes out of sport, and found that 20% of young men and women that participated experienced emotional difficulties following the transition. Furthermore, Nacimento, Duffy, Schwager and Zaichkowsky (1998) examined the termination of Boston men’s football programme. Findings purported how the unexpected career termination affected the player’s identities, and found that the athletic identity of the young players was affected somewhat more than older players as they have not looked into their future beyond sport, leading to them questioning their self-worth and identity. These results were consistent with the work of Pearson and Petitpas (1990), who discovered that transitions become most challenging for student athletes when their status moves from a player to non-player. Research however, by Curtis and Ennis (1988) looked at elite-level hockey players leaving competitive sport, and found no evidence of any negative consequences after leaving high performance sport. Likewise, the work of Coakley (1983) sought to challenge the assumption that career termination is always a traumatic transition. A developmental perspective is used to suggest that many factors influence the quality of the transition, as such it is not always a difficult process. Furthermore, Blinde & Greendorfer (1985) suggest that there is a very small amount of evidence to imply that former athletes face difficulties during their transition, and may actually experience a positive transition due to relief of the constant pressures and commitment. Nesti and Littlewood (2011) allude to this previous statement, underlining that researchers have mostly agreed with the statement that transition and career termination is negative in sport. Outside of sport however studies indicate that retirement from sport can be a cause for celebration, and can be a new opportunity to pursue different tasks and identities. Moreover, Nesti and Littlewood (2011) suggest that within such a volatile environment such as professional football, transitional experiences may face positive emotions as well as negative emotions. Although repeated transitions throughout ones career may be seen as negative to start, it can also lead on to
more positive encounters, and may be one that needs to be encountered for within future research (Nesti and Littlewood, 2011).

2.3 Involuntary Transitions

The majority of transition research is based on involuntary transitions. Wylleman, Alfermann and Lavallee, (1999) propose that due to the nature of involuntary transitions, it is essential that we fully understand the demands that can be faced by the athletes, in order to produce useful interventions to aid the athlete. A common career transition, and one of the most-significant involuntary transition is injury. Werthner and Orlick (1986) explains that empirical research supports theory that retirement is very difficult when caused by injury, as it is not prepared for. Moreover, Ogilvie and Howe (1982) suggest that injuries can result in many psychological difficulties such as fear, anxiety, loss of self-esteem, and depression. However, retirement can also be referred to as a normal transition phase. In addition, as a result of research conducted by Mihovilovic (1968), it can be understood that retirement in sport is largely identified to be caused by the aging process. Retirement because of the aging process usually takes place as a result of a decline in performance (Taylor and Lavalle, 2010). It can, however, take place due to a lack of motivation and the conclusion that they have met their goals in sport (Werthner & Orlick, 1986). Lastly, the deselection can be a difficult time within an athlete’s career causing a very negative transition. The deselection process, is one that is imminent throughout elite sport and one that is a significant contributor to career transitions in sport (Lavalle, 2007). Brewer et al. (2007) describe these transitions occurred within an athlete’s career to require a considerable amount of personal adjustment. The nature of the elite environment follows a Darwinian ‘Survival of the fittest’ philosophy (Taylor and Lavalle, 2010) in order to narrow down the competition progressing to each level of the sport. Also identified by (Taylor and Lavalle, 2010) is that according to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (2003) only 1 in 10,000 athletes receive college scholarships, with only 1% of those progressing to play professionally. The work of Nesti and Littlewood (2011) provides a narrative into a practitioner’s experience. During the narrative, it comes to the reader’s attention that as a sports psychologist it is his job to help athletes stay true to themselves in times of change, however due to the cynical environment of professional football, it may be very difficult to help the player maintain a positive outlook.
2.4 Self-Identity Issues

Due to the growing importance of one’s self evaluation, there is a growing inclination towards the attention psychologists are placing towards the self in sport and exercise psychology. Brewer et al, (1993) define Self-identity within sport as the degree to which an individual identifies with the athletic role. They also explain that athletic identity can be demonstrated within the domain of sport career transitions. In accordance with this, the work of Allison and Meyer (1988) reported a loss of identity as a result of career termination. The work of Fish, Grove, and Eklund (1997) relates to this study and takes the approach of looking at involuntary within-career transitions, and more precisely selection issues. They found that individuals who were not selected for an elite sport squad were apparent to decreased identity, whereas the selected athletes maintained their self-identity levels. Brewer et al (2007) suggest there is a growing amount of literature suggesting individuals that are heavily involved in sport to the exclusion of other pursuits are extremely vulnerable to the career transition process involving the athletic role. A longitudinal study conducted by Stephen, Bilard, Ninot, & Dilignieres,(2003) perceived physical condition, self-worth, and global self-esteem decreased within the first 6 months of the transition out of elite sport. In addition, Ballie and Danish, (1992) suggest that athletes that over identify themselves with their athletic identity are less prepared for post sport careers. Likewise, Grove, Lavelle, and Gordon (1997) came to the conclusion again that athletes who over identify themselves with their sports careers are far more vulnerable to transition distress.

It is very clear that some athletes experience personal difficulties whilst dealing with a transition, which highlights the need for psychology practitioners to place their attention towards assisting athletes to make a successful transition (Ogilvie and Taylor, 1993). There are a number of different factors that affect the way in which an athlete deals with the transition period such as emotional, social, financial, and occupational factors. Indeed, Lavalle (2007) underlines that whilst in transition, each athlete deals with the process in an individual manner, relating to their transition reasons, and the coping resources that they receive which affects the way in which they adjust to the transition. Taylor and Ogilvie (1998) have proposed a conceptualised model of athletic career transition which seeks to explain the whole of the transition period. The model looks at components such as (a) casual factors that may have an influence on the transition process, (b) developmental factors that are related to the adaptation process during transition (c) coping interventions
that may affect how one responds to the stimulus within the transition, (d) How well the athlete adjusts, and (e) treatment issues for distresses athletes.

2.5 Transition Interventions

As the need for career transition research has intensified, the importance of an increased understanding of transition interventions has also increased (Wylleman, Alfermann and Lavallee, 2004). Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) elucidate a number of therapeutic approaches, which involve cognitive restructuring, stress management, and emotional expression. These interventions can all be implemented in order to assist athletes suffering with career transition/termination distress. The intervention strategy chosen needs to take the personal needs of the athlete in transition into consideration. Taylor and Lavallee (2010) further explain that a career transition can be put together as stressors such as financial, social, psychological, and physical stressors. In addition, intervention strategies need to be implemented to buffer the distress caused, however, difficulties may still arise when the athlete comes to realisation that their athletic career is over. Taylor and Lavallee (2010) also state that one of the most difficult, yet important tasks during the transition process is to help the athlete maintain their feeling of self-worth whilst they try to establish their new self-identity. This can be assisted by trying to produce positive feelings towards the athlete’s new role away from their athletic career. Athletes may also be in need of financial support during their career transition. Sinclair and Orlick (2003) support this intervention, as they recommend that sports organisations need to offer financial help following athletic retirement, and also offer seminars, and resource centres for athletes in transition.

2.6 Social Support

The quality of adjustment to a career transition is majorly influenced by the amount of support and coping resources available during the transition phase (Lavallee, 2007). Research primarily focuses on retirement transitions, as did Reynolds’ (1981) study with professional footballers. Such research underlines the importance of social support during athletic retirement, as did Stambulova (1994), who elucidates the need of social support, from family and friends.
Social Support is one of the most important interventions within psychology (Veiel and Bauman, 1992). In direct relation to the transitional process in sport, Petrie (1993) underlines social support to be one of the most important factors during this time to deal with a negative transition. In addition, Rosenfeld et al, (1989) describes the availability of social support within sport to reduce uncertainty, and help aid any physical and mental recovery. Social support can be given to an individual within an interchange of two or more people, with a purpose of increasing the well-being of the person receiving the support. Such a perspective is clarified by Lakey and Cohen (2000), who suggest that the beneficial effects of social support will protect an individual from the harmful effect of stress. Sarason, Sarason and Pierce (1990) further define social support by suggesting that knowing that one is loved and supported may be the essence of Social Support. Although these clarifications of social support seek to explain its essence, Vaux (1992) states that the broadness causes confusion when measuring the construct. The past 40 years of social support research has laid down the groundwork for advances within the field. Further research by Bianco and Eklund (2001) depicted social support to be a multidimensional construct involving structural, functional, and perceptual dimensions. Sarson, Sarson and Pierce (1994) justify social support to be an interactive process, which can be influenced by the provider and recipient characteristics, their relationship, and the sociocultural context that the social support takes place.

Holt and Hoar’s recent (2006) conceptualisation of social support incorporates a number of different sources (Bianco and Eklund, 2001; Caspi, 1987; Cohen and Syme, 1985; Cohen and Wills, 1985; Vaux, 1992) whilst also linking in their own interpretations. As a result of this, a conceptualised model of social support was provided, as portrayed within figure 2.
In explanation of Figure 1, firstly box (1) provides an explanation of social supports multidimensional construct, including the structural dimension, which is an indicator of one’s social support network, and is categorised by Milardo (1992) into four levels of support networks such as significant other networks, exchange networks, interactive networks, and global networks. The functional dimension is assessed by examining a person’s received social support (Holt and Hoar, 2006), by diving into the interaction a person may have with the provider of support. As summarised by Cutrona and Russell (1990) there are five types of basic social resources that the provider can give to the recipient; Emotional support, social integration, esteem support, tangible aid, and informational support. These five social resources were developed in accordance to the theory of ‘optimal matching’, which implies that there is a different type of social exchange needed within different situations, defining the importance of assessing the recipient to determine the components of support needed. Lastly the perceptual dimension identifies a person’s perception of the amount or quality of support available to them (Vaux, 1985), by scrutinising the perceived social support. Barnes and Duck (1994) suggest that a willingness to support the recipient is often a powerful dimension of social support which can increase perception of social support.
support, and have a stronger effect on well-being than actual support (Schwarzer and Leppin, 1991; Thotis, 1995).

Box (2) divides the Support mechanisms into the main effect and the buffering effect. In definition, Holt and Hoar describe the buffering effect to be based on the assumption that social support helps people manage the negative effect of stress acting as a coping resource. In addition, the buffering effect can be seen as a protective mechanism once a person believes a situation to be stressful (Bianco and Eklund, 2001) as a result of delivering social support to ‘buffer’ the demands of a stressor (Holt and Hoar, 2006). Alternatively, the main effect incorporated the assumption that social resources can a beneficial effect on well-being whether people are suffering with stress or not. This can be considered as a preventative mechanism (Bianco and Eklund, 2001), as when social support is received, people believe they possess the right information and resources to manage challenging situations (Holt and Hoar, 2006). Included within box (3) are social environmental factors such as culture, context and gender, and individual factors of the sender, and the recipient. Lastly, box (4) holds the instrumental outcomes related to social support, which raise awareness to the relieving of stress, and enhancing coping skills.
Chapter Three

Methodology
3.1 Introduction

In order to provide an in-depth understanding of the transitional process of young elite footballers, before the study begins, a justification of the chosen method is crucial. In this case, a qualitative method will be used, in order to scrutinise the phenomenology of the given participants. Bannister et al. (2011) describes Phenomenology to be all about lived experience, and can be understood through “rich engagement with another person’s, ‘lifeworld’ ” (p.4). In relation to the footballing environment, Parker (1995) suggests there is a lack of empirical research, due to the secured working environment that has been created by those working within the sport.

3.2 Rationale for methods adopted

Engaging in systematic inquiry or conducting research involves choosing a research design that relates to the question (Merriam 2009). In accordance to this, a qualitative approach was adopted in order to obtain rich and detailed data. Clark-Carter (2009) describes the very essence of a qualitative design to analyse a large sample size numerically, using statistical tests. In compliance with this, a qualitative approach was decided upon in order to focus on a small number of the population, and to find out more in depth information about personal experiences throughout the transitional period. A qualitative method allowed the interviewer to dive deep into the personal issues of the participant rather than sticking to closed questions that would be provided within the domains of quantitative research. The individuality of phenomenological research as portrayed by Lawthom and Tindall (2011) allows us the ability to dive deep into the variability of human experience in order to deploy different meanings and understandings of certain situations. In light of this, it provides justification for the qualitative methods as it will provide detailed answers, which can be probed and structured towards the type of debate that is needed to answer the research question.

3.3 Methods

A qualitative approach to the study provided a base for obtaining an in-depth understanding of the transition period, and how the use of social support can have a direct effect on this period. Thorne (2000) describes a qualitative approach to involve a
reasoning process in order to interpret and structure the answers that can be taken from the information provided. The main aim of the study was to critically examine the transition process of 5 male elite footballers that has been released from professional football at a young age. The study drew upon self-identity issues, and how the use of social support contributed to the transition. It is evident throughout the literature that there is a slight gap in the area of within career-transitions (Lavallee et al., 2000). Although some studies have explored within career transitions, the main focus of research looks into career termination. Additionally, within the qualitative methods approach, a focus group was the chosen method of data collection. The focus group looked to explore issues before the transition, and the effect the transition had on the participants.

3.3.1 Focus Groups

A focus group is a research method involving a gathering of participants in order to discuss a certain topic, whilst under the guidance of a moderator (Neilsen, 2011). Dawson (2009) underpins the role of moderator to thoroughly explain the potential outcomes of the study, and facilitate each participant involved whilst ensuring they feel comfortable throughout. Prior to the focus group, small talk was essential to ensure the moderator and participants felt comfortable. Kruegar (1994) clarifies the importance of small talk by casually discussing minor issues to create a warm and friendly environment. During the focus group, the moderator provided participants with probes and semi structured questions in order to facilitate a debate around the subject area. Probes were also used to further explore issues that the researcher deemed to have value to the study. Patton (2002) explains the relevance of group discussions due to the retraction of extreme views from others in the group, who may carry out checks among each other. Flick (2006) distinguishes a group interview as a better method than other forms of data collection by explaining that opinions presented in the form of a interview or survey are detached from different forms of communication, and cannot be expresses and changed, due to different opinion that may be encountered within everyday life. Flick (2006) also reveals that group discussions can portray the change of opinion within a social environment, and that expressions of opinion will be made in the context of a group, allowing further discussion around the subject. Although the setting of a focus group may in some ways contaminate a person’s views due to the unsureness of the environment (Dawson, 2009), it may also promote additional questions being asked between participants, and lead to issues being
remembered that may have been forgotten and lost in translation during individual interviews.

3.4 Procedure

Participants were contacted in order to decide a suitable date and time that they were all able to attend. In addition a secure environment was selected for the focus group to take place, ensuring there would be no interference, or human distraction. Participants were given a copy of the interview structure beforehand and as previously mentioned, given time to read over and prepare any answers or responses they wish to contribute. Participants were also handed out a consent form, and information sheet underlining the protocols of the focus group. Once the consent form had been read, and signed, the group discussion then commenced. Participants were all asked to participate throughout the discussion, and allow each other input within each topic. To follow on, they were also asked to remain within the guidelines of each topic and not to stray away, in order to shape the information given and keep it relevant to the research question. During the Focus group, participants were asked to recall on their own Footballing experience, from adolescence, to the time they were released from the professional game, drawing upon their experience within the game. In addition participants were prompted to discuss any differentiation between their experiences, and to discuss their experience of the transition out of the professional game, how their self-identity was affected, and what effect the social support of others had on this experience. The group discussion was recorded and used to transcribe. Furthermore, this research may then be used as a prompt to help athletes in the future during a distressful transition, outlining how the use of support networks, and how the athletes dealt with the situation.

3.5 Participants

Participants consisted of elite performers released from professional football. In relation to this study, the term ‘elite’ stands for a participant that played for a professional club, whether it be as an apprentice, or a full time professional. The study involved 5 purposely sampled male elite athletes, all with a history as an elite footballer. Participants were either released from their club before getting offered an apprenticeship, a pro contract, or before being offered a new contract. The background of the participants varied between academy members at u16’s (n=1), and full time Professionals (n=4), with ages ranging
between 20 and 23. In order to obtain the rich and detailed data, the selected participants were purposefully selected in accordance to their characteristics, which in accordance to Coyne (1996) has a reflective effect on the overall quality of the research.

A brief biography of the participants sporting career is as follows;

**Participant 1** – Joined a professional club from an early age of 11, through to u16’s level, and once released, joined a league 2 side to complete a 2 year scholarship. Following the 2 year scholarship, Participant 1 signed a short term professional contract, however was not offered an extension, resulting in him moving to university and joining their football team. Throughout participant 1’s early career he was also included within the national squad team.

**Participant 2** – This participant's club career began very early, starting off at a championship side at the age of 10, all the way through to being offered a short term professional contract. Although also a member of the national u19s, and u21’s squad, this didn’t quite work out, and after a few short term contracts at a lower tier English club, participant 2 decided to move on and now plays semi-professional football.

**Participant 3** – Signed for a professional club from an early age, and at the age of 17, signed a 4 year professional contract. Participant 3 also represented the national team at u15’s, 17s, 19s, and 21s, and managed to make the bench for the first team. Once released at the age of 21, he then moved on to a few lower tier clubs where he spent short term contracts, however at the end of this decided to cut ties with the game, and move to University.

**Participant 4** – Participant 4 was also involved from a very young age within an academy setting, and signed a 3 year professional contract at the age of 17. At the age of 18 he broke into the first team and made around 10 appearances. A bad injury then set back his progress, and once released he moved on to a non-league side, before moving to University, and signing for a semi-professional team.

**Participant 5** – This participant played local league football until the age of 14 where he was picked up by a football league club. He stayed there for 6 months, however was not offered, a contract extension, however a larger top tier side came in to monitor the player.
After a period of trailing the club didn’t offer participant 5 a further contract however he then signed for a lower tier English club where he spent 2 seasons before being released. He then moved on to University, and cut ties with the game.

3.6 Trustworthiness

‘Qualitative research, ensuing from a variety of disciplines, embraces many standards of quality, known as credibility, rigor, or trustworthiness’ (Morrow, 2005). It was vital from the beginning of the study that everything was done in order to make the study as trustworthy as possible. Firstly as pilot study was conducted before the final focus group could take place. This enabled the moderator to become familiar with using a Dictaphone, and facilitating the debate in terms of keeping everybody involved and participating. It was vitally important that a relationship was built between the moderator and the participants prior to the group discussion. This relationship would add to the strength of answers given by the participants. Secondly, as previously mentioned the involvement of a useful sample, will lead to the information being relevant and valid to the subject concerned. Mays and Pope (1995) explain that much of social sciences are concerned with distinguishing the ‘typical’ from the ‘atypical’. In addition, systematic sampling will identify a specific group of people who possess characteristics relevant to the social phenomenon. In addition, records of the group discussion were kept, by transcribing the data produced from the Dictaphone. This again complies with Mays and Pope (1995) who state that the main way in which qualitative researchers keeps ‘retest’ reliability is by keeping records of interviews and observations, and documenting this process in detail. Although it is important to note that within exploratory research, it is very difficult to trust what somebody says, it is vitally important that measures are taken in order to ensure the validation of the study. Miles and Huberman (1994) consider validity as approaching many potential biases that may be a potential barrier to a validate study. Member checking can work as an important method whilst ensuring validity. Flick (2009) suggests communicative validity, which involves testing the validity of knowledge claims in a conversation.
3.7 Data analysis

Unquestionably, data analysis is the most intricate of all of the phases of a qualitative project (Thorne, 2000). In order to successfully analyse data, Dawson (2009) relays that information must be produced in a format that can be easily analysed. In this light, the information recorded within the focus group was transcribed before scrutinised to explore the data. During this process, the data was carefully examined in order to pick out relevant information about the participants background, the transition period, the participants self-identity, and the social support networks. Information that is applicable to the study will then be recorded and discussed within the results and discussion. Flick (2006) implies that within the interpretation process, problem arises regarding which parts of the text should be chosen for interpretation, which resulted in a strict and careful analysis process.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

In order to keep the confidentiality of the study, the participants names were kept anonymous at all times, with their names being replaced by pseudonyms. Whilst aware of this, participants were also aware that only the moderator would hold their real names as they would be kept completely confidential. Participants were made aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any given time, without any explanation needed. This complies with the role of the moderator to keep a comfortable environment for participants to work in. Dawson (2009) Illustrates that due to the participant’s willingness to give out disclosed information, it is vital that the participants and the information they provide are treated with honesty and respect.
Chapter Four

Results and Discussion
4.1 Introduction

This study was conducted with the purpose of examining how young elite footballers deal with the transition (de-selection) out of the professional game. Through analysis of five male ex elite footballers, themes such as the transition period, self-identity issues, and social support were scrutinised, in relation to the present literature in order to provide a summary of this transition period, and to provide future rationale for further research.

4.2 Grassroots and Footballing background

All five participants are very similar in relation to their early footballing years. Each participant began participating in football at an early age with the ages ranging from 5 to 11. In addition, each participant was in agreement that as soon as they began participating, it became apparent that they wanted to become a professional footballer, and again for each participant, the age that they were picked up by a professional team was similarly young, with the ages ranging between 10 and 14.

This is an important starting point to be aware of within the study. Due to the early start in professional football, each participant became vulnerable to the harsh and ruthless environment of professional football very early in their sporting careers. Such a statement runs concurs with Nesti and Littlewood’s (2011) narrative of English professional football, which underlines the professional game to be a cynical environment. Indeed, participants were asked to relay how they coped being at a professional club from an early age, and it was highlighted that the distance was an issue whilst travelling back and forth to training. For instance, one participant explained

“I think most of us played for clubs quite far away. I think you two played together, I think we two played quite far away so we obviously had to travel and maybe train far away, so it wasn’t easy but it was just part of your life at that time. Your parents probably took time off work or whatever to take you to training on a Tuesday night or whenever you used to train and then to play on Saturday, so it was just normal for us.” Participant 4

Furthermore, another participant highlighted that distance was an issue at the early stages of their career;

“I personally wasn’t too keen, we used to have to miss a Monday and a Tuesday off school to go and I wasn’t too keen on it at the time, to be honest, missing two
days because quite enjoyed going to school and the different environment with the older lads at that time, travelling down it was really far on the train, it was quite difficult."  *Participant 3*

Likewise, participants were in agreement that there is a constant pressure to perform from a young age due to the particular demands of the game, in particular when you reach mid-teens;

"When you're involved from a young age you tend to see it for that time as enjoying it, until then it gets to the stage where you start to realise it's going to get quite serious, probably from 15 onwards. At the start you just enjoy it, you take it in your stride but once it does get to that age you start to realise you need to compete and normally you might be playing with somebody who's your friend but at the same time that's somebody you're technically up against to get a position, rather than that person – as harsh as that sounds, it's true."  *Participant 1*

"I agree, I think there's a lot of pressure especially from a young age and you do tend to see a lot of people come and go, so it's something you've got to deal with."  *Participant 5*

These replies suggest that not only were participants constantly in the limelight throughout their careers, but also had constant pressure to perform, and a very strong commitment. Research conducted by Blinde & Greendorfer (1985) proposes that due to the constant pressures and commitment within professional football, athletes may feel positive feelings during transition as they are feeling a sense of relief.

All participants were happy to conclude the assumption that although football was everything to them through their early lives, it wasn't seen to be something that was a secure future plan. Participants were asked about their contingency plans, and it became apparent that education was hugely important within their lives as well as football. This is an important point to consider whilst analysing the transition period of the participants. The work of Wylleman, Lavallee and Alfermann (1999) suggests that positive transition can take place as a result of their own pre-requisites such as their practical knowledge, and their attitudes towards their career. In this case, participants gave themselves a beneficial start to their transition as they had a positive attitude towards education, and a different career plan.
“I think for me it has always been embedded that education would go further than football. Football’s there for the meantime, you can enjoy it; but what happens to players on a regular basis, in some instances like us, you can always fade away and you see boys who we’ve played with and you know they’re doing stuff now that I can imagine they can picture themselves doing in a few years’ time. So for me it’s always been that education will take me further than football”  Participant 4

“Yes, I was lucky as well. When I was younger my parents told me ‘You need to work hard at school, regardless of how good you think you are at football or how good people are telling you that you are at football,’ so I was lucky that was embedded in me early.”  Participant 3

4.3 Transition out of the game (de-selection)

The next set of questions were designed to critically explain how the de-selection process effected the participants. To begin, participants were mostly in agreement that they had an inkling that they weren't going to be offered a professional contract.

“I think the first time I was released, I was told in the December/January that I wasn't going to be offered a new contract, just after I came back from injury, so I was kind of given time to plan, even though it probably didn’t go to plan really. But I was given time to plan, so yes, I knew I was being released and I think the lads probably agree, you do kind of know whether you're going to get a contract or not.”  Participant 4

In light of such comments, it has been suggested that preretirement planning can be a useful coping strategy leading up to athletic retirement (Gorbett, 1985, Ogilvie and Taylor, 1993). Although in this circumstance it applies to an athletic retirement, this theory still applies to a within career transition. Due to all participants having an idea that they weren’t going to be offered a new contract, and be deselected, they were given an opportunity to plan alternative career paths or alternative routes within the sport, which made the transition easier than it would have been if the deselection was a complete shock.

Participant Number 5 however, did not agree with other participants and stated that he was very unsure to whether he was going to be offered a contract or not. In explanation,
participant 5 claimed that the system at his club was ‘ridiculous’, and didn’t keep the player up to date with their progress.

“Then in the second half of the second season I tore my sports hernia and I’d only been out for about a month or a few weeks before this happened again towards the end of the season. And my Dad actually had a phone call to save us actually travelling up to have that awkward situation and he picked me up from my ex-girlfriend’s place or something and he looked at me and I was training that night – he looked at me and I knew in his eyes, that was it. It’s upsetting but it’s one of those things. Participant 5

In contrast to the other four participants, participant 5 was not given any idea whether he was going to be offered a contract or not. Before the deselection had even occurred, Participant 5 is not as mentally ready to deal with the transition as the other participants. This is partly because he has not been given an opportunity to plan for the transition which could have been implemented as a pre-transition coping strategy. Wylleman, Lavallee and Alfermann (1999) suggest that a crisis-transition may be caused by emotional discomfort, such as doubt and fear. In relation to participant 5, the confusion and uncertainty of his career may have acted as a potential antecedent to a positive transition.

Although it doesn’t agree with the majority of the literature, when participants were asked about their immediate feelings after being released, participants were mostly in agreement that they experienced somewhat positive feelings. Most of the literature agrees with the statement that the transition period within sport is mostly related with negative feelings. For example, Pearson and Petitpas (1990) suggest that when student athletes move from a player to non-player it becomes a very challenging transition. Additionally, Zaichkowsky, Lipton, and Tucci (1997) work examined collegiate-student athletes leaving sport which resulted in 20 percent of young men and women experiencing emotional difficulties leaving sport. A large sample size of 274 athletes was examined, with participants stating a sense of loss, and emotional discomfort during transition. The results from this study however, don’t necessarily agree with this. Participants relayed that it was a release of pressure and an ‘opportunity’ to go elsewhere. For example, several of the participants highlight this below;
“In all honesty, when I left the club, I was sort of happy to leave, because I did feel I
didn’t deserve a chance there at the time, because there were players who were
doing really well. So I accepted the fact that I shouldn’t have been playing; whereas
when I went out on loan I did fairly well and thought to myself it was more of an
opportunity to put all my eggs in that basket, where I'm not just on loan for a month,
to go and actually play for football. So not as bad as I thought I would be.”  
*Participant 3*

“I think if you’d asked me in the first half of the season whether I’d be released, I
would have said ‘No chance, without a doubt’. In the second half of the season,
probably yes. It was at the stage where I wasn't enjoying my football because I
wasn't playing, and in myself, it was nice to have an opportunity to try to get football
elsewhere because I wasn't getting any.”  *Participant 2*

“Yes, that last month of that second season and being injured and having that
assessment hanging over your head, it was almost a relief.  But obviously a bit
upsetting, but a relief in that I could channel my energy into education and it was a
realisation then, from (club 1) downwards, so obviously I went to(club 2 and 3), and
there I didn’t put much effort in, it was (Club 1) down, and I thought I might as well
cut my ties really.”  *Participant 5*

These comments are more in line with Curtis and Ennis’ (1988) study which looked at
elite-level hockey players leaving competitive sport, and found that the players did not
experience any negative consequences after leaving high performance sport. The study
compared Canadian hockey players following the transition out of competitive sport, and
general members of the population. The results revealed no evidence of negative
consequences, as there was no difference in areas such as overall life satisfaction,
employment and marital status. The results from this study are very
similar to Nesti and Littlewoods (2011) work. For instance, they state that due to the high pressured and
volatile environment that football players are faced with, although they may face negative
emotions when leaving the game, they might also experience positive emotions. This
statement can be evident within the results of this study. For example, participants relay
positive feelings following the transition, for reasons such as a new career path, the
chance to test their ability at another level, or relief from the constant pressures.

In contrast, the last participant (1) explained his feelings of ‘Initial devastation’ as football
was everything, and all he had ever wanted to do. However, the participant also added
that it has worked out for the good in the long run.

“Initially devastation, because at the time, being that young as well, when you want to
progress and you get to that stage, everything’s all football. But then as soon as it
does happen and you get released, you just have to open your mind up in terms of what you're going to do and how you're going to go about it. As harsh as the system is, it probably worked out for me as a little blessing.  

Participant 1

4.4 Self-identity

Self-identity issues are heavily involved within the transition literature and can be clarified by Brewer et al. (1993) to be the degree to which individuals may identify themselves within the athletic role. During this section of the focus group, participants were asked to relay how they identified themselves before and after the deselection transition. Results were indicative that as a scholar or apprentice, you would not class yourself as a footballer alone as it feels like you are still in school due to the jobs that you are made to do day in day out. Furthermore, participants were in agreement with each other highlighting that there is always anxiety about a change of career path, which is down to the environment that the professional game is. For example, participant 4 suggested that;

“As an apprentice you do a little bit of schooling or a little bit of college, so then I’d say that as an apprentice you don’t really feel you’re a footballer because you're cleaning boots and you're cleaning changing rooms and you're in before the pros - basically you're just doing everything for the pros to have a great time! So I didn't anyway, I don't know if the lads are the same, but I didn’t really feel as if I was a pro until I actually signed pro.”

“I think to sign that first pro contract, the statistic that you’ll go on to sign another pro and another pro is pretty low, so for me although I’d signed a long-term pro, in the end I wouldn't have classed myself as a professional footballer until I was playing regularly somewhere week in, week out and considered a major part of a team somewhere. Other than that, I think you're always on the edge of – you could be going back into another route.”  

Participant 3

Having said this however, participants were again in agreement that despite not classing themselves as a footballer completely as an apprentice, they still pictured themselves as a ‘footballer’ more than they considered themselves to be anything else in their lives. When questioned about how the de-selection process affected their own self-identity, results differed for each participant. Participant 1 and 3 agreed in saying that the de-selection affected them hugely in terms of their identity, and settling to life away from football as it was everything to them whilst growing up. The quality of the transition can be affected by the strength of the athletic identity, as was portrayed in Hinitz (1988) study. Results found that ‘Gymnasts’ who strongly identified them with their role within the sport experienced a
difficult adjustment to career termination. Both participants however, took a different approach following the de-selection. Participant 1 began playing at university level, which affected the way he looked at himself, and has now resulted in him being able to view himself as part of the team, not just a footballer;

“Going from pro to university level, definitely influenced how I saw myself. Growing up it was always a professional approach to training and football and everything you do, just because you want to become better and develop yourself. I’d probably say it’s for the better, just because it’s made me more relaxed as a person and again, I’m able now not to identify myself as a footballer, but just as individual within the team. Participant 1

These results complied with Hinitz (1988) which concludes that an athlete with a high athletic identity will experience a more difficult transition period. Likewise, as previously mentioned, Fish Grove and Eklund’s (1997) study which explored the area of involuntary transitions took the approach of examining individuals who were selected, and not selected for an elite sport squad. Results proved that participants that weren’t selected suffered with a decreased identity, whereas the selected individuals maintained their identity.

In contrast to Fish et al,’s (1997) study, participant 3 explained how he needed to cut ties with the game at this point, as he had only ever pictured himself as a footballer, and he needed to identify himself as something else. In addition, he also added that until you cut ties with the game, you do not realise quite what you had;

“I knew I had to cut myself off it to get on and do other things, because I think otherwise if I’m dabbling and doing things, it brings back things about football that I don’t really want to feel. So I’ve just cut the ties with it and at the moment I’m happier without playing football, to be honest…. You don’t realise until you come out of it what you had.” Participant 3.

Coakley (1983) describes athletes who are heavily invested within their sports participation to be seen as ‘unidimensional’ people however as they cannot extend far beyond the boundaries of their sport, as they have few options. Moreover, the results of Grove, Lavalle and Gordon’s (1997) study suggested that athletes that overly identified themselves with their sport are most susceptible to a distressful transition. In relation to this study, although participant 1 experienced distress during the transition, he was able to immerse himself
upon a different path outside of elite sport as he is not seen to be a ‘unidimensional’
person. Participant 3 however found that he had to cut all ties with the game as he knew
he needed to break away from his ‘unidimensional’ construct.

Participants 2, 4, and 5 were indicative that although initially there was devastation, they
are now happier after leaving the professional game, and agree that they have developed
more as a person since leaving the game. Although participant 2 underlines that in terms
of his own self-identity, he is still unsure of where he wants to go.

“I think once I left professional football, I feel I'm happier as well. Even though I still
play semi-professional football that's almost a bit of fun now. I play football now
more for changing room banter and … I don’t know … almost as a hobby rather
than as a job.  Participant 4

“I think as a person since leaving professional football I've developed more and I'd
probably say I'm happier now as well. In terms of my self-identity, I'm still not 100%
sure what I want to do yet, which is a little bit daunting.  Participant 2

In relation to Fish, Grove, and Eklund’s (1997) work, these participants heavily identified
themselves with football, which if results were to comply, would lead to participants identity
decreasing. Additionally, the work of Grandisson and Vezina (1997) found that retired elite
athletes held a significantly lower athletic identity than active elite athletes. However,
although these participants agreed that there was initial devastation, they agreed that they
are happier that they can now enjoy the sport they once called a job, and heavily identified
themselves within.

4.5 Social Support

In terms of the support that was given to each individual following the de-selection,
participants highlighted that the immediate source of support was given through family and
friends which is one of the four proposed support networks by Milardo (1992). This came
in the form of emotional support, by the family and friends just being there for them.
Participants were again indicative that their specific need when leaving the professional
game was more in the form of emotional support, which was matched by the close network
of friends and family;
“Family and my girlfriend at the time just provided the majority of support. And friends that was the kind of support I could fall back on.”  
Participant 5

“It’s a whole lifestyle change at the end of the day isn’t it, so you used to have your routine obviously training so much a week, playing all these matches and then suddenly you’ve left it all and focusing on other things, that perhaps didn’t seem as important before, it’s a big change and the support around you is vital to make that transition go smoothly.”  
Participant 2

In relation to Holt and Hoar’s (2006) model of social support, within the social support dimensions, the structural social support network in this case was mainly provided by family and friends. In addition, the functional received support was given mainly in the form of emotional support. In this case, the emotional support provided by family and friends was quoted by be ‘vital’ to make the transition smooth. This statement concurs with Lakey and Cohen’s (2000) suggestion that the beneficial effects of social support will protect an individual from the harmful effect of stress. In terms of Taylor and Lavallee (2010) statement, a career transition can be put together as stressors such as financial, social, psychological, and physical stressors. In this case the stressor directly related to psychological stressors of being released from the professional game. Cutrona and Russell’s (1990) theory of optimal matching proposes five types of social resources that can be given to the recipient. In this case, emotional support was the resource that was mainly matched to the specific needs of the recipients, and implemented by the family and friends of the recipient.

It could also be found that financial support was vital to some of the participants. As participants 1 to 4 were full time professionals, they were entitled to financial support once leaving professional football by certain organisations. This complies with the work of Thomas and Ermler (1988) that suggests that sporting institutions should offer support to athletes during their transition phase. If implemented, this would allow them, to pursue any other career path such as education that they may follow. However, when asked about how much support the club offered, all participants were in firm agreement that clubs need to do more for the player after releasing them. Participants mentioned that clubs could maybe provide financial support to go towards education, or even finding alternative routes or clubs within the game.

“I think if you’ve been at a club, say for 10 years, I don’t think they should just be allowed to release you and not try to help you in a new career. Paying maybe half
towards a university course would be nothing to them and I think that could work. “

Participant 4

“If you have to leave that club, it’s the opposite case to them releasing you, then you are in debt to that club compensation-wise, so it should technically be the reverse, when they release you they should be indebted to you to a certain extent.”

Participant 3

“I agree that the clubs should help you out but I suppose if they do help you out it’s going to look – especially with a lot of clubs – if you are successful it’s not going to look as good for them because if you are going to look good at the club you’ve gone to it’s not good to look for them for releasing you in the first place. “

Participant 1

Sinclair and Orlick (2003) have underlined that sports organisations need to do more to help aid athletes during athletic retirement, and in this case transition. This may come in terms of tangible aid, in the form of financial help which is underlined by participants as an area that needs to be addressed as not enough is being done by their parent clubs. Also mentioned is that seminars and resource centres need to be put in place to aid athletes in transition. Petitpas and Champagne (2007) looked into practical considerations for sports career transitions. The chapter looked at planning concerns and considerations as they are an important part of an athlete’s transition. They state that programme planning is an important part of a psychologist’s work which will determine the success of a transition. In relation to this present study, when asked about how much informational support participants received, participant 3 alluded to the notation that it needs to be done yourself as you don’t receive it from the professional side of things.

“I think a lot of it you chase up yourself, to be honest. You have to be proactive and if you’re not then you can fall by the wayside I think. I was lucky in that there were people who had joined previously that I was in contact with and not just here, but maybe another university, and they helped me out so you did that through your friends that you knew, more so than from the professional side helping you.”

Again in relation to Sinclair and Orlick’s (2003) statement that sports organisations need to do more for athletes in transition, Participant 1 posed the question to participant 3, asking whether his parent club did anything to help him find a new club, generating the response of ‘No, that’s just a saying isn’t it?.’ This answer agrees with the statement that sports organisations need to do more to aid athletes in transition, whether it is to support them
during their transition within the game, or to help them make a successful transition to a new career path.

4.6 Summary

In summary of the key findings from the study, it is clear to see that due to the harsh environment of professional football, the transition out of it can produce positive feelings. During the early career of the participants, stressors such as constant pressure to perform, strong commitment, and travelling distance were all key contributors to the way in which the participants felt about the de-selection period.

Additionally Participant 1 outlined that there was initial devastation following the deselection, as it was all that he ever wanted to do, however he added that in the long run it worked out for the best. In terms of the Self-identity of participants, results varied within participants. Participant 1 and 3 were affected in terms of their identity as all they had ever wanted to do was be a footballer, and they heavily identified themselves with that. Participants 2, 4 and 5 however were in agreement that they were happier after the deselection as they were able to identify themselves with a different career path.

The role of social support networks was consistent in making the deselection easier for participants. Emotional support from family and friends was a key factor as it made the transition ‘smoother’. The use of financial support (tangible aid) was also a key support network that arose within the focus group. Participants agreed that certain footballing organisations were a great help when leaving the game by providing financial help, however it could be understood that participants believe that the club needs to do more when releasing a player. Participants were in agreement that they did not receive any tangible aid or informational support from the club that released them, and this would have been an area of support that would have potentially made the transition a slightly easier process.
Chapter Five
Conclusion
5.1 Main Findings

The aim of the study was to gain a more in-depth understanding of career transitions and the deselection process in football. To begin, the findings from the study purported there are different factors prior to an involuntary transition that can influence how an athlete deals with it. Prior to the deselection, participants alluded to the constant pressure to perform, and travelling difficulties which made their career a tough experience before the deselection occurred which may have had an influence on how they adapted to the transition.

Although participants stated that the deselection process was a difficult time for them, and initially devastating, it was evident that positive feelings were experienced as a result of the transition. Through the research findings it can be argued that there are various reasons for these feelings. Indeed, it can be highlighted that individuals suggested that there was a relief of commitment and pressure, and the chance to undertake a new career path. Likewise, results suggested that the deselection will affect a ‘unidimensional’ person, and complied with Coakley (1983) who suggests that athletes who are heavily invested within their sports participation are seen as ‘unidimensional’ people and cannot extend far beyond the boundaries of their sport. The transitional process however, may not affect the self-identity of an athlete. In light of this study, three participants stated that they were happy following the deselection process as it gave them an opportunity to identify themselves with another career path, or activity than football. The role of social support played a key part in the transition of the 5 participants. Emotional support became the most contributing factor, with participants stating the emotional support of family and friends was the most beneficial within the Support network. Moreover, financial support was noted to be another instrumental area of support for participants, which was implemented by certain footballing organisations. It was revealed however, that participants believe that the club that has released them needs to do more in supporting them through their transition, whether it be with financial help, or informational support regarding a new career path.

In light of the research question, it is clear from the results of the study that the role of social support plays a key part in assisting athletes in transition out of professional football. When relating the present study to the literature review, it agrees with Petrie’s (1993) statement that social support is one of the most important factors whilst dealing with a
negative transition. The research question also looked to explore the possible antecedents to a positive and negative transition. Results provided further evidence to Blinde and Greenforder’s (1985) suggestion that transition out of elite sport may come with positive feelings due to a relief of pressure. Moreover, the literature review suggests that an athlete that is overly identified with the athletic role will experience somewhat more negative feelings during transition out of elite sport. Results of this study however, suggest that the deselection from elite sport may be a chance to start a new career path, and identify themselves with something new.

5.2 Strengths and Weaknesses

Due to the purposeful sampling in relation to the study, the sample chosen enabled rich and resolute information in regards to the present study. Each participant came from a slightly varied background in terms of their footballing career, with each participant’s transition varying to some degree. This diverse sample ensured that the information was detailed enough for an in-depth analysis of the transition process. Likewise, the method of data collection adopted (Focus Group) allowed the researcher to explore the participants own experience, and gain a deep understanding of each issue that arose. Moreover, the focus group allowed participants to recall their own knowledge by listening to other participant’s answers, and additional questions were prompted by participants throughout the focus group due to their own personal interest within the topic. The Qualitative method was adopted to focus on a small number of the population, which allowed research to explore personal issues prior to the transition. Lawthom and Tindall (2011) described this as an ability to explore the variability of human experience. The sample size however was a certain weakness of the study. Due to the small sample size of 5, it is difficult to relate the findings to the whole population, and in this case, all footballers in transition out of the professional game. For example, transition research such as Lavallee et al.’s (1997) work used a sample size of 48 when looking into career termination and adjustment difficulties. Additionally Sinclair and Orlick’s (1993) study exploring positive transitions adopted a quantitative approach with the use of questionnaires.
5.3 Practical Implications and Future Research

Following the present study, a future area for research could be looking more directly at apprentice footballers, to distinguish how a footballing apprenticeship affects your self-identity. During the present study, it was identified that players don't really see themselves as a footballer as an apprentice due to the environment and reality of the job a player has at apprentice level.

Again, this study backs the theory of Blinde & Greendorfer (1985) that claims that athletes may actually feel positive feelings due to the relief of constant pressures whilst in transition out of sport. This may provide another possible area for research which can examine the possible antecedents to a successful transition out of professional football. This study seeks to understand how the transition affected participants, therefore future research should explore the reasons for a successful transition out of professional football, building on certain results of the present study. Additionally, a further area of research may explore the nature of a professional football apprenticeship in order to suggest possible ways to assist athletes that are not offered a professional contract. Parker (2005) suggests that the reason for the lack of empirical research into players experience in professional football is due to the closed environment. Furthermore, it is important that this experience of players is looked into to determine potential methods to consider in transition. Methods such as potential programmes may need to be put in place to assist a negative transition, or even possible strategies to ensure the transition is more of a positive experience.
Reference List


Appendices
Appendix A
Participant Consent Form
Participation consent form

Title of Project: ‘How does social support contribute to the transition from professional football’

Name of Researcher: Elliot Scotcher

Please tick if confirmed.

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet, I have been given information, understand the process and inform my consent

2. I understand my right to withdraw from the study at any time.

3. I also understand that the relationship with Cardiff Met will not be affected if this happens

4. I understand that information from the Focus group will be later used for a study, although my name will not be used.

5. I agree to take part in the Focus groups

__________________________________
Name of Participant

________________________________________________
Signature of Participant

____________________________
Date

________________________________________________
Name of researcher
Appendix B

Participant Information Sheet
Information Sheet

Project Title: ‘How does social support contribute to the transition from professional football’

Background

This study will look into the transition of young footballers, out of the professional game after being released, or not offered a contract extension. In further examination the study will draw upon how the social support of others contributed to the transition period, and will seek to explain the difficulties of the transition period. The study will adopt a qualitative method of a focus group, in order to explain your own personal experience.

Your participation in the research project

Due to you past experience within professional football, and either being released out of the professional game, or not being offered a contract extension, you are eligible for the study.

Potential risks

There aren’t any potential risks as long as you are comfortable with participating in the Focus group. Confidentiality is informed.

Your rights

Joining the DASH programme does not mean that you give up any legal rights. It is unlikely that something will go wrong however, UWIC fully indemnifies its staff, and participants are covered by its insurance.

Focus Group results

The Focus Groups will be recorded, transcribed, and used within a study, in order to find out about the transition period, and how social support effected it. The useful, and purposeful information will be extracted and used within the result and discussion section of the study. Participant’s names will be kept confidential at all times

Privacy

Once given consent, participants who take part in the Focus groups will not be called under their own name. Participants will be given a subject number (i.e.) Subject 1-5, and also given code names, in order to keep the study confidential. In addition the background of the participant such as the club they played for will also be kept confidential.
Appendix C
Interview Guide
Hello, my name is Elliot Scotcher from Cardiff Metropolitan University. Firstly I was like to show my appreciation for your participation in my study. As I am in my final year of study, I am required to complete an independent research project, and I have decided to examine the area of career transitions, as explain within the information sheet.

The reasoning for this focus group in the research certain issues that have become apparent within the literature of career transitions. In addition, the main focus is to increase the awareness and understanding of the deselection process in football, and in more detail the process of being released from the pro game.

Before we begin, is there anything that you are unclear about? Any questions? If not we will proceed.

The first set of questions provided are intended to find out about your footballing career before we look more directly at the transition that occurred…

**Section 1 - Introductory questions**

Could you please provide a brief description of your footballing career?


At what age did you become interested in football?

From what age did you realise you wanted to be a professional footballer?

At what age were you picked up by a professional football team?

How was it being at a professional club?

*Probe – Anxiety issues?*

*Probe - Did you cope with the travelling?*
What positive experiences did you encounter during your time at a professional club?

Probe - Standout Moments? Debuts?

Probe – Why was this a significant moment in your career

Did you think about a contingency plan or was football the only option at the time?

**Deselection**

Within the transition literature, deselection is seen as the failure to progress to the next highest level of elite competition (Lavallee, 2007). In relation to this study, the deselection process either being released from the professional game, or not being offered a new contract.

This section will focus on the transition out of the game

Did you have an incline that you weren’t going to be offered a contract or was it a shock to you? Probe - Were you prepared for this?

How did you take the news that you weren’t going to be offered a contract?  
*Can you expand on this anymore? Feelings? Emotions?*

Following the news, did you have any trials or other clubs to go to?  
Probe – If yes, what was it like?  
Probe – If no, why?

Did the transition affect your everyday life?  
Probe - Positive changes? Sense of relieved pressure?  
Probe - Negative changes?

**Self-Identity**

Having discussed your deselection from the game, I would now like to ask you some questions related to your hobbies and your Self-Identity.
Brewer et al, (1993) define Self-identity within sport as the degree to which an individual identifies with the athletic role

Firstly, whilst you were at a professional club, did you identify yourself as a footballer alone, or were there other things you identified yourself with?

Do you have any other hobbies outside of football that you may identify yourself with?

Many athletes attach themselves hugely to the sport and identify themselves heavily within it, how did the deselection process effect you in terms of your own self-identity?

*Probe – why was it effected?*

**Social support**

Rosenfeld et al, (1989) describes the availability of social support within sport to reduce uncertainty, and help aid any physical and mental recovery.

Did the use of social support contribute and help the transition?

If yes……..

What types of received social support did you receive? (E.g Emotional support, social integration, esteem support, tangible aid, and informational support

*Probe - Financial support? PFA Grant?*

- *Informational Support? League football Education?*

- *Support from Family? Friends? Teammates?*

What type of support did you rely on the most during your transition?

How did this support make you feel?

Did the Support you received match your specific needs?

*Probe – Financial? Informational? Esteem?*

How did you perceive the support that was given to you?

How did this support contribute to your transition?