

Abstract

The purpose of this case study was to understand the personal experience of a female athlete (aged 24 years) undergoing a significant change-event from a team sport (rugby) to an individual sport (weightlifting) at an elite level. Two in-depth informal interviews were conducted. A number of change-events were experienced in several contexts, including a change of sports, a change in academic status, and a reoccurring injury. The findings provided empirical support for the use of the Scheme of Change for Sport Psychology Practice (Samuel & Tenenbaum, 2011a) for understanding the change process and the associated coping strategies athletes may adopt.

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A case study of an athlete's experience of multiple change-events moving between team and individual sports

Athletes typically encounter various transitions during their career, either within their sport or as part of their wider social environment. The concept of 'transition' was originally described as, "an event or a nonevent which results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behaviour and relationships" (Schlossberg, 1981, p.5). Within the field of sport psychology the study of these transitions initially focused on how athletes experienced the process of moving from high-level competitive and/or professional sports into retirement. Since then the field has expanded and these investigations now encompass all aspects of an athlete's career as well as incorporating other nonathletic life events in a gestalt conceptualisation of the transitions encountered by athletes (Wylleman, Alfermann, & Lavallee, 2004).

Wylleman and Lavallee (2004), in their Developmental Model, suggest that normative transitions, those that correspond to the expected movement from one phase to another (e.g., moving from amateur to professional sport), can occur in four overlapping areas of an athlete's life. These areas are: (a) transitions relating to the athletic career (e.g., initiation into a sport), (b) transitions relating to psychological development (e.g., moving from adolescence into adulthood), (c) transitions relating to social development (e.g., developing a partnership with a coach), and (d) transitions relating to educative and professional development (e.g., moving from secondary to higher education). These transitions may have an impact on more than one area and in different, often interdependent, ways. However, transitions can also be nonnormative, events that are involuntary or unplanned (e.g., a career ending injury) and these too may impact on different areas of an athlete's life (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004).

In sport, Sinclair and Orlick (1993) defined any successful or positive transition as one in which the athlete negotiated the transition and reciprocal changes without any

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professional assistance, and defined a negative or 'crisis' transition as one in which the athlete needed specific psychological support. Stambulova (2000) also stressed the difference between a crisis transition and a transition involving anxiety or discomfort, stating that the latter would only constitute a crisis if the athlete experienced difficulties due to ineffective coping and needed to seek out professional support. This means that transitions that involve experiences traditionally seen as negative, such as anxiety or physical discomfort, are not necessarily automatically harmful, unsuccessful, or crisis transitions.

Successful transitions are therefore associated with effective coping and the overcoming of related problems and barriers, while crisis transitions are associated with ineffective coping and the perceived need for professional intervention (Samuel & Tenenbaum, 2011b). Alfermann and Stambulova (2007) suggested that poor strategy selection and ineffective coping was a result of an inability by the athlete to analyse the situation correctly, a poor awareness of the demands of the transition, and a lack of resources to appropriately address those demands.

In order to understand this process Samuel and Tenenbaum (2011a) proposed a conceptual shift away from focusing specifically on the concept of transitions to investigating what they referred to as *change-events*. A change-event is not limited to a recognisable or distinct transition and encapsulates all events in the athletic engagement, including longitudinal processes, as well as transitions and crisis transitions. Samuel and Tenenbaum (2011a) argued that the experience of an objective change-event and the associated subjective changes of the athlete are part of the same process. They suggested that athletes experience an on-going psychological process that can be seen in the way that an athlete interacts with the environment through their decisions and choice of coping strategies.

In sport, this interactive process has been modelled in the Scheme of Change for Sport Psychology Practice (SCSPP; Samuel & Tenenbaum, 2011a). This model focuses on: (a) the

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stages that unfold as athletes encounter change-events and react to them, and (b) the psychotherapeutic process that could be used to facilitate an effective and successful reaction to a change-event. The SCSPP describes change-events and the typical characteristics of these, as well as the subsequent response in athletes.

Stage 1 describes the athletic status quo, that is, the relatively stable environment prior to any change. Samuel and Tenenbaum (2011a) have argued that an athlete will attempt to maintain this state for as long as possible. However, changes will typically occur naturally in this state as a result of either interpersonal or intrapersonal processes, such as reduced performance or an altered relationship with the coach.

Stage 2 begins with the athlete experiencing a change-event. This experience is followed by the athlete's appraisal of the change-event and their own situation. This leads to the athlete's initial strategic decision whether to cope with the event or ignore it. This strategic decision can cover a range of approaches such as; (a) denial, or ignoring the need for change (not acting or not able to act); (b) seeking aid or advice (e.g., consulting a coach or teammate; (c) deciding to act without assistance; and (d) seeking professional help (e.g., a sport psychologist or counsellor). This decision is potentially influenced by a range of moderating factors: (a) the significance of the event (e.g., emotional impact), (b) the influence of significant others, (c) personal experience of similar events, (d) availability of support and guidance, (e) the athlete's individual characteristics (e.g., age and gender); and (f) the motivation of the athlete (direction and intensity). After the initial strategic decision is made the athlete will make a subsequent decision whether they will attempt to change or not. This decision to change (or not) is also influenced by a range of factors such as: (a) the athlete's capacity to change (e.g., motivation to make a change, coping style adopted, expectancy of therapy), and (c) elements of the therapeutic process (e.g., therapeutic alliance and/or relationship).

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Finally, *stage 3* describes the athlete's attempt to implement change within themselves or within their environment. However, Samuel and Tenenbaum (2011a) stress that just because an athlete has made the decision to respond to a change-event, by implementing a coping strategy or deciding to change, does not mean he/she will necessarily have the interpersonal and intrapersonal resources to accomplish this. These efforts may therefore result in either a personal change in the athlete, such as an increased motivation or altered behaviour, or in no change at all.

Within elite sport, transitioning between key points in a career has been identified as crucial in determining an athlete's continued success (Pearson & Petipas, 1990). However, the focus has shifted from considering relatively few normative transitions such as entering sport (e.g., Bruner, Munroe-Chandler, & Spink, 2008) and retiring from competition (e.g., Miller & Kerr, 2002), to examining a greater range of transitions that include nonnormative events and nonevents (e.g., Wylleman, Alfermann, & Lavallee, 2004). The focus has also shifted from describing specific events to considering the processes athletes undergo, the coping strategies they use, the resources available to athletes, and potential interventions to assist in creating positive sport experiences (e.g., Samuel & Tenenbaum, 2011a, 2011b).

It is into this context that the present paper sets out the case study of an elite athlete who underwent a significant change-event when she moved between two sports at an elite level. This event consisted of several interconnected changes, including, but not limited to: a change in sport, a change in academic status, and a potentially career ending injury. To fully explore the interconnections the authors sought to investigate the athlete's personal experiences and capture the subjective, phenomenological interpretations of the athlete, as well as the complex factors that have influenced her athletic engagement.

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Method

Participant

The participant of this study will be referred to by the pseudonym, “Jill”. Jill was a client of the first author and her selection for involvement in this study was based upon her experience of a change-event when moving between two distinct sports while competing at an elite level. Jill is 24 years old. She entered sport during her primary education (ages 4-11) and has since then experienced a variety of change-events. These have included both moving between sports at an amateur level and relocating between countries. She previously competed as an elite female rugby player as part of the national academy and the feeder squad for the national team. However, she later suffered from chronic injuries that prevented further participation. During rehabilitation activities she was involved in weightlifting and within a 12-month period progressed into the elite echelons of this sport and competed both nationally and internationally. During this change-event Jill was also working towards a Strength and Conditioning degree. More specific demographic information related to Jill is not reported to protect her anonymity.

Methods and Procedures

Ethical approval was granted by the appropriate University Ethical Advisory Committee before the study was undertaken. The first author, in her role as a sport psychologist, has previously worked with Jill. This role had lapsed one month previously but allowed the first author to approach Jill and explain the aim of the study and the requirements of being involved. Jill was asked for her permission for her personal information to be used as part of the study and to take part in an in-depth interview process. Jill agreed and signed an informed consent form before any further action was taken. A narrative/biographical research approach was selected for use in this study (see Dowling Naess, 1996).

Narrative/biographical investigations are a common method in qualitative research that

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“enables the exploration of an individual’s subjective reality” (Dowling Naess, 1996, p. 42).

In this study it consisted of interpreting Jill’s narrative using data collected from retrospective in-depth interviews, as well as notes taken by the first author during her work with Jill in the 6-months prior to the study.

The primary source of information was collected using two in-depth, informal interviews with Jill. This interview process was concerned with identifying and understanding the various patterns in Jill’s behaviour that had shaped her personal experiences and her individual narrative. A basic outline of potentially important topics (e.g., injury, changes in coach etc) was developed using the first author’s notes prior to the two interviews, but specific questions were not prepared in advance. Instead, Jill was encouraged to talk about and discuss her lifetime involvement in sports and describe how she had developed as an athlete as well as the barriers she had faced. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) have argued that this approach allows interviews to be ‘reflexive’ in nature, allowing the interviewer to be an ‘active listener’ and adapt to and interpret the participant’s responses. The first author has worked with Jill and so potentially brought prior knowledge to the interview. To reduce any potential biases the interviews were conducted by both authors with the second author taking the lead. Additionally both authors recorded two separate sets of personal notes for later comparison and discussion.

These interviews were conducted over two two-hour sessions divided between two days with a week between them, and were carried out in a quiet, private setting and were audio taped with the participant’s permission. The first interview aimed to establish a framework of Jill’s experiences and chronological development of her athletic career. An overview of the notes taken during the first interview was presented to Jill before the second interview commenced and she was invited to comment on the authors interpretations. The second interview was focused primarily on Jill’s change-event experience of engaging in a

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team sport to engaging in an individual sport at an elite level . During both interviews Jill was also invited to reflect and expand upon her experiences to reduce ambiguity in meaning and these were discussed with both authors to establish a greater level of respondent validity (Van Manen, 1997).

Audio recordings were transcribed and checked for accuracy by the first author. The data was used as the basis of a thematic analysis in the first instance with the first author conducting an inductive, line-by-line, analysis in order to identify units of meaning. These units were then preliminarily grouped into core themes that potentially reflected the various influences identified by Jill as having a significant role in her experience of change-events (Van Manen, 1997). Identified themes were discussed with the second author as part of the first author's on-going analysis of data. Both authors discussed the identified meaning units and worked to reach a consensus regarding the core themes. During the interview both authors had also made written notes concerning their own personal reactions. These notes were compared to each other, as well as to the final transcripts, in order to reduce the influence of the authors' own preconceptions and ideas. The purpose of this process was to reduce the potential bias arising from a single individual's interpretation of data and to increase the validity of any findings by confirming the intersubjectivity of any interpretations (Patton, 1990).

Results

Due to the extensive data collected from Jill's narrative, the authors have presented these findings using a temporal framework across three key change-events: (a) becoming a female rugby player (duration approximately 6 years), (b) being an 'inbetweenner' (duration of approximately 18 months) and (c) adapting to life as an elite weightlifter (duration of approximately 22 months). Additional personal and athletic change-events experienced by Jill are embedded into this framework and the core themes relating to the various influences

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on these change-events are identified throughout. Figure 1 provides a conceptual representation of the change-events experienced by Jill during her sporting career.

Insert Figure 1 here

Becoming a female rugby player

Jill's early experiences of sport were positive. The sports Jill chose to compete in were not actively sought out by her but instead presented themselves through opportunities at school, for example basketball and athletics (shot putt and 4 x 100m relay), allowing ease of opportunity to be involved in sport. Jill's motives for engaging in sport were predominantly extrinsic in nature and were driven by the pursuit of success, as she stated, "The relay (4 x 100m) I enjoyed because I was the finisher so it was the glory at being the fourth runner I enjoyed the most." Her event preference was also characterised by a shared responsibility being involved in a team sport, with some suggestion of attribution bias:

I knew I had explosive power but I think a bit of me didn't want to do the solo 100m because there was too much pressure on getting that one race right so a team was better. There were three other people so if we were to lose, it wasn't all my fault but if we were winning and I'm running the last leg, then I take the glory.

At the age of 12 years, an academic, personal, nonnormative change-event occurred where Jill moved secondary schools. This was the catalyst for Jill to start playing rugby instead of continuing to pursue athletics. During this time, Jill developed a preference for rugby which allowed her to gain respect and become part of an established social network at her new school:

Because I was a first year student playing with all the older girls I sort of got respect at boarding school, not only from all the girls but all the sixth year guys as well. I just became well-known I suppose because of it...I enjoyed the fame.

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During Jill's time playing rugby, she played the position of *hooker* (a defensive role where the player is the central forward in the front row of the scrum aiming to hook the ball out) where she had shared responsibility for the team's success. Jill vocalised a genuine passion for the game which had not been evident in previous sports she engaged in, "I just fell in love with it (rugby) and just always wanted to play it."

A subsequent personal, nonnormative change-event of moving to another country occurred when Jill was aged 14 years. This eventually resulted in Jill playing rugby at an elite level, first at club level between the ages of 14-20 years and then at national level when she was aged 16 years. During this period, playing rugby allowed her to cope with this change-event more effectively by providing an instant social circle and a sense of inclusion and acceptance:

It was the support on the pitch, if you got tackled you would know that someone would come and support you. It was also the after the match, stuff like going out to the pub and just hanging out, having weekend house parties, having a close circle of friends. This was how I found friends (after moving to a new country)... I didn't really have that many high school friends, just because they weren't my cup of tea, so they (rugby teammates) were my friends and I hung out with those people... If it wasn't for rugby, I would never have settled as quickly as I did.

Whilst playing for her club, Jill experienced an athletic, nonnormative change-event of an injury. This change-event occurred during a collapsed scrum in training, which resulted in her being unavailable for team selection for two months. This change-event was perceived optimistically by Jill, "I wasn't devastated because I was still training, doing the fitness but wasn't doing any of the contact. I still felt like part of the team and didn't feel left out. It wasn't that big a blow to me." As a consequence of the injury, an additional change-event transpired where Jill had to change her position from *hooker* to *centre* (an attacking role

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where the player reads the play, directs the attack and runs lines). This change was perceived positively; allowing her the opportunity for more speed work, more ball handling, less scrumage and less contact. She enjoyed the change in position:

I enjoyed the position more as I found I could tackle really well which I didn't know I could do before and I enjoyed the position more because I felt like I was doing more, there was a lot more individual play.

At this point, aged 15 years, Jill was invited to train with the national squad on a regular basis, alongside playing regularly at club level. This change-event provided Jill with the opportunity to be selected for the national team to compete at their next major competition. However at this point, she experienced another change-event, a new injury, and this was perceived quite differently from the previous injury:

I just remember being really gutted about not getting to play but everyone was telling me, '12 weeks and you'll be back' so that was fine. But I remember being really gutted when the national A squad coach said, 'I would have selected you (for the 1st XI team) too but just work on your recovery, you're a really good player and you'll have no issues getting back into the system'.

Similar to the coping response to her previous injury, Jill reported being positive and optimistic at this point. This continued until she had to undergo a second surgical procedure when she started to realise that a future career in international rugby may not have been possible. After a scan and a third surgical procedure, this realisation was confirmed when she was told she would never be able to play rugby again.

Being an inbetweenener

During the year spent being injured, Jill became isolated from the rest of the team stating, "I never felt part of the club anymore because I wasn't playing." She also went to watch a few games and tried to continue to interact socially with the team yet for her it wasn't

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the same as before her injury, where she reported that, “going to watch the games was the hardest bit. I would just get so angry and pissed off being at the side of the pitch... I wanted to be playing yet just felt so helpless.” Jill also reported maladaptive coping strategies (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989) during her time spent injured, including excessive drinking and poor dietary habits:

The fact that I was drinking quite a bit at the time helped me anyway as I was often in a good mood but I knew it wasn't a good way of life. I was just sat eating pizzas and getting drunk all the time, that's what I did... I was absolutely miserable.

As a result of the injury, Jill spent 6-8 months, “wallowing in self-pity” and decided to change her academic plans and take a year out of Higher Education to focus on her rehabilitation. In autumn 2009, aged 21 years, Jill made a decision to change and started her Strength and Conditioning degree. This decision was against the surgeon's advice who expressed concern about the practical nature of the course yet she made a conscious decision to respond to this change-event (Samuel & Tenenbaum, 2011a) and overtime the pain became manageable. Jill's self-presentational concerns (Schlenker, 1980), a need to maintain her athletic identity (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993) and the desire to pursue a new athletic goal contributed to her decision to change. As a result of this, Jill started to spend more time in the gym, using the bike and weights, doing exercises that required limited movement. It was at this time that Jill's focus and need to be involved in sport returned. This decision to change was supported by the availability and guidance of both a sport psychologist and significant others, and the motivation of Jill herself to reintegrate into the sporting world.

As with her early sporting preferences, weightlifting was not actively sought out by Jill but presented itself as an opportunity through an academic assignment on female weightlifters. She used weightlifting as an activity to maintain her fitness over the summer and to practice her lifting technique for her undergraduate degree. She began training with a

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club and was entered into several competitions and, as the only entry in her weight category, continued to improve on her personal bests for each lift. This shift in the frame of reference for her success (i.e. from other-referenced against teams in rugby to self-referenced against personal bests in weightlifting) was an additional change-event she encountered. Her selected coping strategy for this was moderated by several factors (the significance of the transition, motivation and individual characteristics) which enhanced her motivation to continue weightlifting, “because I was winning it made it easier to stick with it. I was getting better with every competition so that made me want to stay with the sport”. During this time Jill's mood was positive, “I was just getting better and better. My fitness was going up and my injury was feeling better,” her self-confidence was high yet her athletic identity (Brewer et al., 1993) as a weightlifter was not acknowledged, stating, “I didn't feel like a weightlifter...I wasn't 'all in' as it were. I wasn't really pursuing weightlifting, I was just sort of doing it... I wasn't looking for any particular sporting career at the time.” There was also evidence of self-presentational motives (Schlenker, 1980) for pursuing weightlifting where Jill stated, “I enjoyed what weightlifting was doing for my body, looking better and feeling better.” Throughout this 'inbetween' period, Jill wasn't a rugby player anymore due to a career-ending injury yet she hadn't acknowledged herself as a weightlifter. Although she was training regularly, winning competitions and noticing physical changes, Jill hadn't made that athletic strategic decision in her mind and it wasn't an integrated part of her athletic identity. Jill's links to rugby were predominantly social and she utilised the rugby team environment for her social support network during this inbetween period.

Life as an elite weightlifter

The realisation that she had made the change to elite weightlifting level didn't happen for Jill until she was selected to start training with the national squad and then she finally recognised that it was part of who she was, stating, “I had been training as an elite athlete and

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living as an elite athlete but just in my head it hadn't clicked that that's what I had become.” It was this change-event that prompted her to respond, accept her new situation and integrate weightlifting at an elite level as part of her athletic identity. This nonnormative athletic change to weightlifting was accompanied by variety of changes to Jill's personal, social, and academic domains that she had not experienced as rugby player. Initially there was a sense that she didn't deserve her success as a weightlifter:

Even though I was winning all the time, I didn't feel like I deserved to win. I felt like I hadn't paid my dues because I hadn't sought out to do [weightlifting]. It was a different world to [playing rugby].

The different worlds of her two sports were characterised by a shift from a team sport to an individual sport where there was no a reliance on others within the team to perform and take responsibility, and Jill openly admitted that she, “had to make it happen.” Jill responded to this pivotal change-event with a positive coping response where key factors influenced her decision to change to elite weightlifting. The change-event itself was valued by Jill, she had high levels of motivation, access to professional support (e.g. coach, sport psychologist) and had social support for the change-event from significant others (e.g. rugby team mates, university friends). This resulted in a conscious decision to change involving high levels of personal control during this change-event. There was a sense of autonomy and accountability for her training as a weightlifter that was never an issue as a rugby player where, “with rugby you would have coaches do everything for you, be there and there at this time and to do this at training but with weightlifting it's all on you.” There were also subjectively recognised differences in Jill's responses to a change in the competition demands of the two sports:

In rugby there are small margins for error in a game and in training but with this, if you don't weigh enough, then you don't get to compete. If you don't train enough, you won't be able to lift the weights.

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Jill also described the difference in the duration of a rugby game compared to a weight-lifting competition where a game of rugby is 80 minutes and a player's emotional responses can change throughout. In weightlifting, there are three lift attempts lasting six minutes with a 45 minute break between each lift attempt. Jill describes the differences in the cognitive demands of this below:

In rugby you have 80 minutes of processing stuff in your head but with weightlifting you have no time at all and the adrenaline rush is ridiculous. In a rugby game, if I made one good tackle, that's the only thing I remembered from the entire game but with weightlifting it's hard to remember just one thing. It's all just a blur and I can only remember a sense of how it went.

The training demands of weightlifting resulted in Jill predominantly training in isolation with coached sessions only scheduled once a month due to geographical constraints. Consequently, Jill had to coach herself and learn to self-regulate as an athlete where commitment to her training was a priority. This was in contrast to her time as a rugby player where other commitments (e.g., socialising, university) would be considered of equal importance. This shift in her level of commitment is highlighted in the following extract:

It's hard to remember a time before weightlifting because it became such a big part of me. Everything was centred around weightlifting instead of me fitting weightlifting around my life or [University] life or anything like that. I had to think about when I had lectures, when I could train and how much time I had to eat before a session. For this past year, all I've thought about is training.

Jill's commitment to weightlifting impacted on her typical social behaviours where she stated, "I had to make a decision early on that if I was to keep training this hard, I wouldn't be able to drink. So I stopped drinking. That was the biggest change to my social life that I noticed." This was a significant change in cultural norms for Jill, where in both her sporting life as a

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rugby player and her university life as a student, drinking was considered a normal behaviour, “being in a rugby team and a student as well, you can't imagine yourself not being in the pub. All of the social engagements are centred around parties in the pub, drinking and going on tour drinking.” Although difficult at first, her new identity as a non-drinker was accepted by her friends in the rugby team and by her fellow peers at University where Jill noticed that, “people at university would say ‘she doesn't drink’ rather than ‘she's not drinking.’”

Although Jill referred to these changes as 'sacrifices' in her narrative, these were outweighed by a list of positives about being an elite level athlete:

There's definitely a feel-good factor about saying you're a British level weightlifter and the biggest thing I've noticed is when my friends talk about it to other people... You have a sense of purpose and focus, knowing I was going to spend three hours in the gym working out used to make me so happy.

The final chapter in Jill's story ends with another athletic nonnormative change-event of an injury. A reoccurrence of pain from her previous rugby injury had a debilitating effect on Jill's ability to train and compete. “It wasn't a single injury, it was everything... a combination of pain and inflammation all over my body and, to date, I haven't trained for 15 weeks.” Her description of how she feels at present in this transitional phase reflects a sense of dejection, despair and low self-worth:

I keep trying to remember how I used to be before I got injured because right now I'm a miserable, miserable person... right now getting out of bed is bad enough. You feel so dejected after doing so much, from doing so much to doing nothing.

Discussion

The purpose of this paper was to understand the personal experiences of an individual undergoing a series of unusual and highly significant interconnected change-events,

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including, but not limited to: a change of sports, a change in academic status, and a reoccurring (and potentially career ending) injury. These were presented using a temporal framework across three key phases: (a) becoming a female rugby player (duration of approximately 6 years), (b) being an 'inbetweeners' (duration of approximately 18 months) and (c) adapting to life as an elite weightlifter (duration of approximately 22 months). A significant finding of this case study was the number of change-events Jill has experienced as a relatively young athlete, including athletic and personal normative and non-normative change-events. This is supportive of Wylleman and Lavallee's (2004) developmental model of transitions where there was evidence of all four levels of transitions (i.e., change-events) experienced by Jill. At the athletic level she moved from rugby to elite weightlifting which coincided with her moving from adolescence to adulthood at the psychological level. At the psycho-social level, Jill shifted from shared responsibility within a team sport to self-regulation and autonomy as an individual athlete. This shift was concurrent with changes at an academic level with a move to a new country and schooling system to becoming a student at University.

Another important finding in this case study was the diverse approaches in which Jill dealt with the same change-event. An athletic, nonnormative change-event of an injury was experienced several times by Jill yet with different coping strategies used each time. Lavallee (2000) emphasised that the distinct context in which a transition takes place may influence an athlete's perception of the meaning and importance of the transition and their selection and implementation of an effective coping strategy. This was evident for Jill where her first experience of an injury was perceived optimistically as the change-event did not threaten or jeopardise her position on the team. She was able to continue to train with the team and therefore her coping strategies were based around continued involvement with the team and her athletic status quo was not compromised. Yet she successfully coped with this change-

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event through the knowledge that the duration of this significant change-event was minimal and with the support and guidance of significant others (rugby team mates). At this point, Jill had the intrapersonal resources to cope effectively. Her successful coping of the change-event resulted in her developing as an athlete and changing her position from hooker to centre, allowing her the opportunity for more speed work, more ball handling, less scrumage and less contact. This change in field position in rugby is also reported as a change-event in sport by Samuel and Tenenbaum (2011b) in their examination of change-events, perceptions and reactions to change-events in 338 athletes from a range of sports. The context of her second injury, however, differed considerably where Jill was on the verge of being selected for the national squad prior to the injury. This shift in context and the meaning and the importance of the change-event resulted in her adopting maladaptive coping strategies. This demonstrates the importance for athletes experiencing within-career change-events(s) to be equipped with the necessary coping resources to successfully negotiate change-events and has important implications for sport psychologists when working with athletes to consider the context of their change-event(s). For example, ensuring athletes are involved and informed during change-event processes, set appropriate, self-determined goals and utilise available social support networks.

The SCSPP (Samuel & Tenenbaum, 2011a) has been recently developed as a framework to constitute an effective coping process when an athlete is faced with a change. In this case study, there were several associated change-events that Jill experienced across her temporal shifts of becoming a female rugby player, being an inbetweenner and adapting to life as an elite weightlifter and this can be used as an example of this framework in an applied context. In *stage 1* of the SCSPP, the athletic environment is considered to be relatively stable prior to any change-event. For Jill this period of relative stability occurred when she wasn't a rugby player anymore, due to a career-ending injury, yet she hadn't acknowledged

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herself as a weightlifter at this point. Although she was training regularly, winning competitions and noticing physical changes, Jill hadn't made that athletic change in her mind and it wasn't an integrated part of her athletic identity. This change-event from being an inbetweener to becoming an elite weightlifter is discussed below in relation to the SCSPP.

Stage 2 of the SCSPP begins with the athlete experiencing a change-event. For Jill, this change-event was her becoming an elite weightlifter. This is followed by the athlete's appraisal of the change-event itself and their own situation. Jill's appraisal process was triggered by her involvement with the national squad when she finally recognised that being an elite weightlifter was part of who she was and that she was undergoing a change to a new sport as an elite athlete. According to the SCSPP framework, at this point an athlete's selection of coping strategy associated with the strategic decision is influenced by six moderating factors, (a) the significance of the event (e.g., emotional impact, how long it will last); (b) the influence of significant others; (c) personal experience of similar events; (d) availability of support and guidance (access to professional and informal support); (e) the athlete's individual characteristics (e.g., age and gender); and (f) the motivation of the athlete (direction and intensity). In Jill's case, becoming an elite weightlifter was influenced by the significance she placed on this change-event and her motivation and desire to experience the change successfully. Jill had made a number of personal, social and academic sacrifices during this change which influenced her decision to change. In line with findings by Samuel and Tenenbaum (2013), Jill's decision to change and fully embrace the change-event was a function of the informal support she received from her university friends and her ex-teammates from rugby; the formal support she received from her sport psychologist and her intrinsic motivation to change.

At *Stage 3* of the SCSPP, an athlete's attempt to implement change within themselves or within their environment is considered. Samuel and Tenenbaum (2011a) stress that just

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because an athlete has made a decision to respond to the change-event, by implementing a coping strategy or deciding to change, does not necessarily mean they will have the interpersonal and intrapersonal resources to accomplish this. In this case study, Jill was experiencing a unique change-event from a team sport to an individual sport where a sense of autonomy and accountability for her training as a weightlifter was never an issue as a rugby player with guidance, direction and instruction being provided to her by her coaches. It was clearly evident that Jill fully equipped herself with the required intrapersonal resources to implement the self-regulation needed to be an elite weightlifter, for example her commitment to training was a priority and her nutritional and training requirements were the focus of her daily schedule. Jill made a conscious decision to respond to the change-event and fully engaged with the process, which resulted in her becoming an autonomous and fulfilled athlete. This decision to change is supported in the SCSPP framework. In the development of the SCSPP, Samuel and Tennenbaum (2011a) acknowledged that some change-events may be influenced by additional factors not currently described in the framework. Based on the findings of this case study, it could be argued that concurrent change-events experienced by an athlete could moderate the coping strategies used by athletes and several change-events may have an interactive influence on each other, which has yet to be explored by the SCSPP. Jill was experiencing social, academic and personal change-events during the time she was undergoing her athletic change-event which could have influenced her ability to cope with the main change-event of moving from a team sport to an individual sport at an elite level.

Although a case-study based approach allowed an in-depth insight into unique and highly significant associated change-events experienced by one athlete at an elite level, it is not representative of all athletes who undergo a change from a team sport to an individual sport at elite level. It is important to recognise that change-event experiences may vary between sports and individuals, particularly given the potential number of moderating factors

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that contribute to the experiences of athletes in both personal and athletic contexts.

Additionally, the findings may have been subject to a retrospective recall bias of the participant and bias arising from interpretation of the data. However, the authors minimised this through encouraging Jill to reflect and expand upon her experiences to reduce ambiguity in meaning and to establish a greater level of respondent validity (Van Manen, 1997).

The change-event experiences of Jill were explored through retrospective interviews, yet adopting longitudinal studies which track athletes throughout a change-event could eliminate the limitations faced by retrospective interviewing in this area and provide a deeper understanding of the change-event process as it unfolds, over time. This would also allow sports psychologists to develop specific and tailored interventions that would assist the athlete in preparing for within-career change-events and subsequently negotiating them in a positive manner. Based on the findings of this case study, there is preliminary evidence for the usefulness of the SCSP framework as a guide for practitioners who are working with athletes who may experience within-career change-events. Findings support the importance of understanding the significance of the change-event for the athlete and their levels of motivation in relation to the change-event. Ensuring athlete independence in the decision-making process has been shown to be critical in order for an athlete to address a change-event in an appropriate manner (Samuel & Tenenbaum, 2013). This sense of control was shown to be a moderator of coping responses within the change processes that occurred for Jill. Educating athletes on potential change-events that could occur in both personal and athletic contexts could reduce feelings of uncertainty and increase feelings of control and autonomy over the change process, which in turn could enhance the coping strategies utilised by the athlete. In addition to increasing the athlete's awareness of potential change-events that could occur, practitioners should consider the importance of pre-emptive work with athletes such as goal-setting and coping strategies, as suggested by Pummell, Harwood and Lavalley (2008).

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One of the key coping strategies used by Jill was to discuss her decision-making with an independent source external to her weightlifting environment. Several sessions with her sport psychologist were dedicated to her using her sport psychologist as a sounding board to vocalise her thoughts and feelings regarding change-events, for example not drinking alcohol with her university friends now she was competing at elite weightlifting level. The sport psychologist also directed her to autobiographical readings of female athletes who had also experienced a similar change-event across sports during their careers to develop a sense of relatedness.

Athletic change-events commonly addressed in the literature include injury, retirement and moving from amateur to professional sport yet to date, this is the first known study that has examined a unique change-event experience of moving from a team to an individual sport for an athlete at an elite level. Findings highlighted that a number of associated change-events were experienced in several contexts and practitioners need to develop an awareness of these and the impact they may have on holistic athlete development. The findings also provided empirical support for the use of the SCSPP for understanding the change process and the coping strategies athletes may adopt dependent on influential factors within the change-event.

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