

# Transitions in the process of female basketball players' development

CDD. 20.ed. 796.017  
796.32

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1807-55092016000200491>

Alexandra FOLLE\*  
Carine COLLET\*\*  
William das Neves SALLES\*\*  
Juarez Vieira do NASCIMENTO\*\*

\*Centro de Ciências da Saúde e do Esporte, Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina, Florianópolis, SC, Brasil.

\*\*Centro de Desportos, Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Florianópolis, SC, Brasil.

## Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate the transitions present in the process of female basketball players' development. Thirty-one athletes and two coaches from a top-rated development basketball club of Santa Catarina/Brazil participated on the study. Data collection occurred through semi-structured interviews and were analyzed by the technique of content analysis, with the support of NVivo 9.2 software. Results revealed the importance and the challenges around the simultaneous experiences of sporting and non-sporting transitions, highlighting that athletes experienced the transition from initiation to specialization in basketball at the same time that they experienced the transition from childhood to adolescence. The athletes who experienced transitions to more intense specialized training also experienced significant psychosocial transitions, especially related to social life (friendships), leisure and study (transition from Elementary School to High School). Finally, while transiting from the young categories to the adult one, players have gone through transitions both in interpersonal relationships (dating) and from high school to college. The evidence found allow us to conclude about the importance of deepen the understanding of the lived transitions and how they affect the development of female basketball athletes, as well as to identify the intrinsic and extrinsic features and strategies used to the successful overcoming of these different transitions.

KEY WORDS: Athletes; Sport; Training; Career.

## Introduction

Studies on the development and transitions in sporting career started to be published in the 60s and have shown a substantial increase both in quantity and in quality. This increase occurred specially in the end of the 80s, a period when certain changes in the focus of research, in theoretical frameworks and in the attention to contextual factors that characterize the evolution of the theme started to happen<sup>1</sup>. In the field of sport psychology, the concept of transition in the athletic career was introduced with particular interest in the study of how (ex) athletes faced retirement from competitive sport<sup>2</sup>.

The first observable change in the comprehension of the term "transition" as a phenomenon was reflected on the increase of theoretical references related to its own studies. In this moment, the concept of transition was no longer exclusively associated to negative or

traumatic life events. The second important change occurred in the 90s, with the migration of the subject of studies from almost exclusively sporting retirement to different transitions during the athletic life. The third change aimed to deepen the transitions manifested in other spheres of life, so the transitions in sporting career were no longer the main object of study. Finally, the fourth significant change implied to also consider macro social factors (sports and cultural systems) in this process<sup>1-2</sup>.

From this point of view, it is reasonable to assume that sporting career - composed by successive phases with remarkable transitions between each one of them - comes along with changes in psychological and social characteristics, as well as with the need for athletes to enjoy resources and strategies to deal more effectively with each one of them<sup>3</sup>. It is noteworthy

that sporting domain covers part of the environment that is directly related to the sport, while the non-sports area includes all other spheres of athletes' lives<sup>4</sup>.

Transitions correspond to changes during the development process of sports athlete career and may be characterized as normative or non-normative. Normative transitions are relatively predictable and allow the occurrence of opportunities that prepare athletes to deal with them in advance and more easily because they usually present a more structural and organizational nature. Non-normative transitions, in turn, are less predictable, because they occur unexpectedly and therefore are characterized as harder to deal with<sup>1, 5-6</sup>.

In sports, while non-normative transitions correspond to transitions caused by factors such as injury, overtraining, changing teams, clubs, coaches or teammates<sup>1, 6</sup>, normative transitions include transitions for early sport specialization, for intensive training, from basic categories to the adult category, or even from amateur sport to professional and from active career to sport retirement, which has specific characteristics that require some kind of adjustment from the athletes<sup>1, 3, 6-8</sup>. Non sporting transitions, in turn, require that athletes learn to cope with changes in psychological level (passage from childhood to adolescence and from adolescence to adulthood), psychosocial (significant changes in social agents as they mature), academic or professional (educational and vocational changes)<sup>2, 7, 9</sup>.

## Method

The study included 31 female athletes, aged from 11 to 18 years old, belonging to a prominent basketball club in the development of athletes from youth teams in the state of Santa Catarina. To facilitate the presentation of the content of the narratives and anonymity of the investigated players, athletes were organized as follows:

- Under 18 athletes (17 and 18 years old): A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H;
- Under 16 athletes (15 e 16 years): A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I;
- Under 14 athletes (14 years old): A, B;
- Under 13 athletes (11 to 13 years old): A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L.

In order to extend the information around the transitions experienced by basketball players, contributed to the study the two coaches who led

By participating in a transition to higher levels in the sporting domain, the athlete can at the same time, experience a psychological transition from adolescence to adulthood, as well as from high school to college. Such multiple transitions can create difficult situations for the life of this athlete, which requires greater support and support from their social network<sup>9</sup>. Furthermore, a transition is believed to be most successful when the athlete is able to develop and effectively use all the resources needed to overcome barriers during the coping process, which results in an overall feeling of fit and increased satisfaction with sports and life. However, the transition period can turn into crisis if the athlete is not able to manage the demands of transition, which can request assistance or psychological intervention<sup>1</sup>.

The analysis of investigations around the transitions present in the athletic development demonstrated the authors' recent initiative to address this issue in national reality<sup>3, 10</sup>, which reinforces the socialized literature by international studies conducted over the past two decades<sup>7, 11-16</sup> and indicates the relevance of the phenomenon studied for understanding the sports development process. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the transitions present in the development of athletes belonging to a prominent club in the formation of women's basketball players, in order to understand the phenomenon and contribute to the expansion of studies on the subject.

the teams of the club at the time of data collection: the coach of Under 13, Under 14 and Under 16 categories (coach A) and the coach of the Under 18 category (coach B).

The investigated basketball club was selected due to its history in the formation of young athletes, considering that the club has won 23 state titles in 49 appearances in competitions sponsored by the Santa Catarina Federation of Basketball, since its first appearance in the year 1994. It is noteworthy that in these disputed 49 competitions, the club won medals in 36 opportunities (1st, 2nd and 3rd places), with 73% win rate in matches. In addition, the official club records revealed that 31 athletes have been selected to represent the State of Santa Catarina in Brazilian Championships for Young Athletes promoted by the Brazilian Basketball

Confederation, 17 of these athletes have been selected more than once. Regarding the national team, the club already had seven pre-selected athletes, but none of them was among the 12 who went to competitions representing the country.

Data collection with the athletes and coaches took place through semi-structured interviews conducted in the training facilities (gym) or at the sports department, before or after training sessions. Interviews with athletes lasted 45 minutes to 1 hour and 30 minutes while the interviews with the coaches had last approximately one hour each. These interviews were mainly focused on the following emerged themes: normative transitions; non-normative transitions experienced by athletes. In the sports area, the following themes predominated: initiation process (sports practice of other modalities on early age and practice time from other modalities, age of initiation and practice time of basketball, reasons for adherence to basketball); specialization (the first competition age, age of first participation in state/national competitions, reasons for dropping out of other sports); sports investment (major competitions disputed, call for state and national selection, prize competition, training load and competition, abdication of other businesses in the sport function); temporary interruption reasons, desire to abandonment and probable reasons for basketball definitive abandonment (duration, generating factors, resources and strategies to deal with them); obstacles faced in sports (generating factors, resources and strategies). In non-sporting domain, the generators themes presented relation to: family background (financial, emotional and information about family members); school context (school

level, school performance, scholarship, relationship between study and sport); social context (activities in their free time, friendship network, the relationship between social life and sport). All interviews were conducted individually, recorded and transcribed, with subsequent proofreading by study participants.

The research project was approved by the Ethics Committee on Human Research of the Federal University of Santa Catarina, in the opinion 1170/2010. Participation in the research was made possible after the signing of the Term of Consent by coaches, by the 18 year-old athletes and the parents or guardians of underage athletes.

Data were analyzed with QSR NVivo software (version 9.2), using the categorical content analysis technique. The analysis categories, drawn from theoretical models covered in the literature, included the normative sporting transitions (initiation to specialization, intensive specialized training, basic categories to adult team) and non-normative (injuries, changes, not been selected in sport), as well as non-normative sporting transitions (professional and academic, psychosocial, psychological) and non-normative (professional and academic, psychosocial, psychological).

The transitions analysis sought to present barriers, consequences and the resources used by the investigated athletes to overcome the non-normative transitions, as well as the challenges and ways to overcome the normative transitions. In addition to the validity of the statements of the participants, the validity of analyzes was secured from further analysis of two researchers with experience accumulated in studies of this nature.

## Results

### Non-normative sporting transitions

The non-normative transitions experienced by sports basketball players included the injuries, changes and not sporting selection. Injuries caused by sports activities were cited as the main barriers experienced by athletes in their sports training process.

Resources and strategies used by athletes investigated to overcome adversity related to sports injuries were the physiotherapy programs and emotional support from peers and coaches, as can be seen in the narrative below:

Only when I had a knee surgery. I'd stay only one month out, but I had to stay three. In physiotherapy I was doing, they did not do the right exercises to improve and it took a long time, it did not improve, it did not improve. Once I have changed the clinic, I went there for only ten days and returned. When I had the surgery, I was out for so long that I did not miss basketball. I think I did not stop because of the incentive of the girls ... girls and (Under 16 Athlete G).

The city, club and coach changes have also been mentioned as not important normative transitions that happened in the development of athletes' career.

Some city changes were caused by family decisions, which led the athletes to move away temporarily of the sport until they contact the Department of Sports to obtain information about the academies and competitive teams present in the new city.

Some athletes have perceived the change of coaches from one season to another, as well as the removal of one of the coaches of the club, as barriers in their paths. The following reports reveal the importance of the work and maintenance of complicity between coach and athlete throughout the development of the sports careers of athletes:

“I was discouraged, tired. Discouraged because all the time was changing, one coach came and it was one way, another coach, another way. Everything was modified and we were with the head in two places, one there and one here (Under 18 athlete C).

I stopped because our coach was gone. I thought she was not coming back and we have a lot of affinity with her. We even were with another coach, he was very good and all, but I could not, it seemed that my game was not moving, I did not flow (Under 18 athlete D).

[...] I was able to lead a team from Under 13 to the present day (Under 18). The club made this change because of my request. Because usually the coach was in that category, when athletes come out of that category, they were passed to another coach. I came with a point of the view that if it's working, you do not have to change. If you are with a group of athletes in your hand and you move on to another coach, will have all that adaptation phase again, changes of coach's profile and a lot of times it does not work like it worked with the other coach and fortunately this idea was approved by the board of directors, by the Department of Sports and we managed to continue (Coach C).

The failure on sports selection was marked as one of the main barriers faced by athletes. This process comprised, for example, denying entry of athletes during the games where they started as reserves, to not be called to dispute some games or competitions and to be cut of state teams that would compete in national championships. For coaches, the selection process of the team is often cruel, but necessary - once, that for each match coaches can only select a specific number of athletes, because the selection process depends on the sports rules of basketball. Coach B report expresses the reality of not been selected in sports:

For admission to the competitive teams, it also depends on the demand, supply and demand. If you have enough, we have to give up some athletes because there comes a time that unfortunately the team consists of 12 athletes, only fit 12 on the scoresheet that can play. So if you have 25, you end up having to cut 13. There's no way you put to play [...] The selection process ends automatically by the very rule of sport (Coach B).

Resources and strategies used by athletes to overcome such barriers and advance their sports careers were strongly guided by social influences, especially by the emotional support from colleagues, coaches, and family. The following story illustrates the importance of interpersonal relationships to overcome this non-normative sporting transition:

I was selected for Santa Catarina state team, was cut off and stopped playing because I lost motivation. [...] I was not training anymore and the girls tried to make up my mind to come back: ‘..., come back to training, ..., come back to training.’ The girls were always calling me to return. My mother took a lot on me to come back because I just stayed home (Under 16 athlete C).

### **Normative sporting transitions**

Normative sporting transitions observed in the development of athletes correspond to the transition from initiation to specialization, the transition to the intensive specialized training and the transition from the first categories to the adult team.

Challenges experienced by basketball players in their first normative sporting transition (from initiation to specialization) pointed out that the choice of type of sport to specialize was strongly related to adaptations to the new demands of training, the requirements of the group and linking sport with other spheres of life, especially the studies. The reasons given for the abandonment of other sports involved inappropriate behavior of the coaches, not suitable height for the sport, the perceived lack of skill in this sport and especially the interest and/or personal preference for basketball.

I gave up gymnastics because, in the second year, I realized I was not able to evolve as the other girls, so I went to volleyball. Volleyball I left because I met the basketball and preferred basketball to volleyball (Under 13 athlete L).

Because the competitions coincided, there were JASC and Brazilian championship in 2007. I

had to choose. As I was part of the group, I had to leave my trainer in the lurch, but I had to choose. I was training gymnastics and basketball on the same days (Under 18 athlete A).

Overcoming the challenge of adapting to training and athletes group requirements was conquered with the daily contact with the motivation provided by the coaches and the dedication and personal effort to address these barriers, as shown in the following reports:

Because there had been many fights in training. Now it has stopped, but before ... when we started training with the big ones, the majors, it was a rivalry. Because they wanted to show they were better, but now we are training since the beginning of the year, we are getting used (Under 13 athlete A).

In the beginning, when we left first category to train with the older girls, I did not agree, because we, the younger girls, had peeve, because they are older and think they rule over us. Then I thought better because we got more match practice. I thought training sessions were better with them. With some girls we still get a little angry because if we do something wrong, they still charge [...] (Under 13 athlete L).

As regards the challenge to conciliate the sport with studies, it is clear that the strategy used by athletes in the transition from initiation to specialization was to put the school requirements in prevalence in relation to sports demands because there was strong exigency by the relatives to perform well in school. In this sense, most of the athletes ended up missing the training sessions to study for tests or do homework with due understanding and support of the coaches. Only one player indicated that, during this transition, she already tried to better organize her study time, not to harm the sport.

When it's necessary to talk, because I'm missing a lot of training, I call the coach and we talk. One day I was kind of bad emotionally because of school, it was a lot of pressure. The coach talks to me about it, it's pretty peaceful (Under 13 athlete C).

My parents charged and charge me a lot in the study. My mother talks like this: 'if you like basketball, you have to also like the studies, the same effort you make in basketball, you have to do for the studies'. So I always tried to put the two on the same level, separate from each other, but

it's hard, because basketball requires a lot, all the time is basketball, basketball (Under 13 athlete B).

In addition, some athletes reveal the importance of understanding the school administration and teachers regarding their commitment to sports practice, as shown in the following excerpts:

There are times that I miss school, but I miss class for good reason, which is basketball. At my school they even understand because they want to see us training, especially the principal. I talk a lot with her, I open myself to her. I tell her about basketball and she authorizes my exit to come for training once in a while (Under 13 athlete J).

You become responsible over time. For your age, you have to have a little maturity. I do so, as I have school, I have the basketball and do other things, do other courses, I also try to reconcile everything. I stipulate times for me to study, train. [...] If you are organized, if you have responsibility, because you also have homework, have exam, you can do it (Under 16 athlete C).

When I return from competitions, I always talk to the teachers, I always manage to get also the justification. In every school I studied, everyone understood me, everyone respected (Under 18 athlete E).

The information found in this investigation revealed that the second normative sporting transition experienced by basketball players, marked the start of intensive specialized training, from the moment in which the athletes have gone mainly to experience increased competition and the expectation around good results as well as increased demand for physical and psychological loads in training and competitions and more difficult to combine sport with other spheres of life (study, social life, ...). In addition, we need to take responsibility for the team's performance in some games, maintain previous results of the team and the club and do not fear failure in competitions also stood out as challenges experienced in this sport transition.

With regard to the increase in exigency around individual and collective performance, resources and strategies used by athletes to overcome this transition are related to intrinsic factors such as the perceived need for greater seriousness in training, personal motivation in training, personal pursuit to evolve in the sport and achieve the level of performance of more experienced colleagues, and extrinsic factors such as the possibility of training with more experienced athletes, the informational and emotional support from colleagues and coaches and the emotional support of family members.

It's good because as they get older, they help. We who have the opportunity to play with Under 18 team, they teach, they encourage us. As they play well, in our team ... we always win. So, we are inspired by them to continue what they have won. They always ... our team is always the one that wins more often here in the region, then we, for not to break what they did, we are inspired by them and try to play better (Under 13 athlete A).

Besides getting match practice, you start learning more about them. As you train and play with older girls, they will teach you and when we play with the girls in our category, we defend better, already pressing, we go firmer to the basket [...]. I prefer to train with them than with younger girls, because with younger girls you decrease yourself, you will not grow and when it comes game time, you're soft, you're tired. With them it doesn't happen, it's very fast all the time, you have to run, you're tired, in pain, but you have to run. Comes game time, we'll get a girl from our category and we'll be already used to it (Under 14 athlete B).

When we saw, at last year Brazilian championship, that we needed to evolve, we saw that there were better teams than ours, because here in Santa Catarina our team is the best, when we got there and we saw that we had to improve, had to do more to have a team in Brazil level, it was something that motivated us enough. They had very good teams, it was one of the moments that were more scary to get out there and not be able to go to the end. Then we saw that to be an athlete, we have to strive much more (Under 18 athlete I).

In the transition to a more specialized and intense training, investigated basketball players began to feel new difficulty in their careers: to reconcile the demands of sports with youth features - period where teenagers seek to strengthen their personal relationships and pass to crave more leisure time for socializing with friends. However, to realize the importance of dedication to the sport for its growth, they began to interpret the exchange narrowing of these relationships and moments of fun by sporting career as a natural thing.

I wanted to have a normal life like my friends, to be able to go out in the afternoon with them and it's not possible, because I train with the Under 16 and the Under 18 teams, in the afternoon there, and at night here. So there's no way to conciliate.

It's complicated. The fact that I train in the afternoon and at night somewhat limits, because I cannot do what I want to do in the afternoon with my friends and I cannot miss training sessions to do something else ... there's no logic. So it's a bit annoying, but you get used to it, there's nothing to be done. Then I leave for the weekends when there is no competition and, lately, it's complicated not to have competition, because they are two categories (Under 16 athlete F).

Evidence found on the third and final sport transition present in the development of basketball players showed the transition from youth teams to the adult team, in which the pinnacle of athletic career began to be glimpsed by athletes, which implied that sports goals became the main purpose of their lives. The challenge of linking sport with other spheres of life was not as noticed or emphasized, but internalized as a result of their choices and professional goals.

To overcome the difficulties of this transition, athletes mentioned the following strategies and events: acquisition of sports experience and personal maturity to deal with them; lifestyle subordinate to the demands of the sport; perception of prestige gain in the sports scene through receiving invitations to perform in other clubs, salaries (financial support) and scholarships for college. These modalities of support have come to be seen as strong strategies to minimize the transfer of athletes (adult category) to other cities and to avoid the abandonment of sport by those who needed to work to help with the household expenses and continue their studies.

Because in the past it was more for fun, now it's becoming more than a profession. Basketball, for me, is now virtually everything, it's what I like to do. In my life it's basketball, family, friends, my studies. It's one of the things that I cannot be without. [...] For me it's just about everything, like my family. A profession that I like to have (Under 18 athlete A).

Basketball was and is very important for my life because I know several places, many different people, people I'll take for my whole life. I think there's no way to explain. It is everything. It's my life, because my whole life was basketball, basketball was and is my life, because everything is moved around basketball, people, school, everything is connected to basketball (Under 18 athlete C).

Sometimes, though, I have to put my training sessions in first place because they are my job, my

livelihood and that's what I came to do here. So I think it has to disturb. It is the most important, if it disturbs, it is not that it disturbs, but limits you because, at that time, every day you will be training. I could be doing other things, but I think if it disturbs or not, it has to disturb, because it's my job, it's my livelihood (Under 18 athlete G).

### Non-sporting transitions

In this study, non-sporting transitions of basketball players' sports training process were related to academic, professional, psychosocial, and psychological transitions.

Academic and professional transition cited by an athlete corresponded to school failure in elementary school because of the constant change of cities by the family. For coaches, this transition implies, above all, the difficulty of athletes to conciliate sports and school demands, which makes many of them to diminish the dedication to training to recover from the low academic performance presented. In addition, coaches cite the regulatory transition from elementary school to high school and from there to college as crucial in this process.

For the investigated coach, the transition from elementary school to high school has been negative in recent years, not only for athletes but also for the club. It has resulted in the loss of dispute for new state, national and international titles conquered in previous years. In recent years, while athletes were in elementary school, almost all received a scholarship at a private institution representing school-level competitions. However, as the school did not have a high school diploma, athletes lost their support when completed the 9th grade, and some of them went to public schools or private schools in the city, which contributed to the dispersion of the previous group of athletes.

So, until they finish elementary school, they were all together and got one of the most specific results of the team that was a South American competition. So, it was worth for them and for the school. In fact, the sponsorship is not over, the point is that the school only had primary education, then there were some negotiations with a high school education. In the first year it worked, the problem returns, as we commented before, there were some girls who were still in elementary, others in high school, then the problems started because the school does not offer the two levels of education (Coach B).

Regarding the normative transition from high school to college, coaches reinforce that currently

it has been facilitated by the scholarship provided through an agreement with a private institution, enabling athletes to not need to interrupt their sports career to work and help with household expenses or even in the college payment, at the same time it becomes a key motivating factor for continuity and commitment of the players with sporting career.

The non-normative psychosocial transitions involved a mother leaving home, which affected the in-court performance of an athlete. The illness of a family member, in turn, caused the temporary departure from the practice of sport by another athlete, while the death of a relative, although it caused initial discouragement of a third athlete with its daily activities, also led to the narrow of ties from other family members with her sports participation.

It's good they are following me, it's one more motivation for me to play. Because I lost my father in 2008, I now like they go to watch me during training and games because who knows how long they will be with me, how long they will be able to watch one of my game. Because I know they always liked to do that. Then they go to watch because I like now (Under 18 athlete F).

I'd just left Rio because my father had cancer. I had just returned to training to rehabilitate me in basketball, to continue to play well. Because when I left Rio, I was in my basketball summit, I was playing very well. But this thing with my father happened, I went home and stopped training, I gained a few kilos (Under 18 athlete G).

Normative psychosocial transition emphasized by coach B was the set of stable or unstable relationships that affect the performance or even move away many athletes from their sporting careers. However, few athletes have cited the difficulty of concealing the sport with these relationships, because, according to them, their boyfriends understand the importance of basketball in their lives and they can thus combine both satisfactorily.

There is the issue of the boyfriends, because it is a period when dating starts. Many athletes stopped playing because of boyfriend, many, many, they were not few. I have a huge list of girls who played well and started dating and lost motivation, because every time we were getting ready to travel the boyfriend messed around or the boyfriend started a fight because she was going to travel and was jealous, I did not know what was happening in the games. I thought the girl was going to date other boys: 'Either I

or the basketball ?!’ and they ended up giving up (Coach B).

Not to limit, but sometimes, a lot of times I missed out on something with my boyfriend to travel or to train (Under 18 athlete D).

Another important psychosocial transition cited by coaches refers to the fact that athletes demonstrate difficulties in conceal the sport with other demands and daily information, they end up drawing the attention and concentration of the players during training and competitions.

Today there are many things that I see, the psychological part of the girls, attention, focus,

which is very dispersed. Because they were raised like this, they have a lot of information during the whole day. Then they do not pay much attention, because another is already coming, another, another, another. I ask things today, tomorrow they have already forgotten because they have had more 20 information before arriving in the morning. So that’s a factor that I see that ... but I do not see that it’s a context only for my team, it’s with this generation that this is happening. They are less dedicated to basketball than it was before. [...] Today there are many elements, many things that draw their attention (Coach B).

## Discussion

The non-normative transition caused by sports injuries results in temporary removal to recovery or to avoid the risk of playing important games under the influence of injury, which aggravated the problem. Sports injuries end up happening too often and are therefore more predictable in athletic development than what is expected from a non-normative transition.

Similarly to the evidence found in this study, research carried out with Russian athletes in athletics and gymnastics<sup>1</sup> observed that all interviewed athletes had suffered sports injuries at some time in their careers, so the majority of them, evolving through competitive levels, feel the consequences of these traumas. The presence of injuries was also observed in the development of Brazilian<sup>14</sup>, American<sup>16</sup> and Swedish<sup>18</sup> athletes, from team and individual sports, showing that injuries are common in sports scene, whether they present major or minor gravity.

Many athletes have their promising careers marked or even closed by problems with serious injuries, making it difficult to measure the impact of these injuries on the daily lives of athletes due to the complexity of environmental factors, interpersonal and intra-psyche which are affected by them<sup>19</sup>. However, despite these transitions mark the development and continuity of the sports career, the physical and social environment in which they occur also presents an important effect on the athlete’s development process. Thus, the material and human resources as well as the characteristics of the social context can influence significantly the degree of difficulty that a transition represents<sup>19</sup>.

Changes to different cities to play in other clubs presented, as consequences, the difficulty of adapting to new cultures, interpersonal relations and training demands, which were overcome through love for sports activities, the strengthening of relations and the desire to overcome the difficulties encountered. Studies in countries like Spain<sup>13</sup>, United States of America<sup>14</sup> and France<sup>15</sup> also diagnosed moving to another city or club as important transitions in the sporting career of athletes from different sports and competitive levels.

While generating difficulties in adapting, the city changes and, especially, club, end up being desired by many athletes looking to evolve in sport and renew their expectations of better conditions of training and competition, as well as the rise in sports career. However, the exchange of coaches represented a transition that has led some athletes to think about the possibility of quitting the sport – and one of them quit basketball practice temporarily until the coach returned. In addition to the return of the cited coach, this non-normative transition was overcome due to the subsequent adoption of a new strategy by the board of directors: keep the same coach for each group of athletes, from Under 13 category to Under 18, a factor that favors the maintenance and improvement of work with teams in a long-term.

Another transition that affects the development of sports career is the intention of selection for the state teams, which if not achieved, ends up discouraging athletes, especially those who dedicate themselves for the whole year and are not selected by the coaches. In this context, one can highlight that the widespread

occurrence of non-normative transition of a player is in the results of the sports teams selection system, and the consequences of that selection process left deep marks on self-esteem, interpersonal relationships and life choices of the 'survivors' and 'cut ones'<sup>19</sup>.

Transitions related to the change of city, club, coaches, and not being part of a select group presented as consequences the desire to quit the sport, as well as the temporary abandonment of the sports practice in some cases. To overcome the instability caused by different sports transitions, athletes often seek support in social relations throughout life. Despite the stress generated by the transitions be strongly influential in a sports career, the social support provided to athletes, whether in terms of emotional support or advice on sports issues, has been recognized as essential for them to face the everyday athletic barriers<sup>9, 16</sup>. In addition, the positive emotional support arising mainly from parents seems to have strong influence in this process, as it increases the chances of athletes progressing to higher stages of their careers<sup>12</sup>.

The first steps of a young athlete in the world of organized sport can force him to adapt to the demands of a sport and the specificity of the modality chosen for specialization. Of course, the effects of such experiments are neutralized by interest and enthusiasm for sports practice and the quality of support provided by parents, coaches and team mates<sup>5</sup>. The disappointment around expectations or lack of correspondence between the ideas on sports, the specific nature of sport and the training process are presented, consequently, as important barriers in the transition to the sports specialization<sup>7</sup>.

Overcoming the challenges of choosing basketball as a method to specialize - for example, matching schedule between basketball training sessions and competition with other modalities, or the excessive demand required for the development of their careers in other modalities - led athletes to choose to abandon other modalities and to specialize in basketball. Information found in this study are related to affirmations present in the literature, in which one of the main reasons for teens choose to specialize in one activity to the detriment of others, lies in the positive value associated with the lived experience<sup>20</sup>. Therefore, the overall quality of initial sports experience should be positive to ensure that these young people remain involved with particular sport.

Adapting to the demands in the sports environment is an important transition with regard to the knowledge of new training routines and group of athletes. In the

literature, there is the recommendation that the provision of information to young athletes about the specificity of training and encouragement, regardless of the competitive success or failure, may create comfortable atmosphere of support, both in and around the sports group<sup>5</sup>.

Information obtained revealed that basketball players, although engaged and disciplined with the sports practice, did not give up their education. In this sense, it was observed that the players sought to organize their routine or even prioritize the studies in relation to sports, in order to not become outdated in their academic backgrounds. Different results were found in research conducted with young soccer players, which showed that most of these athletes have had repeated the year in any moment, or even that some athletes have quit their studies in favor of sports practice<sup>10</sup>. However, it is important to note that this difference may be strongly linked to the future financial prospects envisioned for each modality, since soccer players can idealize that the effort dedicated to the sport can give them future benefits in their careers. Basketball players, facing the national reality of the sport, have the comprehension that if their careers do not evolve or are not well rewarded, they should be prepared to act in other job areas.

In contrast to some information obtained during interviews, a study that investigated English athletes has detected the absence of support from the school and the lack of comprehension from teachers regarding the need of athletes to miss some classes to engage in certain sports commitments<sup>9</sup>. Thus, there were negative impact of sport participation on school performance (difficult to prepare because of exam periods matched sporting events' season) and at the same time, negative impact of school on sports participation (school exams prevented participation in some important competitions).

The transition to an intensive sports training generates the athletes need to work harder to achieve the highest levels of sporting performance, which implies in participating in more intense workouts (time, physical and mental workload) and to learn how to deal with the increasing demands of higher competitive levels. In the transition to intense training, athlete shall be considered a 'future talent', because new and harder sports goals are added in its preparation of daily life, as well as higher levels of competition, with the predominance of more intensified preparation that requires increasing levels of physical and psychological loads<sup>7</sup>. The literature has shown that athletes who manage to overcome the crises linked to early sport

specialization can develop into a more intensified training in the chosen sport, whereas those who cannot deal with these barriers remain at the same level, progress more slowly or simply drop out of competitive sports participation<sup>7-11</sup>.

As well as other transitions, psychological support network (coach, family, colleagues) should give special attention to the gradual career development and other spheres of life, and provide increased support to athletes to progress to a higher sporting level<sup>5</sup>. Similar to reports in this research, a study of high-level Russian athletes diagnosed that emotional support in difficult situations of their sporting careers, arising from coaches, parents and friends, as well as psychologists, doctors, masseurs and, more rarely, administrators, was fundamental for them to overcome the barriers faced and to advance the development of their careers<sup>7</sup>.

If in the previous transition the challenge of linking the practice of sports to the study was overcome with the absence in training, the transition to intensive specialized training strategy used by athletes to overcome the link between sport and other spheres of life was to reorganize study schedules and to recover the content of the missed lessons with colleagues.

The transition to higher levels of athletic career has required hard work and determination of the investigated athletes in order to obtain results, as well as greater time dedicated to sports and consequent reduction of time devoted to leisure, which corroborates the findings of some studies with British equestrian athletes<sup>9</sup>, Spanish basketball athletes<sup>13</sup> and Brazilian futsal athletes<sup>10</sup>. Transitions faced by athletes throughout their sports careers reveal, increasingly, the importance of managing the demands of social life, lifestyle and studies with the harder demands in sports context<sup>16</sup>.

In this perspective, it has been believed that the task of concealing sport and other important demands of life becomes fundamental for athletes to progress (or not) toward new transitions in their careers<sup>7, 11</sup>. In this case, athletes who adopt new set of behaviors, beliefs and attitudes, and achieve great success in competitions at that time, are able to overcome these transitions more easily. On the other hand, athletes who cannot overcome them leave the sport. The main argument is that they need to focus greater efforts on other important issues of life.

The levels of physical, tactical-technical and psychological demands tend to increase progressively during the development of sports athlete's career. The transition to the highest level of competitive sports

(adult category) requires athletes to perform their skills consistently for as long as possible. To conquer this, however, it is necessary to reserve almost an exclusive period of life for the preparation and participation in competitions and to receive support, family assistance and guidance of coach and other experts<sup>5</sup>.

Considering that the transition from youth category to adult category is essential for athletes who aim to reach the elite level, it is important to recognize that this particular transition does not refer only to the sporting context, it also includes new challenges and demands in psychological, psychosocial and academic-professional levels<sup>1</sup>. When athletes begin their participation in adult competitions or start to train with colleagues of this category, they enter a phase that requires correspondence with a group of new requirements in order to remain successful in sport<sup>16</sup>.

A research that investigated the sporting career transitions of Swedish individual sports athletes revealed that personal resources, as a process of coping, motivation, self-expectations and personal skills, become crucial to overcome negative transitions<sup>16</sup>. In addition, it is emphasized that, after overcoming this sport transition, athletic goals become the main life goals, as well as lifestyles become subordinate to the sport, which requires acquisition of major sporting experiences, personal maturity and expansion of athletic personality<sup>7</sup>.

Where as the development of athletes has traditionally been centered on player development in sports level, the holistic approach of the person, trend present in the current literature, examines the athletic career as a reciprocal interaction between the development in the athletic field and the development in other areas of life<sup>21</sup>. Importantly, the transitions studies should not only highlight the interactive nature of transitions in different areas of sporting life of the athletes, but also non-sports transitions that can affect the career development of them<sup>2</sup>.

The events that happen around the athlete, related to their social interactions profoundly affect sports performance. Problems such as diseases, fighting and the loss of loved ones influence negatively, even temporarily, the specific evolution in sports scene. As observed in the present investigation, family member's death was also identified, in a study of Paraná athletes from athletics, as a non-normative event occurred in sports history - which, in turn, also affected the perception and the involvement of these individuals with competitive sport<sup>22</sup>.

Considering the normative psychological transitions, coaches reported that in the transition from childhood

to adolescence, athletes have shown a decrease in coordination levels, as well as many physical changes that need careful monitoring so athletes are able to maintain and/or improve their performances, even with the changes that occur during the transition process. In addition, athletes and coaches reinforce that during the transition from adolescence to adulthood, there are many accountabilities, especially from the family, with regard the preparation for being approved by a College Institution and the need to help with household expenses. Added to this, there is the need of athletes to have a more active social life. The experienced transitions in their last years as teenagers reinforce that this transition is strongly linked to academic and psychosocial transitions experienced by athletes as well as the transitions from younger to adult category.

The consulted literature reinforces that when an athlete experiences a transition from the sports domain to higher levels of performance requirements, he often experiences the psychological transition related to early adulthood and academic transition with regard to starting college, which contributes to the creation of multiple difficult situations in the life of the player<sup>9</sup>.

The results related to sports and non-sports transitions experienced by basketball players investigated revealed important evidence about the barriers or challenges, about the consequences and coping resources used by young players to evolve in sports career.

The non-normative transitions correspond to the experienced sports injuries, changes and not being selected, while the normative transitions were related to early sport specialization, the intense specialized training and early participation in the adult category. Non-sports transitions, in turn, are linked to professional and academic, psychosocial and psychological transitions.

The observed evidence highlighted facing challenges around the simultaneous experience of sporting and non-sporting transitions. While experiencing the transition from initiation to specialization, athletes also were experiencing the transitions from childhood to adolescence. In addition, when they were experiencing transitions to more intense specialized training, surveyed athletes experienced significant psychosocial (social life and leisure) and academic transitions (elementary school to high school). Similarly, while moving from young to adult categories, players have gone through transitions in romantic relationships (dating) and in academic scenario (high school to college).

The relationship between the normative sporting transitions and academic and professional transitions was crucial for the development of athletes in the investigated basketball club, considering that transitions in educational levels made it possible, for this group, the continuity of participation in important school competitions or even the participation in college competitions, as well as receiving scholarships characterized as an important incentive for the maintenance of sports practice and dedication to basketball.

The results also showed that the transitions experienced in the various fields have triggered the interest of abandonment or temporary removal from basketball, and the need to adapt to new cultures, interpersonal relations, training demands, and physical and psychological loads. Considering the commitment of the sport with other spheres of life, it was required to athletes that, during each transition, sports goals would progressively correspond to their life goals.

The main resources available, regardless of experienced transition, correspond to intrinsic (greater seriousness, motivation and personal maturity) and extrinsic factors (possibility of training with more experienced athletes, receiving financial support and scholarships, informational and emotional support from colleagues, coaches and family). It was also noted that the maintenance of the same coach for each group of athletes in different categories enabled athletes to overcome the barrier related to changing coaches and the requirement to adjust to their work.

Considering the lack of investigations related to transitions in sports and non-sports fields at national reality, it is suggested the expansion of investigations with young or professional athletes from different Brazilian regions or studies with young and adult national teams. These investigations may advance the comprehension of the consequences of these transitions for sport career and may assist in identifying the resources and the most used strategies to overcome them.

Finally, it is emphasized that the study presents as a limitation the lack of longitudinal follow-up of sports and non-sports transitions of athletes throughout their careers, since it has been carried out one-time frame, where athletes recalled specific aspects of their experiences by the memory background of experiences that were more significant. Moreover, considering that data collection focused on a single sports club (case study), the generalization of the present findings requires prudence.

## Resumo

### Transições no processo de desenvolvimento de atletas do basquetebol feminino

O objetivo deste estudo foi investigar as transições presentes no desenvolvimento de atletas de basquetebol feminino. Participaram do estudo 31 atletas e dois treinadores pertencentes a um clube de destaque na formação do basquetebol do estado de Santa Catarina/Brasil. A coleta das informações ocorreu por meio de entrevistas semiestruturadas e os dados analisados por meio da técnica de análise de conteúdo, com auxílio do software NVivo 9.2. Os resultados revelaram a importância e os desafios em torno da vivência simultânea de transições esportivas e não esportivas, destacando-se que as atletas vivenciaram a transição da iniciação para a especialização ao mesmo tempo em que experienciaram a transição da infância para a adolescência. As atletas que vivenciaram transições para o treinamento especializado mais intenso também experienciaram transições psicossociais importantes, sobretudo relacionadas ao convívio social (amizades) e ao estudo (passagem do Ensino Fundamental para o Ensino Médio). Por fim, ao transitarem das categorias de base para a adulta, as jogadoras passaram por transições tanto nos relacionamentos interpessoais (namoro) quanto na passagem do Ensino Médio para o Ensino Superior. As evidências encontradas permitem concluir sobre a importância de compreender com profundidade as transições vivenciadas e o quanto afetam o desenvolvimento esportivo de atletas de basquetebol feminino, bem como identificar os recursos e as estratégias intrínsecas e extrínsecas utilizadas para a superação bem-sucedida destas diferentes transições.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Atletas; Esporte; Formação; Carreira.

## References

1. Stambulova N, Alfermann D, Statler T, Côté J. Career development and transitions of athletes. *Int J Sport Exerc Psychol.* 2009;7:395-412.
2. Wylleman P, Alfermann D, Lavallee D. Career transitions in sport: European perspectives. *Psychol Sport Exerc.* 2004;5:7-20.
3. Agresta MC, Brandão MRF, Barros Neto TL. Causas e conseqüências físicas e emocionais do término de carreira esportiva. *Rev Bras Med Esporte.* 2008;14:504-8.
4. Henriksen K, Stambulova N, Roessler KK. Holistic approach to athletic talent development environments: a successful sailing milieu. *Psychol Sport Exerc.* 2010;11:212-22.
5. Wylleman P, Lavallee D, Alfermann D, editors. *Career transitions in competitive sports.* Biel: FEPSAC; 1999.
6. Alfermann D, Stambulova N. Career transitions and career termination. In: Tenenbaum G, Eklund RC, organizers. *Handbook of sport psychology.* Hoboken: John Wiley; 2007. p.712-33.
7. Stambulova NB. Developmental sports career investigations in Russia: a post-perestroika analysis. *Sport Psychol.* 1994;8:221-37.
8. Brandão MRF, Akel MC, Andrade SA, Guiselini MAN, Martini LA, Nastás MA. Causas e conseqüências da transição de carreira esportiva: uma revisão de literatura. *Rev Bras Cienc Mov.* 2000;8:49-58.
9. Pummell B, Harwood C, Lavallee D. Jumping to the next level: a qualitative examination of within-career transition in adolescent event riders. *Psychol Sport Exerc.* 2008;9:427-47.
10. Marques MP, Samulski DM. Análise da carreira esportiva de jovens atletas de futebol na transição da fase amadora para a fase profissional: escolaridade, iniciação, contexto sócio-familiar e planejamento da carreira. *Rev Bras Educ Fis Esporte.* 2009;23:103-19.
11. Salmela JH. Stages and transitions across sports careers. In: Hackfort D, editor. *Psycho-social issues and interventions in elite sports.* Frankfurt: Lang; 1994. p.11-28.
12. Wuerth S, Lee MJ, Alfermann D. Parental involvement and athletes' career in youth sport. *Psychol Sport Exerc.* 2004;5:21-33.
13. Lorenzo A, Bórras PJ, Sánchez JM, Jiménez S, Sampedro J. Career transition from junior to senior in basketball players. *Rev Psicol Deporte.* 2009;18(Suppl):309-12.
14. Samuel RD, Tenenbaum G. How do athletes perceive and respond to change-events: an exploratory measurement tool. *Psychol Sport Exerc.* 2011;12:392-406.

15. Debois N, Ledon A, Argiolas C, Rosnet E. A lifespan perspective on transitions during a top sports career: a case of an elite female fencer. *Psychol Sport Exerc.* 2012;13:660-8.
16. Stambulova N, Franck A, Weibull F. Assessment of the transition from junior-to-senior sports in Swedish athletes. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology.* 2012;10:79-95.
17. Bardin L. *Análise de conteúdo.* Lisboa: Edições 70; 2011.
18. Costa VT, Ferreira RM, Penna EM, Costa IT, Paiva TNS, Samulski DM. Fases de transição da carreira esportiva: perspectiva de ex-atletas profissionais do futebol brasileiro. *Conexões.* 2010;8:84-103.
19. Pearson RE, Petitpas AJ. Transitions of athletes: developmental and preventive perspectives. *J Couns Dev.* 1990; 69:7-10.
20. Côté J. The influence of the family in the development of talent in sport. *Sport Psychol.* 1999;13:395-417.
21. Henriksen K. The ecology of talent development in sport: a multiple case study of successful athletic talent development environments in Scandinavia [thesis]. Odense (DK): University of Southern Denmark, Faculty of Health Sciences; 2010.
22. Vieira JLL. O processo de abandono de talentos do atletismo do Estado do Paraná: um estudo orientado pela teoria dos sistemas ecológicos [tese]. Santa Maria (RS): Universidade Federal de Santa Maria, Centro de Educação Física e Esportes; 1999.

## Acknowledgement

Researchers thank the members of the basketball club (managers, coaches, athletes) for their collaboration in this study, as well as funding agencies Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES) and Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico (CNPq) for the scholarships provided to the post-graduate researchers and the funding to carry out this study, respectively.

ENDEREÇO

Alexandra Folle  
Centro de Ciências da Saúde e do Esporte  
Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina  
R. Pascoal Simone, 358  
80080-350 - Florianópolis - SC - BRASIL  
e-mail: alexandra.folle@udesc.br

Submitted: 04/10/2014

Revised: 01/19/2015

Accepted: 05/05/2015