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B.Sc. (Hons) Psychology

Final Year Project

**An exploration into young active athletes' perspectives  
about their future retirement from sports**

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# **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own independent investigation under the supervision of my tutor. The various sources to which I am indebted are clearly indicated. This dissertation has not been accepted in substance for any other degree, and is not being submitted concurrently for any other degree.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The majority of research about retirement from sports is based on experiences of retired athletes. There is little research about athletic retirement with young active athletes. The aim of this study is to explore how and/or if young active athletes consider the end of their careers and plan for their eventual retirement from sport. Semi-structured interviews have been done with four student cricketers. The interview data were analysed by using thematic analysis. The results show that the young athletes are aware of retirement and its impacts. Even though they understood the benefit of pre-retirement planning, most of them did not engage with pre-retirement. They thought that it was too early to think about retirement at this stage of career development. However, retirement could happen at any stages of their career development process. It would be beneficial if they could have pre-retirement plans independent of which stage they were in their athletic career development.

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**CHAPTER ONE**

**INTRODUCTION**

Athletic career development is part of lifespan development. It involves four main stages: initiation, development, mastery and discontinuation (i.e. retirement) (Wylleman, Alfermann & Lavallee, 2004). Athletes started their careers at a very young age. Generally, they reached the development stage when they were adolescents. The mastery and discontinuation stages would take place in their adulthood. The mastery stage received most attention because it marks the success of an athlete. Most athletes dream to get to this stage. Eventually, the time will come that athletes stop playing and change to other positions. The discontinuation stage is the longest period in an athletic career. It tends to happen at around 30 years of age and lasts for a long period of time (Wylleman, Alfermann & Lavallee, 2004). Therefore, it is an important period, which needs to be examined. Athletic retirement takes place in this stage. In recent years, athletic retirement has been gained more and more attention from scholars. Some of the most common topics are theories of retirement from sports, factors related to athletic retirement, impacts of retirement from sports and pre-retirement planning. These studies do not only enrich the knowledge of retirement from sports, but also develop necessary interventions and supports for athletes before and after retirement (Lavallee, 2000; Williams & Krane, 2015).

### **1.1 Theories of Retirement from Sports**

Most of theories agree that retirement from sports is a stage in athletic career development. Whether athletes decide to stay in sports but change to different roles, such as coaching, supporting or managing, or step outside the sporting world and do something completely different, they will go through a retirement process. (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007; Wylleman, Alfermann & Lavallee, 2004; Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993; Taylor, Ogilvie & Lavallee, 2006; Williams & Krane, 2015).

Retirement from sports could be examined as career termination, retirement or career transition (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007; Wylleman, Alfermann & Lavallee, 2004; Williams & Krane, 2015). Whether athletic retirement from sports should be examined similarly with retirement from other occupations is arguable. Retirement from professional sports is also a retirement from an occupation, therefore, it could be paralleled with retirement theories such as thanatological models, social gerontological models and transition models (Lavallee, 2000; Williams & Krane, 2015). Thanatological models suggested that retirement from sports could result in social death, in which, retired athletes feel isolated and rejected from people who they used

to work with. Social gerontological models focus on the relationship between aging and society. Some of the models suggest that retirement from sports was a step of athletes taking a different role in the society. These two types of models examined athletic retirement as a single event (Wylleman, Alfermann & Lavalley, 2004). Transition models have been applied more widely for athletic retirement. It examined retirement from sports as a process in lifespan development or a transition in career development (Lavalley, 2000; Williams & Krane, 2015). Transition models allowed researchers to characterise factors which influenced in pre-, during- and post-athletic-retirement stages. Thus, it suggests interventions and support to improve the quality of retirement (Lavalley, 2000; Williams & Krane, 2015; Wylleman, Alfermann & Lavalley, 2004).

Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) developed a transition model for retirement from sports, which is one of the most adapted athletic retirement models. It was presented as the Conceptual Model of Adaptation to Retirement among Athletes (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). In this model, athletic career termination went through a five-stage process: retirement causes, factors related to adaptation, available resources, quality of athletic retirement (healthy or distress). In the first stage, the causes of career transition could be age, deselection, injury or choices. Deselection and injury seem to generate more negative reactions with athletes (Stoltenburg, Kamphoff & Bremer, 2011; Webb, Nasco, Riley & Headrick, 1998). In the second stage, factors related to adaptation include developmental experiences, self-identity, perceived-control, social identity and tertiary contributors. In the third stage, available resources involve coping strategies, social support and preretirement planning. In the fourth stage, quality of career termination is about athletes' reactions and attitudes upon their retirement. The elements in the first three stages could define what happened in the fourth stage (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). The quality of retirement could either be stressful or healthy. In the fifth stage, interventions would take place in a stressful retirement, which consists of treatments for financial, social, physical or psychological issues. These five stages do not necessarily proceed step by step. They tend to influence each other throughout the retirement period.

## **1.2 Impacts of Retirement from Sports**

Historically, athletic career termination was usually associated with its negative influences, such as trauma or distress (Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993; Blinde & Stratta, 1992).

Over the years, a great deal of research highlights that retirement from sports can influence both positively and negatively on athletes' mental health and quality of life (Martin, Fogarty & Albion, 2014; Park, Lavalley & Tod, 2013). Negative effects include alcohol and drug abuse, participation in crime, identity crises, anxiety, depression and other emotional disorders (Stambulova, Stephan & Jäphag, 2007; Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007; Wylleman, Alfermann & Lavalley, 2004). Higher risk of suicide could be considered as another negative effect. However, a study with ex-cricketers suggested that there was no difference between retired cricketers and people in the same age groups in suicide rate (Shah, Sava-Shah, Wijeratne & Draper, 2016). Positive effects comprise feeling free, happy, relieved and relaxed (Stambulova, Stephan & Jäphag, 2007; Alfermann, Stambulova & Zemaityte, 2004; Martin, Fogarty & Albion, 2014). Roberts, Mullen, Evans and Hall's (2015) qualitative research with retired cricketers gives an insight into the view of athletes on retirement. They highlight that athletes experienced negative emotions throughout their career transition such as a sense of loss, regret and bitterness. These effects could be viewed as a measure of the quality of retirement among athletes, in which, negative effects indicate a distress retirement and positive effects indicate a healthy retirement (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994).

### **1.3 Factors related to Retirement from Sports**

Age is one the main reasons leading to retirement (Henretta, Chan & O'rand, 1992). This was also found in athletic retirement from sports (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994; Park, Lavalley & Tod, 2013; Rintaugu & Mwisukha, 2011). However, athletes started training from a very young age. When they retired, they were in their 20s or 30s. This can be considered young when compared to retirement from other occupations (Park, Lavalley & Tod, 2013; Martin, Fogarty & Albion, 2014; Williams & Krane, 2015). Moreover, age could be an influential factor in retirement orientation, in which, older people tend to focus on achievable goals for their retirement plans and younger people prefer expected goals for their retirement plans (van Schie, Dellaert & Donkers, 2015). Even though this research had been conducted with people who were 40 years old and above, it presented how different age groups considered their retirement differently. Thus, athletes, who retired before 40 years old, could perceive their retirement differently from others.

Some of the factors in the model of Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) could be activated before retirement actually happened, such as retirement by choice (i.e. voluntary retirement),

self-identity, perceived-control, coping strategies and social support. In other words, they had been developed in career planning or pre-retirement planning (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994, Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993; Taylor, Ogilvie & Lavalley, 2006; Williams & Krane, 2015; Alfermann, Stambulova & Zemaityte, 2004). They did not only influenced pre-retirement planning, but also impacted on each other which lead to a positive impact on the quality of retirement. Athletes who retired voluntary tended to have a sense of control over their retirement (Alfermann, Stambulova & Zemaityte, 2004). This feeling of control would lead to a positive retirement outcome (Taylor, Ogilvie & Lavalley, 2006; Martin, Fogarty & Albion, 2014). Rintaugu and Mwisukha (2011) suggested that athletes, who retired voluntarily, might plan for their retirement and have a more focused coping strategy. One of the most common coping strategies of retired football players was entering other positions related to sports (Rintaugu & Mwisukha, 2011). This could be considered as a common coping strategy among retired athletes (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007; Wylleman, Alfermann & Lavalley, 2004) and is one of the ways through which retired athletes maintain their connection with sports (Lally, 2007).

#### **1.4 Pre-retirement Planning**

Career planning has a strong correlation with increasing positive effects and decreasing negative effects (Demulier, Le Scanff & Stephan, 2013). Both Alfermann, Stambulova and Zemaityte's (2004) study with German, Lithuanian and Russian athletes and Stambulova, Stephan and Jäphag's (2007) study with French and Swedish athletes show positive effects of career planning on athletic retirement. These studies suggest that career planning could improve athletes' career development across cultures. The model of adaptation to retirement among athletes also points out that the quality of athletic retirement has a strong dependency with retirement preparation, in other words, career planning (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Erpič, Wylleman and Zupančič's (2004) research reflected that voluntary retirement, perceived control and retirement planning reduced difficulties of sport retirement (i.e. psychological difficulties, psychosocial difficulties, occupational difficulties and organisation of post-sports life). Martin, Fogarty and Albion (2014) also highlighted that retirement planning could predict a positive quality of retirement and life satisfaction.

Athletic retirement plans seem to be more beneficial for athletes if it happens before their retirement (Demulier, Le Scanff & Stephan, 2013). Stambulova, Stephan and

Jäphag (2007) argue that athletes, who planned their retirement in advance, were less likely to have negative emotional reactions and were able to access financial and psychological support from families, colleagues and friends.

There is evidence that active athletes are unwilling to engage with retirement and pre-retirement planning activities (Roberts et al., 2015). Even though retired athletes could have more positive emotions related with retirement planning, there was a possibility that active athletes might not like to engage with pre-retirement planning, because it made them feel negatively about retirement. Shouksmith (1983) suggested that people's attitudes changed after exposure to pre-retirement planning. After the exposure, most of them were more positive towards retirement, however, there were some who became more negative about the retirement idea. This might indicate that pre-retirement planning could influence attitudes towards retirement in either directions depending on the person's perspective. Moreover, people were more likely to engage with pre-retirement planning when they were getting older (Fillenbaum, 1971). Consequently, athletes, who were young and active, might be less likely to engage with post athletic career ideas and activities. It could be a result of young athletes seeing themselves at the development stage of their career (Wylleman, Alfermann & Lavallee, 2004). They might think that they are still far away from the retirement stage. Additionally, Fraser and Fogarty (2011) found that athletic age and the level of difficulty in career decision-making correlated negatively. The difficulty level would decrease with the increase of athletic age. Therefore, young athletes could find it more difficult to facing important career decisions, such as retirement or pre-retirement planning.

Support could enhance pre-retirement planning (Stambulova, Stephan & Jäphag, 2007). The model of Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) identified support as an important element which influenced the quality of retirement and was an intervention for stressful retirement. Retired athletes, who were offered support such as counselling and skills training, saw retirement more optimistic (Lavallee, 2005). Other types of support included social support, institutional support and internal support also impacted on quality of retirement (Wylleman, Alfermann & Lavallee, 2004; Roberts et.al, 2015). A qualitative research with retired cricketers showed that they felt lack of support from their teams and institutes. They regretted not to talk with their teammates about retirement. Most of the support was external (Roberts et.al, 2015). Athletes might not

engage with pre-retirement planning because they did not get support inside a sport environment.

### **1.5 The study's aim**

The majority of research about retirement from sports is concerned with 'life after sport' (Park, Lavalley & Tod, 2013). In other words, athletic retirement research was mostly based on experience of retired athletes. There is little research on retirement from sports with young active athletes and how it affects them (Park, Lavalley & Tod, 2013). Therefore, this study would like to focus on young active athletes.

In light of previous literature, it would seem that young active athletes' attitudes towards retirement and pre-retirement planning was not positive. They did not actively plan their retirement. However, whether they were aware of the positive effects of pre-retirement planning on their retirement was unclear. How this awareness influenced athletic attitudes and behaviours on retirement needed to be explored. On the other hand, it was a possibility that sport organisations did not support athletic retirement. Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore how and/or if young athletes consider the end of their careers and plan their eventual retirement from sport. A qualitative approach was chosen because it gives detailed insights into young athletes' perceptions on retirement and pre-retirement planning. This study could provide an in-depth and personal view into retirement attitudes of young active athletes.

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. It was suitable for students or new researchers to practice. It is also able to underpin the deep meaning of the data, not only describe the data surface. Thematic analysis allows for the richness of data to be preserved, and the differences and similarities to be highlighted across data sets (Clarke & Braun, 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2014).

**CHAPTER TWO**

**METHODS**

The purpose of this study is to explore into perceptions and opinions of young athletes about their future retirement from sports.

## **2.1 Design**

A qualitative approach of semi-structured interview was chosen. It was suitable for the purpose of the study. It will give individuals a unique voice and also capture the richness of social context surrounding them (Coolican, 2014; Braun & Clarke, 2013).

## **2.2 Sample**

Participants who took part in the research had to meet the inclusion criteria, including playing sports for an official club and over 18 years of age. Four male participants were recruited in South Wales. They all played cricket professionally for a same team. Their ages were around 18 to 20 years of age. This is a snowball sample with a friend of the researcher.

## **2.3 Materials**

The interviews were audio-recorded on a smartphone for later transcription.

## **2.4 Ethics Approval**

Approval for the study was granted by Cardiff School of Sport and Health Sciences Ethics Panel, Cardiff Metropolitan University.

## **2.5 Procedure**

Semi-structure interviews were used to collect data, with an interview schedule. This interview schedule explored athletic visions and emotions of participants' future retirement from sports. It is based on the Conceptual Model of Adaptation to Retirement among Athletes (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994), which included the progress of sport career retirement, causes and effects of internal and external factors on the success of athletic retirement. However, the researcher extended the interview schedule to explore some deep or unique points during the interview. Interview questions included:

How long do you think you will be an athlete?

How do you imagine your future retirement?

How does thinking about retirement affect your performance?

Have you ever planned your future retirement?

Do you think it is necessary to plan your future retirement from sport?

Why? or Why not?

This study was piloted with the first participant. The transcript of the pilot study was included in the data because it was a specialist subject. The interviews took place in quiet areas inside the university campus. Participants and interviewer spent some time to get to know each other before the interview started. The participant information sheets (Appendix 1) and consent forms (Appendix 2) were given to the interviewees before the interview. They had time to read and consider their participation. The interviews were anonymous – participants' names were changed in the transcript. The interview records were kept in a password-secured computer, which only the researcher and members of the supervisory team could access. Participants had the right to withdraw from the interview at any time or to remove statements from the transcript. They were offered a copy of the transcript and had four weeks to change their mind before the analysis was conducted.

## **2.6 Method of analysis**

Thematic analysis is appropriate for this research. Braun and Clarke (2014) point out that thematic analysis had a pure and simple process. The data was analysed in six steps in Braun and Clarke's (2006) paper. The first step was familiarising with data by transcribing and repeated reading the interview data. The second step was producing initial codes. Codes were generated from interesting features, which appeared to recur across the data set. The third step was looking for potential themes. Themes were formed by collapsing initial codes into groups. The fourth step was reviewing and refining themes, in which, meanings and connections between themes were considered carefully to create the most adequate representation of the data. The fifth step was generating themes and their definitions. At this point, each theme was finally determined by re-considering its meaning and relation with other themes. The final step writing the report, where the data analysis was presented in written language. It is a representation of how the researcher made sense of the data. In this process, codes and themes were the materials for the researcher to see patterns in the data and develop a deep understanding about participant's perceptions, experiences or social context (Clarke & Braun, 2017).

**CHAPTER THREE**

**RESULTS**

This study was an exploration into perceptions of young athletes about their future retirement from sports. After analysing interview transcripts, there were three main that themes emerged from the data: Retirement prospect, Adjustment to future retirement and Retirement awareness (Table 1).

Table 1. Themes extracted from transcripts of young athletes about their perceptions of future retirement from sports

<b><u>Main themes</u></b>	<b><u>Subordinate themes</u></b>	<b><u>Relevant quotes</u></b>
<b>Retirement Prospect</b>	Career Expectation	<i>Andrew: "Where we want to be playing as much as we can, get into high level as we can."</i>
	Definition of Retirement	<i>Sean: "I don't call it retirement. I call it retirement like after you play your full career."</i>
<b>Adjustment to Future Retirement</b>	Reasons for Retirement	<i>Kyle: "I could get injuries and leave like I said tomorrow."</i>
	Degree of Control	<i>Kyle: "I will make the right decision going to leave sports."</i>
	Attachment to Sports	<i>Andrew: "I want to make sure that I'm in the sport, in sporting environment."</i>
<b>Retirement Awareness</b>	Attitudes towards Retirement	<i>Danny: "It'll be a bit sad the career is over."</i>
	Planning Intention	<i>Sean: "Why I'm not plan, cause I'm too young yeah, too young to plan."</i>

### **Retirement prospect**

This main theme reflected the perceptions of participants about their future career, which related to their opinions on an "ideal" retirement from sport. It included two subordinate themes: Career expectation and Definition of retirement.

#### ***Career expectation***

All participants seemed to have a clear vision about who they would become. Generally, their visions were optimistic. There was a similar pattern in their career

expectation. It was three stages in career development: development, peak and ending. They saw themselves in the first stage now, which was far away from the final stage. The second stage or the peak period received most of their attention and planning. The final stage would be when the retirement process started. Consequently, retirement was the less expected thing in their career.

*Andrew: "Um, yeah. It's, I guess it's something [retirement] that I haven't really thought about because I'm saying only starting my career, as I said I want to be playing for as long as I can."*

Retirement from sports was seen as a normal career pathway that should happen at a specific time. It was a norm that cricketers would stop playing at a certain age. In other words, there was an expected age for athletes to retire, which was a part of their concept of career development. Therefore, participants assumed that their career could not continue around that age. It showed that the concept of retirement from sports related closely with the concept of age in sports career development.

*Danny: "Um, I think generally in cricket tend to retire from their mid-30s onwards. So I think the retirement will sort of come, I'll see with no injury or anything, it will come around that time. That when I'm most think about it."*

The age-related feature of retirement could explain why they viewed retirement from sports as a career transition. It was different from others, who could fully stop working after retirement. Athletes would have another job or another life after they stopped playing.

*Sean: "Uhm, I say it's a transition yeah. Um you're still 30s, you're only 39, 30s, you still got a lot of your life, don't you. You still do a lot with your life, yeah."*

### **Definition of retirement**

Most of participants made a clear cut between retirement and "drop out". They were both stopping playing cricket professionally, but if it happened before their peak time, it would not be labelled retirement. An "ideal" retirement from sports would only happen after athletes reached a professional level. Only one participant considered the potential of "a sudden retirement" before his peak. Retirement seemed to be a privilege

for professional athletes and a positive result of a successful career. Therefore, these young cricketers did not think that retirement was within their reach at this moment.

*Sean: "Oh, I don't think, I don't call it retirement. I call it retirement like after you play your full career or even you play a good sting of your career and then you have to retire due to injuries."*

Most of the vision of future retirement was associated with a successful career. It was seen as a product of a success in sports, but not as a retirement itself. It reflected that these young athletes did not consider retirement as a separate stage in their career development. They saw it as a part of their accomplishment.

*Danny: "I think if you have a career and you pretty certain that you're gonna be a longest one, one that you could, you know, use as a circumstance something else and yeah I think you have to have years of planning go into it. Um but if any of short career than I wouldn't even consider retirement. I think it's just something you dwell in and didn't really work out so you went to something else."*

### **Adjustment to future retirement**

The above themes showed a promising picture of future retirement, this main theme revealed the "reality" of retirement and how the young athletes adjust their views around it. This theme was constructed by three subordinate themes: Reasons for retirement, Degree of control and Attachment to sports.

#### ***Reasons for retirement***

Even though age was a measure of time for retirement from sports, there were direct factors, which triggered retirement progress, such as injuries, decline in performance and loss of interest. Injury was a recurrent issue, which impacted on athletes not only in the future, but also in the present. Injuries could trigger retirement at anytime, but decline in performance and loss of interest would happen later in life.

*Andrew: "And of course it's one of those things that's retirement it will happen and you never know, maybe the next day you get injured and then it's an injury that means that you can't play again."*

Decline in performance was the main reason for future retirement. Athletes "normally" retire because of it. They realised that playing sports professionally was mentally and

physically stressful. It would push their body to a limit, which they could not cope with anymore when reaching a particular age. That was the mark of retirement.

*Kyle: "I watched a lot of interviews of cricketers and why they retired and you know most of them say they just woke up one day, um Michael Vaughan play for England, captain of England, ..... and his body was exhausted ..... he just thought why I am still playing ..... I think that's mine when I ended would be very similar to that."*

### **Degree of control**

This theme reflected how some of young cricketers positioned themselves within the retirement progress. They saw retirement as an unstoppable and unavoidable stage in their career development. It could be due to age, injuries, performance and interest, things they could not control. They had to accept retirement as a part of their career. It seemed like they tried to make sense of the unavoidable aspect of retirement by making it more predictable and controllable. Retirement would be their choice. They would decide on how and when it would happen. By taking control of the retirement process, they perceived retirement from sports more acceptable and manageable.

*Kyle: "Retiring obviously comes someday. I can't tell you when that day will be, um, but yes, it has to happen and I think I will make the right decision going to leave sports."*

### **Attachment to sports**

Four participants felt attached to with their sports. Retirement did not mean that they would break this attachment completely. They all hoped to stay within the sporting world after retirement. It was also a way to secure their current attachment with sports. They realised retirement would potentially loosen it. By having an opportunity to bond with sports again, it made the concept of retirement more tolerable.

*Danny: "Umm hopefully, I have a successful career and I can go back and do some sort of something related to sport still. Um whether that'll be coaching or something like kind of physical therapy that's kind of thing, apart from that I'm more like to stay within the world of sport."*

The attachment with sports highly related to retirement perception of the participants. Most participants mentioned pressure of playing sports professionally. It affected

negatively on their mental and physical well-being. Taking breaks from sports would give them chance to recover and release stress. Breaks meant getting away from sports for a while, but it was different from stopping completely, in other words, retirement from sports. Even though they liked to take breaks, it never meant quitting to them. They seemed to relate breaks with retirement, which could impact on their bonds with sports. To ensure this attachment, they had a tendency to clarify the difference between taking breaks and retirement within themselves and to others.

*Andrew: "Um so I feel it's definitely important to have that break, and um just to refresh a bad state. Um because if you're doing it 12 months of the year, I don't feel, I think you just burn out very quickly and then you just lose lose that enjoyment of the game that you can't have."*

### **Retirement awareness**

There was a dissociation between acknowledging retirement and being aware of it. This main theme explored how these cricketers responded with their own future retirement and what they had done so far to prepare for it. This included two subordinate themes: Attitudes towards retirement and Planning intention.

#### ***Attitudes towards retirement***

This theme reflected their feelings and opinions on their own future retirement. The more they got into details about their own retirement, the more they distanced themselves from it. Thinking about retirement was an unnecessary distraction, which did not contribute to their career development at this stage. It was reasonable not to think about retirement at this point.

*Sean: "Uh yeah, it's another thing. It could do, in a way it could do. It just, it just the way you're thinking like you're not focused, you're not entirely focused on being a cricketer. You fly your finger out of time. I don't think you should, I don't really think you should think of time [retirement] as a young cricketer."*

This dissociation seemed to be related to their negative feelings about retirement. A number of participants were aware of the potential of psychological distress and financial issue, which made them feel sad and wary of thinking about the future. To protect themselves from these feelings, they avoid thinking about retirement. On the

other hand, retirement was not always associated with negative emotions. It could be a glorious moment, if they had been successful in their active careers. These positive feelings related to their career expectations. It could also be a release from stress and an opportunity to pursue other interests.

*Kyle: "I think it [retirement] could affect your performance, I would say positively, um, Jacques Kallis who played for South Africa, played cricket for South Africa scored 100 so he did very well at the last match, um so it's kind of maybe motivate you, you want to leave on a good note or you could go I'm retiring, I don't want to be here, it just go through your emotions. I see myself being someone that want to give all they got in the last few matches."*

### ***Planning intention***

The participants all agreed with the essential of pre-retirement planning, which would contribute to a "smooth" and "easy" retirement. However, there was one participant who had a "plan B". All the others mentioned planning as a thing they would do in future. The planning progress would start according to when and how retirement decisions are taking place. Apparently, this was not the suitable time for pre-retirement planning.

*Andrew: "Um, as an after-sport. Umm hopefully get a good one [life after retirement], hopefully an easy one as well. Um because I guess what I want to do is make sure that I just got, as I said that plan B and that it's an easy transition into it, um not and hopefully it isn't a sudden retirement out of nowhere when I wasn't expecting it."*

The idea of pre-retirement planning was unappealing to these young cricketers, therefore, they did not have a tendency to discuss it with others, including coaches, teammates, friends and families. This topic might be a taboo, which some of young athletes felt discouraged and inappropriate to talk about in sports environment. They could find it difficult to get supports from their teams if retirement came early. One participant had been offered support from a sports association, which he could use for retirement planning. However, retirement was never discussed openly. They were not comfortable to talk about this topic directly.

*Sean: “Oh, coaches. They rarely speak about it [retirement] to be honest, yeah, you have occasional, but you never really think about, you never really think about it. Um I play with older people as well but they’re not professionals so, so I play with a few yeah professionals in my club and they don’t speak about it at all. I say more people don’t speak about it then you speak about it.”*

In summary, participants positioned themselves at the early stage of their career. They saw retirement as a privilege of professional cricketers. It would take them a lot of time to reach to a professional level. Hence, they felt that it was too early to think about retirement at this stage. Besides, they had considered about things which influenced their future retirement. They mentioned factors which could trigger their own retirement such as injuries, boredom and age. They preferred to make retirement decisions by themselves to make retirement more acceptable and manageable. They would like to stay within sports environment after retirement to maintain their attachment with sports. These young cricketers show their awareness about retirement from sports, which mostly linked with negative emotions. They distanced themselves from thoughts of retirement. Pre-retirement planning was one of those thoughts. Most participants did not plan for retirement.

**CHAPTER FOUR**

**DISCUSSION**

The aim of the study was to explore into young athletes' perceptions about their future retirement from sports. Semi-structured interviews with four young cricketers were conducted. The interview data were analysed by using thematic analysis. Three main themes were generated from the analysis: retirement prospect, adjustment to future retirement and retirement awareness. In the retirement prospect theme, participants discussed about three stages in athletic career development and retirement would be the final stage. It also included their "ideal" definitions of athletic retirement, which would happen after they reached their peaks. The adjustment to the future retirement theme reflected how the athletes made sense of their future retirement. They discussed reasons of retirement (i.e. age, injuries, decline in performance and loss of interest), a sense of control over their retirement and maintaining their bonds with sports after retirement. Finally, the retirement awareness described emotional impacts of retirement and pre-retirement planning. Retirement affected these young active cricketers both negatively and positively. Pre-retirement planning was considered beneficial to them, however, most of them had not yet any plans to retire.

Career development perspectives of the participants and theories of athletic career development were similar. Participants broke their career into three stages: development, mastery and retirement. They did not mention the initial stage, which was described in the theories (Wylleman, Alfermann & Lavallee, 2004). At this stage, they might look ahead to their future and skip the initial period. The mastery stage was the most expected stage in their careers. Eventually, retirement would happen after that. Thus, the retirement stage was the least expected stage in their career. Most of them indicated that retirement should happen after the mastery stage. If they stopped before this stage, it would not count as a retirement. Retirement was not about stopping playing sports professionally, but a stage in their career development. This reflected that retirement was seen as a transition (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007; Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993). On the other hand, in the Conceptual Model of Adaptation to Retirement among Athletes (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994), deselection was one of the causes of retirement. There was a possibility that athletes retired before they reached the mastery stage because of deselection. However, some of participants did not agree that this was a type of retirement.

Age was highlighted as a subtle factor in career development process. Firstly, participants understood that their athletic career would not continue after a certain age.

This suggests that age was a reason of retirement (Henretta, Chan & O'rand, 1992), in which, athletic retirement was not an exclusion (Park, Lavalley & Tod, 2013). Secondly, it reflected the relationship between aging and career development. The cricketers saw their career progress according to their age. They were between 18 and 20 years old, hence, they indicated that they were in the development stage and far away from retirement stage. Retirement would come in their 30s. This correlated with athletic career development theories (Wylleman, Alfermann & Lavalley, 2004). Thirdly, they recognised their retirement age was different from the retirement age from other occupations. Retirement from sports comes at relatively young GE (Martin, Fogarty & Albion, 2014). Thus, they would continue working after retirement. This might indicate that retirement was a career transition (Lavalley, 2000).

Reasons of athletic retirement were mentioned in the interviews, such as age, injuries, decline in performance and loss of interest, which were uncontrollable triggers of retirement. Normalising some of the uncontrollable reasons of retirement could be a retirement coping strategy of these young active athletes. Reasons of retirement and a sense of control correlated with each other (Williams & Krane, 2015). The cricketers would feel that their retirement is more acceptable and manageable, if it was a voluntary retirement (Alfermann, Stambulova & Zemaityte, 2004). Injuries were discussed repeatedly as an uncontrollable reason of retirement. The cricketers felt that injuries would cause a sudden retirement, which could impact them negatively (Stoltenburg, Kamphoff & Bremer, 2011). Even though decline in performance was not introduced in the Taylor and Ogilvie's model (1994), participants had accepted it as a "normal" and "common" reason of athletic retirement. This reason could not be a direct trigger of retirement. It was an influential factor in retirement-decision-making. The decline of performance was identified as an uncontrollable and controllable factor of retirement from sports. It was uncontrollable because the athletes realised that their bodies would reach to a limit when they could not perform competitive sports professionally anymore. However, they indicated that it would be their choice on how it would impact on their retirement. This reflected that the sense of control over retirement did not only express during the retirement process (Alfermann, Stambulova & Zemaityte, 2004), but also appeared in the early stages of career development. One of the participants talked about how loss of interest could become a retirement trigger. It was included in voluntary retirement (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994; Williams & Krane,

2015), but the participant felt it would cause a “spontaneous” retirement. Interest in sports seemed to be a personal choice (Williams & Krane, 2015), therefore, it might impact on individual retirement decision differently. It could be either an uncontrollable or a controllable factor related to retirement based on athletes’ perspectives.

Attachment to sports was an interesting theme, which played two different roles before and after retirement. Firstly, the attachment to sports was a factor to keep them away from retirement. There were times in which they had stopped playing, but in their opinions, they never left the sport. Retirement and stopping to play could be distinguished by the athletic relationship with sports. In other words, stopping to play was not a retirement as long as they maintained the attachment with the sport. It seems like there is a lack of literature about the relationship between athletic retirement and attachment to sports. This role should be investigated further. Secondly, all participants discussed maintaining their bonds with cricket after retirement. They would prefer to work inside sports environment after retirement. This was reported as a common coping strategy with retired athletes (Rintaugu & Mwisukha, 2011; Wylleman, Alfermann & Lavallee, 2004). This coping strategy appeared to be a way of maintaining their connections with sports (Lally, 2007). In the Lally’s (2007) qualitative research, the connection between this coping strategy and attachment to sports was reported in the results, but it was not discussed further.

The retirement awareness theme included two of the subtlest findings in this study: attitudes towards retirement and planning intention. The attitudes towards retirement theme discussed about how the young cricketer felt about retirement. There were positive impacts of retirement (Martin, Fogarty & Albion, 2014). They saw retirement as an opportunity to pursue other interests, which indicated retirement as a transition to other occupations (Wylleman, Alfermann & Lavallee, 2004). They associated retirement with a successful career, therefore, it would be a “happy ending” for their athletic career. This could be viewed as a healthy retirement in the fourth stage of Taylor and Ogilvie’s model (1994). However, this was a vision of the young cricketers about their future retirement, it was inadequate to adapt the models to this vision. On the other hand, the potential negative impacts, which the participants associated with retirement, were psychological distress and financial issues (Park, Lavallee & Tod, 2013). These negative impacts made them feel sad and wary to think about it (Shouksmith, 1983). Perhaps, to avoid those feelings, they did not like to engage with

retirement. The cricketers distanced themselves from retirement. This reaction did not only apply to them, but also applied to other active athletes (Roberts et al., 2015). In their opinions, thinking about retirement at this stage was an unnecessary distraction from their career development. They did not like to engage with retirement because they were in career developing stages (Wylleman, Alfermann & Lavallee, 2004) or because of their age (Fillenbaum, 1971).

Planning intention theme showed that the cricketers were aware of pre-retirement planning benefit. Retirement would be “smooth” and “easy” with a plan (Martin, Fogarty & Albion, 2014). However, only one participant discussed about doing “plan B”. Others thought that this was not the time to plan yet. It reflected that being aware of pre-retirement planning did not mean that they would make a plan. They felt that they were not old enough to plan (Fillenbaum, 1971). They argued that it was not the right time to plan, retirement was far away. This could be linked with stages in athletic career development theories, in which, planning would take place when they approached the retirement stage (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994; Wylleman, Alfermann & Lavallee, 2004). On the other hand, injuries and deselection could cause an involuntary retirement at any stages of athletic career (Webb, Nasco, Riley & Headrick, 1998). If pre-retirement planning was approached by career development stages, athletes might not have any plans when retirement happened spontaneously. It could manifest the negative impacts of involuntary retirement (Erpič, Wylleman & Zupančič, 2004). In this theme, the participants also mentioned that they did not like to talk about retirement with others, including family members, friends, coaches and teammates. They thought that it was an inappropriate topic to talk about in the team. This supported Roberts and colleagues’ (2015) finding that cricketers did not discuss retirement with their teammates which they regretted. This might prevent them from seeking support from their team (Roberts et.al, 2015). One of the participants shared that he had been helped from the cricket association to build up his “plan B”. He was the only one who had a plan at this time. This shows that institutional support was a positive influence on pre-retirement planning (Wylleman, Alfermann & Lavallee, 2004).

This study had a number of limitations. Participants were male and played cricket at university level. Further studies could explore this topic with female athletes or with other sports. Most of the participants did not have a pre-retirement plan. The study could not investigate planning processes and factors that surrounded it.

In conclusion, this study used semi-structured interviews to explore into young active athletes' perceptions about their future retirement from sports. It suggested that these young active cricketers were aware of retirement and its impacts. Retirement was the last stage of athletic career development, which could be triggered by age, injuries, decline in performance and loss of interest. They preferred voluntary retirement and maintained their attachment with sports after retirement. Even though they understood the benefit of pre-retirement planning, most of them did not engage with pre-retirement. Retirement could occur at any stages in career development. Thus, having a pre-retirement plan would benefit them. It could help them get an "easier" retirement. They could get support and feel more optimistic about athletic retirement.

### **Reflexivity**

For some participants, the interviews were the first time they discussed athletic retirement openly and deeply. It was difficult to explore this topic. Their responses were limited and repetitive. Especially regarding pre-retirement planning, most of them did not plan. They tended to disengage with this topic. It prevented the interviewer to explore this topic further.

The researcher did not have a great understanding about cricket and professional sports. Cricket was not different from other sports. This might give the study an outsider's perspective. On the other hand, there might be some metaphors or terminologies that the researcher was not familiar with.

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1



### Participant information sheet

#### The study

Career termination is a stage in athletic career development. Whether athletes decide to take a different role inside sports or do something outside of the sporting world, they will go through a career termination process. There is much research highlighting that retirement may have both positive and negative influences on athletes' mental health and quality of life. Positive effects include feeling free, happy, joyful, relieved and relaxed. Career planning has a strong correlation with increasing positive effects and decreasing negative effects. However, most research is concerned with 'life after sport'. However, there is little research about how athletes plan their retirement from sport (career termination) and the effect that this has on them.

I am an undergraduate student in Cardiff Metropolitan University. The aim of this study is to explore athletes' perceptions about sport career termination. The questions will be concerned with how you think about your own career orientation, how and if you plan for your career retirement and how other factors may influence you.

#### What would happen if you agree to participate?

You will be asked to take part in an interview, which will last no longer than 30 minutes. The interview will be recorded on a smartphone.

#### Exclusion criteria

Participants are over 18 years old, who are students of Cardiff Metropolitan University and play for Cardiff Met Sport Clubs.

#### Potential Risk

The topic may be sensitive and raise concerns about planning for your long-term future.

You can visit Cardiff Met Student Services or these websites for helpful support:

<http://www.uk sport.gov.uk/>

<https://www.olympic.org/athlete-career-programme>

### Potential benefits

You will have an opportunity to experience a psychological research.

### Withdrawal, anonymity and confidentiality

Your interview will be anonymous - your name will be changed in the transcript. The interview record will be deleted from the smartphone and kept in a password-secured computer, which only the researcher and members of the supervisory team can access.

You have the right to withdraw from the interview at any time or to remove statements from the transcript. You will be offered a copy of the transcript and will have 4 weeks to change your mind before the analysis takes place.

I

## APPENDIX 2



### PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Reference Number:

Participant name or Study ID Number:

Title of Project: An exploration into young active athletes' perspectives about their future retirement from sports

Name of Researcher:

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**Participant to complete this section: Please initial each box.**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time before leaving the interview, without giving any reason.
3. I agree that my interview will be recorded and transcribed.
4. I agree to take part in the above study.

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Signature of Participant

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Name of person taking consent

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Signature of person taking consent

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Date

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Date

