Transitioning out of Professional Sport: The Psychosocial
Impact of Career-ending Non-Musculoskeletal Injuries among
Male Cricketers from England and Wales

Monna Arvinen-Barrow¹, Kelsey DeGrave², Stephen Pack³, and Brian Hemmings⁴

¹University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, USA, ²Midwestern University, AZ, USA, ³University of Hertfordshire, UK, ⁴St Mary’s University, UK

Corresponding Author:
Dr. Monna Arvinen-Barrow
Department of Kinesiology
PO Box 413
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Milwaukee, WI 53201-0413, USA
arvinenb@uwm.edu
Abstract

The purpose of this study was to document the lived experiences professional cricketers who had encountered a career-ending non-musculoskeletal injury. Three male cricketers each with over nine years of playing experience in professional cricket representing England and Wales in participated in retrospective in-depth semi-structured interviews. The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith et al., 1996) revealed that at the time of the injury, the participants were at the “final stretch” of their professional sporting careers and that despite a range of unpleasant reactions to injury, all participants experienced a healthy career transition out of sport. To best prepare athletes for a life outside of sport, ensuring athletes have sufficient plans in motion early on in their careers can reduce external and internal stressors, which if not addressed, can increase sport injury risk and have a negative effect on athletes’ reactions post-injury.

*Keywords:* Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, Forced Retirement from Sport, Qualitative Study
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The process of transitioning out of sport can be a significant time in an athlete’s life (Alfermann, 2000), and many factors will not only contribute to the reasons why an athlete transitions out of sport (e.g., Stambulova, 2003; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994), but also how they cope with such transition. The process of career transition has typically been accompanied by changes in athletes’ self-perception, emotions, and relationships with those around them (e.g., Morris, Tod, & Oliver, 2015), and as such, are likely to have a significant impact on the athlete and their life beyond the transition.

Of the different causes of athletic retirement, it is likely that transition due to involuntary reasons (e.g., sport injury) might present greater negative difficulties to the athletes, as it is likely that the athletes may not be psychosocially “ready” to retire (e.g., Roberts & Davis, 2018). Indeed, injuries and health issues during career transition has been identified as a source of transitional difficulties (Park, Lavallee, & Tod, 2013). Unfortunately very little is known about the effects of injuries and other involuntary reasons on career transition process. Thus far, only 22 studies have investigated voluntariness of retirement as a variable, and of those, eight have investigated athletes who had experienced a forced retirement such as an injury from sport (Arvinen-Barrow, Hurley, & Ruiz, 2017; Park et al., 2013), and it is not known how many of these studies included non-musculoskeletal injuries. In addition to then above, research investigating the psychosocial impact of career-ending sport injuries also appears to be sparse. It is known that psychological responses to a career-ending injury can be both positive and negative (Arvinen-Barrow et al., 2017; Stoltenburg et al., 2011), and that some of the negative
responses include alcohol abuse, anxiety, depression, fear, grief, identity loss, loneliness, loss of confidence, and suicide (e.g., Alfermann, Stambulova, & Zemaityte, 2004; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). It is also known that athletes with career-ending injuries have reported lower life satisfaction five to ten years following retirement (Kleiber & Brock, 1992) and significantly greater need for emotional and social adjustment to retirement (Lavallee, Grove, & Gordon, 1997) than those who retired for non-injury reasons.

A recent study with three professional Irish rugby football union players (Arvinen-Barrow et al., 2017) found that following injury occurrence and throughout the transition process, the participants experienced a range of reactions toward the injury itself, as well as toward the process of transitioning out of sport. More specifically, the participants appraised their injuries as part of sport, as a source of psychophysiological and life stress, and as a loss. The participants also described how their injury rehabilitation and the transition out of sport process was a predominantly emotionally distressing, and disclosed how “talking to someone” had become an important way to cope and come to terms with their injury and subsequent career transition.

Thus far, statistics about the prevalence of career termination due to injury are also limited. What is known, is that injuries are the main reason why Finnish elite athletes retire from sport (Ristolainen, Kettunen, Kujala, & Heinonen, 2012). Injuries and health reasons are also the second highest reason of career termination for Danish elite athletes (Moesch, Mayer, & Elbe, 2012). When combined with the fact that only a handful of research has investigated injuries as a reason for athletic retirement (for more details, see Park et al., 2013), more research is needed to
understand how injuries influence career transition and subsequent adjustment to life outside of
sport in different sport and cultural contexts.

English cricket players have reported mental health problems during their careers (e.g.,
Trescothick, 2009; cited in Roberts, Mullen, Evans, & Hall, 2015), and anecdotal evidence has
suggested that cricket players have a higher suicide rate among its retired athletes in comparison
to other sports (Professional Cricketer's Association, 2014; cited in Roberts et al., 2015). Thus,
documenting and understanding the psychosocial impact of career ending injuries and the
subsequent transition out of sport in this population is particularly important. However, empirical
research into professional cricket is sparse, as to date, only one study has explored career
transition experiences among professional cricketers (Roberts et al., 2015). In their qualitative,
retrospective interviews with nine retired professional cricket players, Roberts et al. found that
regardless of the voluntariness of the retirement, all of the participants reflected negatively on the
termination of their career, with a sense of loss and resentment characterizing the post-retirement
period. Since Roberts et al. did not specifically discuss the psychosocial impact injuries had on
the retirement process, the current study aims to add to the Roberts et al study by documenting
the career-ending non-musculoskeletal injury experiences among male cricketers from England
and Wales. By taking a qualitative approach, the study afforded participants opportunity to share
personal narratives regarding career-ending sport injury experiences they considered as
important.

Methods

Participants
Consistent with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Smith, 1996), using a personal contact, a snowball sampling method was used to approach professional male cricketers from England and Wales who had encountered a career-ending injury. The participants had substantial experiences of playing professional cricket ($R = 9\text{-}13$ years) at the national and international level. All of the participants had experienced non-acute, non-musculoskeletal career-ending injuries.

**Interviews**

The semi-structured interview guide previously used with professional Irish rugby football union players (Arvinen-Barrow et al., 2017) was employed. Consistent with the IPA tradition, the interview questions (including the probing questions) were framed in an open-ended manner (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). While serving a partial purpose of an icebreaker, the questions of “could you tell me about your involvement in sport” and “can you describe some of your most memorable moments you had while playing your sport” allowed the participants to give accounts of their elite rugby union career. These were followed by a questions related to the injury occurrence, post-injury reactions, and how they had dealt with the above. The final section was set out to examine the overall impact of the injury where participants were asked: “can you describe how the injury impacted your life”?

**Procedure**

Prior to participant recruitment, ethical approval was obtained from the primary researcher’s university. We used a snowball sampling method to recruit the participants. First, one of the authors contacted their personal contact via email and provided them with a print copy of the interview questions, consent form, and details of the study. If the potential participant
expressed interest in taking part, they were then contacted by another member of the research team who explained the details of the study, and upon verbal consent, scheduled a mutually convenient time and location for the interview (Patton, 2002). The third author, who has extensive experience in IPA interviews, conducted all of the one-to-one interviews that ranged between 30 and 50 minutes in length.

**Analysis**

Each interview was transcribed verbatim, and pseudonyms (Adam, Ben, and Charles) were added to ensure anonymity. The transcripts were then sent to the participants for review and approval. None of the participants commented on their transcript. The interview transcript for Adam was then randomly chosen to initiate the analysis. The analysis was conducted following the IPA guidelines (Smith, 1996; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Both the first and the second author read the transcripts several times to familiarize themselves with the data (reading and re-reading), and worked independently by first noting preliminary comments about interesting and significant content on the left hand margin. This was then followed by noting initial descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual comments on the right hand margin, which were reflections of the primary notations identified in the left hand margin, and allowed the development of the emergent themes.

The above procedure was then repeated for the other two transcripts. The transcripts were then compared to look for connections in emergent themes between the participants. The first and second author then compared their notations and emergent themes, and through a thorough discussion of the underlying meanings of the participants’ accounts, abstraction, i.e., the development of the super-ordinate themes were then agreed upon and
supported with verbatim quotes from the transcripts. To ensure inter-rater reliability and to
establish trustworthiness, the other two authors also commented on the emergent themes, made
small modifications to the wording of the themes, and verified the final emergent super-ordinate
themes. The themes were then sent to the participants for final verification. (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994).

**Cricket as part of life**

For the participants, cricket had formed a significant part of their life since childhood. The participants had fathers who had played county level cricket, and they recalled living in immediate vicinity to a cricket ground: “I’d spend all my, my time in my early years you know five or so into sort of 10 or 11 in the nets with my father” (Ben). He continues by saying:

As a young child we actually moved to a house where it was backed onto my father’s local club… umm so from the age of four or five umm… I would walk out the back gate and walk into… the nets… basically within 50 yards of the house… (Ben).

At the time of injury, cricket appeared to have been an embedded part of their life-space. Throughout their childhood, cricket had represented a family bonding process, and it had become a natural extension of childhood (a way of life). It is likely that this strong connection between cricket and life as a whole potentially had an influence over the next emergent theme: pressure to perform and be fit to play.

**Pressure to be fit to play**
The participants described having felt pressured to consistently perform at a high level. They described how the pressure to perform was embodied in the need to maintain fitness, and at times to play through injuries: “there are times where people shouldn’t be out there playing for their own health and their own well-being… umm but as the season goes on, and pressure is on coaches to perform, pressure is on players to perform…” (Adam). The participants felt like their innate need to rest and recuperate had been over-ridden by what seemed to be considered as more immediate issues, and the priorities of others. Instead of giving themselves more time to recover, the participants had felt pushed into earlier return: “[the pressure came from] the coaches and physiotherapists in particular… and I never really gave myself a chance of getting my back strong…” (Adam).

When making decisions to return to play, all three participants described how their own judgment had been undermined, due to pressure to perform despite apparent discrepancy between physical and psychological readiness. Similarly to previous research (Arvinen-Barrow et al., 2017; Roberts et al., 2015), the participants had felt commodified and felt that ultimately professional cricket was a numbers game: “there is always the chance that there’s a 20-year old that can do the job for about half the price…” (Charles), making the participants very aware that they were replaceable should they fail to stay on top of their game, and thus creating a sense of internal and external conflicting demands.

It is likely that this perceived pressure had created an additional stressor for the participants prior to career-ending injury onset. Previous research has identified a strong link between chronic stress and illness (e.g., Mohd, 2008), previous history of stressors (i.e., major life events, daily hassles, and prior injuries), and sport injury (for more details, see Appaneal &
Habif, 2013). Given that the participants reported experiencing a number of musculoskeletal injuries immediately preceding their career-ending non-musculoskeletal injuries, it is likely that potential psychological and physical stress they had experienced had an influence on the injury occurrence, as well as post-injury reactions and recovery outcomes.

**Influence of injury on emotions**

Along with the apparent physical impact, the participants talked about the emotional impact of the injury on their lives. Consistent with existing theoretical conceptualization of psychological responses to sport injuries (Wiese-Bjornstal et al., 1998) and existing empirical evidence (Wiese-Bjornstal, 2014), these emotional responses varied, depending on the type, severity, and stage of injury. Initially, Adam and Ben both experienced negative emotional reactions: “yeah it, it was like I said it was, it was...a shock really and disbelief” (Ben). Ben’s recollections appeared to be painful as he described the struggle to make sense of conflicting circumstances: “I was obviously…disappointed of not playing anymore…was obviously, obviously hard to take.” For both Adam and Ben, the inability to be physically active, appeared to cause negative emotions: “you need to be off your feet… …that’s really frustrating.” These feelings of frustration were shared by Adam, who also experienced negative emotions about not being able to play again: “I was as frustrated as anybody that I wasn’t playing the game I loved…and getting out there and playing for a team and, and doing all that sorts of things.”

In contrast, as Charles spent the first few weeks in a hospital bed being given continuous pain relief, he may have been spared the worst emotional reactions: “I wasn’t really in any position to think too deeply at all, all I could do, I was, I was a bit of a zombie, I was spaced out and I was on painkillers”. Charles’ temporary loss of a coherent self, and so temporal distortion,
seemed to have prevented him directly reaching a conclusion to things: “when there might have been a moment to realization about how bad it was I was probably out of it a bit.”

As the time progressed, the participants believed their injuries gave them a growth opportunity for new beginnings and allowed them to pursue other dreams (e.g., coaching, personal business ventures, further education), thus allowing the emergence of positive emotional responses. These findings are similar to those found in previous research (Arvinen-Barrow et al., 2017; Stoltenburg et al., 2011), in that initial reactions to injuries were generally negative, but on reflection, encountering a career-ending injury had given the participants an opportunity to move onto the next stage in their lives, thus the process was viewed as a positive experience.

**Money, the main source of stress and worry**

The participants talked about numerous financial matters that arose as a result of injury that were perceived as a source of worry and stress. Charles mentioned that during his injury period, the only thing he really worried about was finances: “If I was to have…three or four months of un-pay…then of no pay then what would happen.” Ben was told that “you’re not fit to play with [club team], your contract’s gonna finish, uh…we can sort of …you know…stop paying you next month” which he indicated was a major source of stress. Ben also experienced a period, where his contract had ended, but the insurance company would not compensate loss of earnings and recalled this as “probably the most stressful time not knowing where the next pennies would come from”. It seemed that Ben had been forced into a position whereby he had needed to consider his income and expenditure in minute detail. These worries and stressors were greatly alleviated by having an income protection insurance in place:
I might mention again but was something that would, would, that did become very evident as I started, as I was coming toward the end of my career was that I qualified for umm…an insurance policy…of income protection, which all of a sudden those financial worries…were gone. (Charles).

Having an income protection insurance in place before the injury also allowed time to retrain to another profession without major financial worry: “I expect those two years I had to have… sort of, insurance money if you like, to… retrain and… retrained in, in what I’m doing now and its… … what I’m doing now is… is fantastic” (Ben).

These results are very similar to those found with the Irish rugby football union players (Arvinen-Barrow et al., 2017). Since the participants played professional cricket, at the time of the injury, their main livelihood was dependent on their ability to continue playing the sport. When coupled with the perception of pressure to perform and being fit to play, and their apparent singular sense of identity that had been further enforced since early childhood, inability to play and earn a living became a major stressor. It is likely that this created conflicting appraisals of their situation and insecurity. It seemed that the relief for such thoughts and assurance of security was achieved once insurance companies confirmed financial continuation, which allowed the participants to move forward with their lives outside of professional cricket.

*Keeping busy*
To help cope with negative emotions, the participants discussed how they needed to keep busy. Adam described having struggled to deal with an accumulation of daily stressors, so he started using swimming and yoga as way to deal with stress. Serving as a “form of escapism”, swimming and yoga allowed him to:

Get me into a place where I could clear my mind, umm…get away from everything going on in the world, actually have an hour and a half to myself…and really listen to my body and listen to my thoughts, and listen to myself. (Adam)

Adam’s focus on keeping busy post-injury was on ‘finding himself’, and re-evaluating his priorities:

I have this going on with my cricket, I have this going on with my xxx, I have this going on with the possible end of my career but actually I had a very thorough process going on… of… addressing who I really was and what I wanted out of life…ummm other than cricket and other than sport.

In contrast, Ben and Charles had significant physical restrictions, and kept busy post-injury by moving swiftly into new professional activities. For Ben, it was important to keep moving forward as soon as possible “so that the grieving process was as, was as, was as short as possible.” Charles coped with the injury and by keeping himself busy planning his new company website. This retracted him from spending time thinking about the injury and its
consequences. Overall, and similar to their careers as an athlete, it appeared that the main coping strategy for all three participants was to keep busy, which in turn helped them to cope emotionally with both the injury and the realization of that their cricketing career was over.

A blessing in disguise

Despite initial negative emotions and stress over financial situation, the participants’ felt that injury had eventually presented “a blessing in disguise.” Before the injury onset, Adam had already considered the possibility of not being able to play another season:

I think genuinely umm… even before my [injury] came on, I think I would’ve struggled to play another season of cricket because of my back so I was looking at either… another set of four injections umm cause you can have 12 in one year and then a more intense rehab period… I think I… I knew that the end the end of my career was basically gonna be this winter even before [the injury] came on… umm… and from a physical point of view I’d actually known deep, deep down that I’d not been right since November…

Charles too had also anticipated an end to his career before the injury onset, and had taken stoic approach to his career as a whole:

To be fair the, the year that right before I got injured, the very start of the season when, when I was injured but not playing…I was… thinking that this is the last year of my contract so there’s the possibility that I could finish… but to be honest that’s I’ll always have, I won’t say in the back of my mind somewhere in the middle of my mind if you
like, the fact that this will come to an end at some stage… because I knew I was always borderline.

Despite the above, after recovering from the consequences of failed medical treatments, Charles appeared to delay the inevitable end by trying to play again: “I did play again in that season so umm… and then they, and then they didn’t renew my contract at the end of the summer.” It appeared that Charles was finding it difficult to let go of being a professional cricketer, thus emphasizing the role of cricket in his life, and the pressure to be fit to play. Charles stated that the lack of contract renewal was due to number of factors: his recent injury, number of previous injuries, and potentially lack of funding: “I’m sure if I had not been ripping it up for the last three seasons they would have, they would… there would have been possibly another contract for a year.”

At the time of his injury, like Charles, Ben had one year left on his contract; and had no plans of retiring. However, he too described how previous injury had precipitated an inescapable change in self that had signaled an ending to his career:

I had a really bad back… bad back injury in 2007 that never quite, I was never quite the same… I had a slipped disc, so I missed a year in 2007, so I never really had that… I was never quite the same bowler then, if you know what I mean.

Partially because of the impact of his previous injury, he too, like the others had already started thinking about alternative plans for the future:
I have always wanted to be a coach you know… but… umm… I kind of thought to myself… before that January, that Christmas time… if I could play another four years… umm… which would, which would’ve meant this summer, next summer would have been my last year… I think that would be a… good effort in that time, to make sure I got all my coaching awards and when I do finish, then there is an opportunity to go into coaching but… it got all kind of fast forwarded a bit…

Although the injury had accelerated Ben’s post-professional cricket career plans, he saw this transition as fateful:

If I try to reflect back now, and look at the whole situation I… it’s almost in a kind a roundabout way… it was a blessing in disguise because… I only had, I think, I only had one year on my contract then left… so… it could’ve been worse case I had a bad year and then… I’d then ended up with no insurance, no chance to retrain, and being in that situation… of not knowing what to do anyways, so it is kind of, and, and if I look back at it, well, maybe you know it happened for a reason.

In essence, although initially upon sustaining their injuries, none of the participants wanted to retire from their sport, over time, they appeared to displayed signs of early acceptance of what had happened. Upon reflection, they also perhaps viewed their injuries as a legitimate
‘release’ from pressure, and as such, retiring due to injury was potentially more preferable than having to make a decision to retire due to age, deselection, or declining performance.

**The importance of career planning**

What emerged as a dominant theme and probably the most influential factor affecting their career transition, was the existence of post-professional cricket career plans to ensure future outside of sport with a purpose. The presence of pre-retirement planning, and the participants own cognitive appraisals of its importance during the transition process undoubtedly underpinned successful career transition for the participants.

Charles had a Bachelor’s degree in sport and exercise science, which he saw as having a positive impact on his cricket, and he had also set up a business shortly before his career-ending injury, and spent a considerable amount of time setting it up because “just on the off chance it [injury] may have happened.”

Ben had planned for his post-professional cricket career by obtaining a Masters’ degree which he had just finished before the injury: “the moment I wrote my…my last sentence and got it published, or got it given to the university…within four weeks then I had I had this injury.”

He also knew that he wanted to be a coach, and had planned to take coaching qualifications over the next few years; however these plans were accelerated significantly due to his injury.

Adam had also started planning for future before the onset of the injury:

…some very uhh… precise and thorough and detailed plans to help me move forward umm so that I can actually… confidently umm deal with the end of my career and then
also… umm move forward and start to think about what it is I want to develop as a second career.

More specifically, Adam had started engaging in regular leadership coaching sessions for two very specific reasons: “One was that he was nothing to do with cricket and the other that he was nothing to do with sport…” with aim of getting help in “redirecting your career from one thing to another.”

These results support previous research conducted with professional cricketers (Roberts et al., 2015) and rugby football union players (Arvinen-Barrow et al., 2017), but are in contrast to those found with the collegiate athletes (Stoltenburg et al., 2011). This is not surprising as the participants in Stoltenburg et al. study were collegiate athletes, and therefore at the start of their elite/professional careers, whereas in our study, they were professional athletes who had already had a long professional career. In the Stoltenburg et al. study only two had initiated alternative career plans prior to getting injured. What is consistent between the two studies is the notion that the athletes’ who had actively prepared for life after sport, experienced a more positive transition than those who had not developed an alternate plan.

The participants also perceived these post-professional cricket career plans as a vital part of any professional athletes’ career. The participants felt that every professional athlete should understand that the process of career transition is an ongoing process for which athletes should be planning, and nurturing, throughout their career. For Adam, this process was vital in terms of holistic personal development and the avoidance of a unidimensional self:
Growing yourself as an individual and as a person … umm you can’t underestimate the power of what growing yourself does in many different aspects of your life… I think [it] will then benefit your sport, and benefit any transition you have to go through in the future… (Adam)

Ben felt that athletes who had “really, really looked at their professional careers outside of the professional game…” would be the “ones that cope a lot better with that than the guys who haven’t…” In his opinion, it is the planning for life after sport that is the key in helping players to cope with possible career-threatening injuries:

I just fear for those guys who…who haven’t got a… career outside to finish, how they cope you know… I’m guessing they might be stressed out a little bit but how, how, they would cope and the stressors that they, they would… psychologically… would, would, would, have if it happened to them, so I think that’s a my overall thought would be a huge aid… to people who come across career-threatening injuries knowing they’ve got something else to move into. (Ben)

Charles also stated: “My advice would be to make sure you’ve got options umm, that you take a step back and make sure that you’ve got something to fall back on.” He too believed that the “ real struggle that players have with injury is… born out of the real worry and concern about what if this… what if I have to stop playing cricket umm…” and this is typically caused by one of two things: (1) the player is “so in love with the sport that they umm… they can’t cope
without it…” or (2) the player is “clinging onto this career because you have to, because you haven’t got any other options”, both of which can be seen as fragile paths to follow as a professional athlete.

**Social support and successful coping**

A big part of successful career transition was the participants’ perception and satisfaction with the social support during the injury process. Consistent with previous research (Arvinen-Barrow et al., 2017; Carson & Polman, 2008; Podlog & Eklund, 2007; Roberts et al., 2015; Stoltenburg et al., 2011), the most commonly identified sources of support came from family and close friends:

If it had been different if my close friends had not cared, or my family would have not cared, then it would’ve been a bit different but, I knew…I’m very, very lucky I’ve got very close family around. (Charles)

I had a strong group of friends around me…who, a lot, a lot of my good friends actually work at the club… and I played with for…you know, I think that that helped, I had played with twelve years at the time… and they were really supportive and, and really helpful. (Ben)

Only Ben felt that his cricket club had been a positive support system for him. He felt his club had looked after him by helping his transition into a new career as a coach, while also recognizing this may not be a standard practice for everyone: “I was sort one of the lucky ones
who, who got looked after really well by…the people that were at the club at the time.” For Ben, the club provided the needed outlet to keep busy, and he felt very thankful: “[I] kinda owe a lot to them [the club], it’s giving me the opportunity to…develop over the last two and a half years to what I’m doing full time now.”

Adam and Charles felt the opposite. Adam discussed how some of the club coaches and physiotherapist had been questioning the severity of his injury, and explained that such practice was part of the “short-termism of…umm… success and failure… and… pushing people to their absolute limit…” For Adam, some of the conversations he had with coaches and the physiotherapist were “extremely difficult to have because…umm questioning my character more than anything in regards to what I was actually feeling…umm and…umm…that period of time was one of the most difficult.” For Charles, the club had not been a real source of support during the process: “they were all busy doing their little things you know…I wasn’t relying, relying on them anyway for support from them, nor did I expect it, so much so, so they didn’t hinder it, they didn’t massively support it.”

In contrast, and similarly to the Irish rugby football union players (Arvinen-Barrow et al., 2017), the participants mentioned receiving helpful support from the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) and/or County Cricket Clubs in terms of providing career development guidance before and after the injury. For example, Ben talked about how he was helped by a development manager for the ECB with a history of similar career transition. Adam stated:

We have umm…people within the counties that offer advice in terms of umm…performance life as well, and they are called personal development and welfare
people and I’d always on, on or off the field used these people and spoken to them
about...possible future careers.

Overall, the participant deemed the organizational level support as important after the
injury onset, and perceived it as instrumental in the recovery process, a service that cricketers in
previous research felt was “ineffective” and “undirected” (Roberts et al., 2015, p.940). Such
support has however been highlighted as important in the literature (Alfermann, 2000; Arvinen-
Barrow et al., 2017), to ensure an athlete is developed holistically as a person and not just as a
player throughout their athletic career.

Consistent with the IPA tradition (Caldwell, 2008; cited in Pringle, Drummond,
McLafferty, & Hendry, 2011, p. 21), the results make a contribution to theory by supporting the
existing explanatory career transition models (e.g., Stambulova, 2003; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994).
The results revealed two distinct developmental experiences (cricket as part of life, and history
of previous injuries that led up to the career-ending injury) and a major tertiary contribution
(financial worry) which were resultant of the cause of retirement. Consistent with existing
models (Stambulova, 2003; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994), the results also highlighted three main
resources (coping skills, social support and pre-retirement planning) as significant factors
influencing the quality of retirement. However, based on the results, several themes related to
the psychosocial impact of injuries (i.e., specific interaction between post-injury thoughts,
emotions, and behaviors) also emerged from the data that are not explicitly accounted for in the
explanatory career transition models (Stambulova, 2003; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994).
Over the past three decades, interest in understanding psychosocial aspects of sport injuries has risen significantly (e.g., Brewer & Redmond, 2017). Since the most widely accepted psychology of injury model (Wiese-Bjornstal et al., 1998) was published in the late 1990’s, it is no surprise that existing explanatory career transition models (Stambulova, 2003; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994) may not be adept to explain the bi-directional cyclical process of cognitive appraisals, emotional, and behavioral responses that result following a sport injury. Our results revealed that the participants in this study experienced a number of cognitive appraisals, emotional, and behavioral responses following the injury, influenced by a range of personal and situational factors. This is consistent with the integrated model of psychological response to the sport injury and rehabilitation process (Wiese-Bjornstal et al., 1998), and similar to research findings from studies documenting the psychosocial impact of career-ending injuries (Arvinen-Barrow et al., 2017; Stoltenburg et al., 2011) and non-career-ending injuries (e.g., Arvinen-Barrow, Massey, & Hemmings, 2014; Clement, Arvinen-Barrow, & Fetty, 2015; Wiese-Bjornstal, 2014).

From a clinical perspective, there are two key aspects to note. First, from a psychosocial perspective, for the current participants, the process of reactions to injury, rehabilitation, and recovery appears to be similar to non-career-ending injuries. During this process, an athlete will experience a range of thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, influenced by number of factors that may be unique to the individual athlete in question, and will eventually have an impact on the overall outcome (Brewer & Redmond, 2017). Second, neither the explanatory models of career transition (Stambulova, 2003; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994) nor the integrated model of psychological response to the sport injury and rehabilitation process (Wiese-Bjornstal et al., 1998) alone are
sufficient enough to explain the process of transition out of professional sport due to career-ending sport injury. By combining the conceptualizations, the sport psychology professionals working with the injured athletes post-injury are able to gain greater insights into (a) how the athlete is reacting to the injury, rehabilitation, and its outcome, and (b) what factors need to be taken into account to ensure successful career transition out of professional sport.

The results of this study highlight the importance of understanding athletes’ psychosocial reactions to the injury and the career transition process. While both occur simultaneously, it is likely that these reactions may not always align. For example, an athlete may accept the injury, but fails to accept the outcome of the injury. It is for this reason why clinicians working with athletes experiencing a career-ending injury need to ensure any planned interventions and required coping resources are structured and tailored to meet individual needs (e.g., Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). By recognizing the need to address psychosocial reactions to injury along with those associated with the transition process, will ultimately leading to more successful coping with the injury, and the overall transition process. For example, systematic goal setting has been identified as one of the most popular strategies used in sport for performance enhancement (Zakrajsek & Blanton, 2017). Research has also found goal setting as important tool in helping athletes cope well with injuries (for more details on goal setting during rehabilitation, see Arvinen-Barrow & Hemmings, 2013), and the importance of planning is seen as an important coping strategy during career transition regardless of the cause of retirement (e.g., Grove, Lavallee, & Gordon, 1997). In essence, athletes like to plan, and work towards set goals and targets in a range of sport-related situations. By ensuring an athlete has an appropriate pre-retirement plan and involving all key stakeholders in the process of planning early on in their
professional career can be of benefit in several ways: the athlete is likely to feel more cared for by those around them, more prepared for the future financially, and potentially feel like their identity is not solely about being an athlete. As such, they may be less likely to push themselves over the safe limit of play (play with injuries or return back to activity too soon), and to feel pressured to play for financial or self-fulfilling identity reasons. By doing so, many stressors outside of the sporting context can be minimized, and minimizing stressors can in turn reduce the risk of sport injury (Williams & Andersen, 1998).

Using IPA as a methodology for the study allowed the emergence of themes that go beyond the scope of the existing career transition literature, and by adopting a small sample, it also allowed greater understanding of participants own personal accounts of their process. Through the process of engaging in a two-stage interpretation process where we as researchers have (1) given voice to the participants, while (2) also making an attempt to interpret the ways in which the participants have made sense of their own career-ending injury experience, IPA provides flexible means to conduct phenomenological research which privileges the participant. With the small, homogenous sample however, the results are very likely to be very sport-specific, and as such, may only provide in-depth insights into selected sample of UK professional cricketers’ experiences. This, despite being a limitation of the research, can also be its strength. One of the characteristics of IPA is that it allows the researchers to consider the results in terms of “theoretical transferability rather than empirical generalizability” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009), and as such, seeking generalizable findings was not the aim of the study. That said, in order to understand the career-ending injury process amongst professional athletes’ further, research should therefore replicate similar study design within range of team and individual
sports. It would also be advisable to gain an understanding of psychosocial impact of career-ending injury experiences for men and women, at various stages of their careers, and in range of sport and other cultural contexts.

**Conclusions**

It appeared that the participants appraised their career transition as successful (as defined by Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). Throughout the interviews, the participants explained how they had experienced a number of psychosocial reactions to their injuries: cognitive appraisals (e.g., financial worry), emotional (e.g., frustration), and behavioral (e.g., keeping busy) responses. These responses were influenced by range of pre-injury (i.e., role of cricket in life, perceived pressure to perform and be fit to play), injury (i.e., severity, type), and post-injury (e.g., income protection insurance, social support) factors. It was this interaction between the psychosocial responses and factors affecting them that ultimately lead to the participants appraising the injury and its resultant situation as a ‘blessing in disguise’, allowing them to focus on activities and careers outside of professional sport. Such stoic attitude towards the injury could be partly explained by their previous history of injuries, and their own acknowledgement of decreased performance even before the injury diagnosis. The results of this study also reiterate the importance of pre-retirement planning and social support when coping with a career-ending injury and subsequent transition out of professional sport. Using both career transition and psychosocial sport injury models can help us better understand the transition process from both the injury and the retirement perspective, and as such, better help prepare the athletes to a life outside of professional sport.
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