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NEW ZEALAND QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY
MANA TOHU MĀTAURANGA O AOTEAROA

QUALIFY FOR THE FUTURE WORLD
KIA NOHO TAKATŪ KI TŌ ĀMUA AO!

Scholarship 2021 Health and Physical Education

SCHOLARSHIP EXEMPLAR

After the Finish Line

"I had 20 years of purpose, and that was to win, to dominate my sport and to earn income... I didn't think about what would come after sport...I really truly hit rock-bottom in terms of depression - I was suicidal." (S. Gurney 2019)¹.

Who am I?

When I introduced myself, I always proudly said, "I am a runner". When my friends asked me to 'hang out', I told them I couldn't make it, I had training. When I failed my school examinations, I told myself it was okay, I was a runner not an academic. So my 'friends' became those who I competed against. I measured my self worth against how I did in races. I was only ever satisfied when my muscles were aching in pain, so badly to the point I struggled to get out of bed. Running became me and I became running. But after I ripped my achilles and with it my dreams of being an Olympian, I found that I had nothing to fall back on as a 'retired' athlete. Running had taken over my social life, my school life and became my entire identity. Without it, I had no purpose. Who am I?

I am an athlete

Retirement is ranked 10th out of 43 of life's most stressful events², so it is inevitable that retirement from sport could cause significant negative impacts on elite athletes. According to State of Sport (2018), more than half of retired sports people have concerns over their mental and emotional wellbeing³. Michael Phelps, arguably one of swimming's best with 28 Olympic medals, has similarly fallen victim to the mental strain

¹ Gurney, S. (2019). How New Zealand's top athletes deal with life after sport [In person]. Newshub. ² Laura, R. (2021). Why Is Retirement So Stressful?. Retrieved 27 April 2021, from

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/robertlaura/2018/05/24/why-is-retirement-so-stressful/?sh=5baae4492579>

³ Half of sportspeople face retirement struggle - BBC Sport. (2021). Retrieved 27 April 2021, from <https://www.bbc.com/sport/42871491.amp>

of retirement from elite sport. After stepping away from the pool, Phelps found that he struggled with depression so much so that he contemplated taking his own life in 2012.⁴

Former athletes are forever remembered as someone they will never be again. The issue of athletes experiencing a loss of identity is increasingly prominent, with more newly retired athletes seeking psychological help than ever before. (Zachary L. Mannes et al, 2018)⁵. This is supported by research done by Hattersley et al (2019)⁶ which found that the main factor influencing an athlete's struggle with retirement from elite sport is athletic identity, the degree to which an athlete associates themselves with their athletic role. Recently, retired New Zealand rower Zoe McBride, commented on her athletic identity saying that a larger proportion of her identity was being a rower, which made her lose herself and her values (McBride, 2021)⁷ As a result of this, the decision to retire was a difficult one as she did not know what a future without sport would look like. This is an experience shared by many athletes not only within Aotearoa but across the world.

This report will look at critically examining the issues associated with retirement from elite sport, and what contributing factors determine an athletes relationship with their sport and identity. This report will critique how Sport New Zealand's Balance is Better philosophy helps or hinders the retirement process of athletes, along with an ideal solution detailing how Aotearoa can best help elite athletes succeed in life after sport.

⁴ Trento, Dominic, "HOW DOES SPORTS RETIREMENT AFFECT ELITE ATHLETES wellbeing?" (2020). Kinesiology, Sport Studies, and Physical Education Synthesis Projects. 105. https://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/pes_synthesis/105 ⁵ **Zachary L. Mannes, Lori B. Waxenberg, Linda B Cottler, William M. Perlstein, Larry E. Burrell, Erin G Ferguson, Mary E. Edwards, Nicole Ennis** (Jun 2018) Prevalence and correlates of psychological distress among retired elite athletes.

⁶ **Chris Hattersley, MSc, MSc, ASCC, CSCS, Dave Hembrough, MSc, PGDip, ASCC, Kaseem Khan, MSc, CSCS, Andy Picken, MRSPH, Tom Maden-Wilkinson, PhD, James Rumbold, MSc, PhD**, (June 2019) Managing the transition into retirement from sport for elite athletes. *Sheffield Hallam University*. 11-17

⁷ LockerRoom, S. (2021). Zoe McBride's tears and shame now wiped away after calling time on rowing career. Retrieved 22 July 2021, from <https://www.stuff.co.nz/sport/women-in-sport/300300018/zoe-mcbridess-tears-and-shame-now-wiped-away-after-calling-time-on-rowing-career>

A head start: What does the Balance is Better philosophy look to achieve

New Zealand's Balance is Better Philosophy seeks to ensure that all young people, regardless of their ability, have a quality experience playing sport. It aims to achieve this by encouraging young people to stay involved in sport and realise their potential, winning in the long run (Balance is Better Philosophy 2021)⁸. The evidence-based philosophy endeavors to shine a light on Aotearoa's athletes and the ups and downs they face throughout their journey with sport, through case studies of such specific athletes. It recognises that one size does not fit all, and that if any action were to be implemented, it would have to be sport specific. This means that in regards to retirement of elite athletes it would appear to consider all sports. The strategy originated from Sport NZ's 2016-2020 Talent Plan which focused on better preparing athletes in their development phase, however has now become a broader topic underpinning Sport NZ's overall approach to youth sport. Although the Balance is Better Philosophy allows the expansion of focus areas in regards to enabling young athletes to realise their potential, there is a risk that looking at the bigger picture neglects target areas and reduces the individualised and sport specific support that may come from a more focused plan, omitting areas of concern such as athlete retirement. In addition to this, the plan neglects to address the ever increasing technocentric approach ingrained within elite sport that could be responsible for creating the toxic culture of athletes overworking themselves in a desperate attempt to push beyond their limit. This has a negative domino effect when athletes retire from sport as they have learnt to treat their bodies like machines instead of learning in parallel to address their emotions and understand the necessity of learning healthy coping mechanisms.

⁸ About | Balance is Better. (2021). Retrieved 13 May 2021, from <https://balanceisbetter.org.nz/about/>

The Last Lap: Why are current New Zealand athletes experiencing psychological issues during sport retirement?

Despite the large variety of journals and articles published around the retirement processes of elite athletes, the impact that psychological issues that may arise as a result of retirement from sport can have on the future of individuals, is not yet clear. It can be argued that retirement from sport actually has little impact on the Hauora of athletes. Research completed by Andrea J Smith (1999) in her article titled: Career Transition: The sport retirement experience of New Zealand Athletes⁹ indicated that sport disengagement has very little negative effect on life satisfaction. In correlation, Psychometric Evaluation of Sport Disengagement (Renee Deaner, H. 2018)¹⁰ claims that most athletes experience positive implications in regards to retirement from sport. Since this issue has only recently come to light in the media as society starts to focus longitudinal research on mental health, and in turn athletes increasingly speak out about the issues they may be experiencing, the studies done on current athletes are incomplete. This indicates a need to assist these athletes in whichever way we can and the way that individuals deem to be most supporting, as the full consequences of elite sport retirement are still largely unknown.

Head in the game: What is the importance of wellbeing?

In today's society, ensuring wellbeing is seen as a 'civic duty' (Pamela Fisher et al 2018)¹¹. It is seen at the heart of many political policies, such as NZ Labour Party's 2019

⁹ Smith, A. (1999). CAREER TRANSITION: THE SPORT RETIREMENT EXPERIENCES OF NEW ZEALAND ATHLETES. *Massey University, Albany, New Zealand*.

¹⁰ Renee Deaner, H. PSYCHOMETRIC EVALUATION OF SPORT DISENGAGEMENT (2018), published by West Virginia University. Retrieved 14 May 2021, from <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/230482753.pdf>

¹¹ Fisher, P. (2018). Wellbeing and empowerment: the importance of recognition. Retrieved 7 June 2021, from

Wellbeing budget led by RT Hon Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister of New Zealand¹². Therefore, the inclusion of wellbeing principles in the Balance is Better philosophy is vital in order to assist with our continued understanding of the issue surrounding the retirement of elite athletes, ensuring that a holistic approach to player welfare is considered. In order to apply the concept of wellbeing, we must look at what it means for us in Aotearoa. Hauora is a Māori philosophy of health unique to Aotearoa that encompasses Taha tinana, Taha hinengaro, Taha whanau and Taha wairua. It is a holistic perception of health where each of the four dimensions support and influence each other, and are grounded by whenua (the connection with land). The model is somewhat paralleled by the World Health Organisation's model of wellbeing which defines health as a complete state of mental and social wellbeing not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (WHO 1948). It is therefore important to consider all dimensions of wellbeing when critically examining the issue of retirement of elite athletes because it can be said that elite sport is more focused on physical outcomes and is visible success orientated, often neglecting mental, spiritual, emotional and social impacts for the individual athletes. The Balance is Better philosophy appears to address and consider some dimensions of Hauora when looking at how to enable athletes to win in the long run, recognising that an athlete's health is not entirely dependent on themselves but rather the conditions which people are born, grow, work, live and age (the social determinants of health). The evidence based philosophy does this by looking at case studies of individual athletes and putting in place structures of who can best support athletes, i.e coaches, parents, schools, and how they can do so. However,

¹² The Wellbeing Budget. (2019). Retrieved 7 June 2021, from

<https://www.treasury.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2019-05/b19-wellbeing-budget.pdf>

Balance is Better seems to neglect Taha Wairua and Taha Whanau by placing a strong emphasis on mental and physical wellbeing as seen by Dom Vettise, a clinical psychologist featured in the Balance is Better Philosophy when evaluating wellbeing. Vettise comments that it is important for wellbeing to recharge mental and physical batteries, yet neglects spiritual or social wellbeing which hence hinders the issue of athletes experiencing psychological reactions during retirement out of sport.

Te Pae Mahutonga is a second important Māori health model which seemingly has less parallels with westernised medicine health concepts and biophysical models of health. The model follows the Southern Cross Star Constellation, bringing together Mauriora (cultural identity), Waiora (physical environment), Toiora (healthy lifestyle) and Te Oranga (participation in society). The difference between this model and westernised health models such as those adopted by WHO is that the biggest star in the constellation, the focus of health promotion is cultural identity. Te Pae Mahutonga implies that cultural identity underpins wellbeing and that it is the most important aspect to health¹³. According to the Ministry of Social Development Cultural identity refers to the customs, practices, languages, values and worldviews that define social groups and it allows people to feel that they belong, giving them a sense of security¹⁴. It is important to consider the cultural aspect of wellbeing using the Te Pae Mahutonga model when looking at the issue of retirement in elite athletes as those who have a strong cultural identity would have a separate identity from their athletic selves. This would hence means that they have a smoother transition into retirement as they identify with more

¹³ Māori health models – Te Pae Mahutonga. (2017). Retrieved 7 June 2021, from <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/populations/maori-health/maori-health-models/maori-health-models-te-pae-mahutonga>

¹⁴ Cultural identity: The Social Report 2016 – Te pūrongo oranga tangata. (2021). Retrieved 22 July 2021, from <https://socialreport.msd.govt.nz/cultural-identity.html>

than that the athletic role. This is supported by Eubank et al (2020), stating that we “become who we are through our engagement in the world with other people”. Our identity is fluid and individuals have the freedom, within limits, to create their own identities¹⁵. Therefore with athletes strongly associating themselves within their athletic identity, they can easily find themselves letting go of who they are outside of their sport, hence making the transition out of elite sport much more strenuous on their wellbeing.

Sideline support: What does it look like from the socio-ecological perspective?

In order to create a well-rounded identity for elite athletes, separate to their athletic identity ensuring positive mental wellbeing outcomes for adolescents, families and communities, it is imperative that the socioecological perspective is applied when considering the issue of retirement in athletes. According to Samantha E. Scarneo, Zachary Y. Kerr et al. (2019) the prevention of sport related health complications may be facilitated by action at a variety of levels across multiple domains¹⁶. This is supported by Sussman M. B. (1997) analytical model for the socioecological study of retirement which states that a conceptual model for career transition stresses the role of personal, social and environmental factors, both pointing towards the idea that health is not just an individual's responsibility but rather the complexity of the interrelationship between the individual, others around them and society¹⁷. In order to improve the overall wellbeing of elite athletes by allowing them to have a smoother transition from their elite career into

¹⁵ Eubank, M. Ronkalnen, N. Tod, D. (2021) New Approaches to Identity in Sport. Journal of Sport Psychology in Action Volume II, 2020 Issue 4.

¹⁶ Scarneo, S., Kerr, Z., Kroshus, E., Register-Mihalik, J., Hosokawa, Y., & Stearns, R. et al. (2019). The Socioecological Framework: A Multifaceted Approach to Preventing Sport-Related Deaths in High School Sports. Retrieved 13 July 2021, from

¹⁷ M.B, Sussman. (1997). Social-Ecological Determinants of Elite Athletes’ Dual Career Development in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Retrieved 7 November 2021, from https://www.academia.edu/33067075/Social_Ecological_Determinants_of_Elite_Athletes_Dual_Career_Development_in_Hong_Kong_and_Taiwan

retirement, it is important that Aotearoa collectively acknowledges the multifaceted nature of an individual's health and hence how the broader social, political, economic and cultural contexts influence the experiences that individuals go through.

When examining the issues of elite athletes we can clearly see how interpersonal relationships have a key influence on the health of elite athletes. It can be said that compromised health as a result of the hegemonic relationships between athletes and coaches is especially prominent within elite athletes. Research by Mahmoodreza Mottaghi et. al. (2020)¹⁸ found that there is a positive correlation between coaches' pressure and athletes anxiety in all areas of their lives. This power imbalance is one of the most prominent influences of health which can lead to ongoing psychological issues even after an athlete has retired. This is supported by Nehntner (2020) who discussed the reasons that athletes accept this power imbalance which can often lead to emotional abuse. The article suggests that high achieving athletes tend to show a willingness to subject themselves to any behaviours or emotional abuse which may help them to succeed in their sport¹⁹. The literature suggests that often athletes mistake such emotional abuse for coaches showing interest in them and wanting to further their development as a sportsperson. This power imbalance clearly impacts athletes' emotional wellbeing when athletes are instructed to focus on their sport if they want to succeed, and let go of other aspects of their lives. In accordance with this, a case study of pre-elite athletes done by Lincoln University showed that a participant in the study felt

¹⁸ Mahmoodreza Mottaghi, Z. (2020). The Relationship between Coaches' and Athletes' Competitive Anxiety, and their Performance. Retrieved 2 October 2020, from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3939992/> ¹⁹ Toughen up snowflake! Sports coaches can be emotionally abusive – here's how to recognise it. (2020). Retrieved 2 October 2020, from <https://theconversation.com/toughen-up-snowflake-sports-coaches-can-be-emotionally-abusive-heres-how-to-recognise-it-110267>

that her coach made her feel guilty if she did anything outside of netball²⁰. This shows potential negative impacts to athlete's health with both interpersonal relationships (with coaches) and dominant societal ideologies to encourage winning at any cost.

Furthermore, past coach (Kissam, 2017)²¹ challenges the idea that coaches make an athlete's success about themselves. This highlights the power imbalance where coaches are benefiting from the status quo as they receive glorification for the success of their athletes, focusing purely on employing methods to get athletes to win. This interpersonal influence is interrelated with the societal influence of sporting organisations commodifying athletes which in turn impacts the health of elite athletes in regards to their retirement. Furthermore, in attempting to get athletes to succeed, coaches commonly persuade athletes to let go of other parts of their lives, such as their schooling or social life. In doing so from a young age, athletes have many of their options cut off as they prioritize themselves being engrossed in their sporting life.

From this, we can learn that the Balance is Better philosophy should not only focus on interpersonal behavioural influences but also on applying the socio-ecological perspective to enable people to become aware of the interdependence and interrelationships that exist between individuals, others and society. The evident impacts that coaches and other societal influences, namely NSOs have on the health of an athlete highlights the limitations of Balance is Better philosophy, which states that in Roles and Responsibilities, coaches have a crucial role to grow and support athletes

²⁰ Case study of pre-elite athletes. (2017). Retrieved 22 July 2021, from https://researcharchive.lincoln.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10182/8952/Thomas_BSRM%28Hons%29.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y

²¹ Ben Kissam (Oct 2017) "How coaches should coach and Parents can stop ruining youth sports" retrieved on 2nd October from <https://medium.com/@benkissam/how-coaches-should-coach-kids-should-compete-and-parents-can-stop-ruining-sports-for-their-kids-c0b7ce434c74>

whilst being committed to their own continuous learning. The philosophy must seek to acknowledge the strong hegemonic relationships that exist within sport, and deliver a strategy that can work towards overcoming these relationships applying a socio-ecological perspective. It is only in dissolving the hegemonic relationships, that athletes can express themselves by telling their coaches what is best for them, not just as a sportsperson, which can later enable them to be set up for a world outside of sport.

After retiring from sport, it would be expected that athletes find themselves lacking motivation to get on with their lives, as they have never really had to do so before, when their coaches were structuring their every action. This claim is supported by Goldman (2020), the president-elect of the Association of Applied Sport Psychology who states that during an athlete's career "Most of [them] get up at 6.am and their day is largely accounted for and scheduled. It can be really intense when they leave" (Goldman, 2020 page 12)²². This suggests how much of a lifestyle change it can be for athletes to leave their elite sport, which may be largely due to the power imbalance of coaches structuring their entire lives for them, with athletes, especially younger ones, having little say in how to structure their own lives. It would appear that as a sporting nation, we need to equip our athletes with the skills to develop greater autonomy over their lives, in order to better set them up for life outside sport.

It is pleasing to see that the Balance is Better Philosophy has placed a strong emphasis on the inclusion of community and building up a support network around the athlete. The Balance is Better Philosophy has a section titled: Roles and Responsibilities, a

²² McCarthy, M., Nayak, V., Nayak, V., Christovich, A., & Evans, P. (2020). Why Athlete Retirement Transitions Can Be So Devastating. Retrieved 2 October 2020, from <https://frontofficesports.com/athlete-retirement-psychology/>

detailed breakdown of all the people involved in an athlete's life, from National Sporting Organisations to parents and schools, giving guidance on how such people can best support an athlete. In strategically appointing the various supporting roles of an individual's athletic career to a variety of people involved in the athlete's life, a community is built up around the athlete. According to Understanding Sense of Community From the Athlete's perspective (Warner, Stacy & Dixon 2011)²³, this sense of community is so important in sports because of its potential to improve the life quality of those associated with sport organisations. This shows how in helping to build up and direct a community around the athlete, the wellbeing of such an athlete is likely to improve. Further to this claim, according to the Australian Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries²⁴, the value of sport is not solely based upon winning, but rather about building these communities. The article indicates that in general, athletes who develop a strong sense of community around them, tend to be healthier and happier than those who do not. This is pleasing to see in regards to athletic retirement, because if an athlete has formed relationships with a variety of people during their career, and developed this community around them, they will potentially feel more at ease during retirement and have people to go to for support. Additionally they also benefit from the diverse relationships they have formed so they can connect when faced with adversity, hence easing the retirement process.

Sarason (1974)²⁵ defined a sense of community as “an environmental characteristic that

²³ Warner, Stacy & Dixon, Marlene. (2011). Understanding Sense of Community From the Athlete's Perspective. *Journal of Sport Management*. 25. 257-271. 10.1123/jsm.25.3.257.

²⁴ Benefits to the community. (2020). Retrieved 1 November 2020, from <https://www.dlgsc.wa.gov.au/sport-and-recreation/benefits-to-the-community>

²⁵ Townley, G., & Kloos, B. (2009). Development of a measure of sense of community for individuals with serious mental illness residing in community settings. *Journal of community psychology*, 37(3), 362–380. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.20301>

leads to individuals feeling a sense of belonging and social support at the group-level". Furthermore, Pretty, Conroy et al. (1996) go on to claim that a sense of community links to increased psychological wellbeing in different aspects of Hauora.²⁶ Therefore, this sense of community that athletes build around them, has a positive impact on their lives. If such athletes are able to build communities that have the potential to positively impact them, and provide support, then this will pave the way for a more easy transition out of elite sport. However, what we must also consider is how some communities can negatively influence individuals and the consequent impacts to overall wellbeing.

The New Zealand Rugby Players Association (NZRPA) work with transitioning athletes and conducted a retired player survey (2020)²⁷, which found that 60% of athletes took 6 months or longer to gain control of their lives post retirement, with 40% facing complications (employment, education, finance, physical health and mental health). Further to this, Mannes, Waxenberg et al. (2019) claims that 78% of past NFL players filed for bankruptcy as soon as two years following their retirement²⁸. These statistics combined reflect how many athletes struggle during retirement, and how prevalent it is. The significant part of the NZRPA survey, which highlights the need for community support of retired athletes, is the statistic that 83% of surveyed athletes said that support from friends and family was most crucial, with 50% feeling as though they did not receive this support.²⁹ It is evident that a significant proportion of retiring athletes

²⁶ Pretty GH, Conroy C, Dugay J, Fowler K, Williams D. Sense of community and its relevance to adolescents of all ages. *Journal of Community Psychology*. 1996;24(4):365–379

²⁷ Retired Athletes Survey. (2020). Retrieved 2 November 2020, from <https://www.nzrpa.co.nz/pdf/NZRPA-Retired-Player-Survey-FINAL.pdf>

²⁸ Mannes, Z. L., Waxenberg, L. B., Cottler, L. B., Perlstein, W. M., Burrell, L. E., 2nd, Ferguson, E. G., Edwards, M. E., & Ennis, N. (2019). Prevalence and Correlates of Psychological Distress among Retired Elite Athletes: A Systematic Review. *International review of sport and exercise psychology*, 12(1), 265–294. ²⁹ Retired Athletes Survey. (2020). Retrieved 2 November 2020, from <https://www.nzrpa.co.nz/pdf/NZRPA-Retired-Player-Survey-FINAL.pdf>

find it difficult to turn to someone for support, and that this sense of community is needed in order to create that aid.

It would be of interest to compare the retirement experience of individuals within different sports, those sports of high status compared with lower status and how the relative experiences were different. What we now need to ensure is that the community that is being built up is of positive influence to all individuals, regardless of their chosen sport, in order to best benefit the athlete's Hauora.

Man versus Machine: What are the attitudes and values in Aotearoa

The Balance is Better Philosophy approaches its goals for New Zealand's nationally identified athletes to succeed and thrive with their talent, underpinned by a somewhat technocentric attitude. The philosophy describes its system as "encompass[ing] identification, confirmation, selection, de-selection..." and "increas[ing] capability and capacity" of talent development. In using phrasing like this throughout the philosophy, it seems as though the attitude held is that athletes are programmed robots that have the only task of inevitable success. The philosophy implies that talented athletes should be treated like machines, working as hard as they can, even overworking in order to reach their maximum potential. This underlying attitude reveals the vested interest in the Plan, with sporting bodies such as Talent NZ gaining significantly from overworking athletes as their positive results reflect well on both the nation and HPSNZ (High Performance Sport NZ). This reveals how the document has elements of bias, which are an evident limitation due to Sport New Zealand's personal gain at the possible exploitation of athletes' talent.

This technocentric approach implied is a clear limitation of the document that is brought to light in research done by Barker D et al (2014)³⁰ which discusses the sustainability of high performance sport in relation to a technocentric attitude. The article states that one of the characteristics of high performance sports is “performance maximization at any cost”. This means that the athletes are trained like machines, with the only goal for their career being the success that the public sees rather than their individualised progress oriented goals. In Sweden, for example, an independent investigation into the state of gymnastics showed ‘ignorant, unethical and unhealthy’ (Stier, 2015, p. 21, personal translation)³¹ approaches to eating, weight issues and injury within women’s artistic gymnastics. The combination of these claims indicate how coaches are often treating athletes as though their bodies are machines that they want them to perform at the highest level regardless of the cost. It seems to be the issue of the coaches exploiting the athletes bodies and abilities during training, which also links to the hegemonic relationships previously discussed.

From examining the literature, one of the main reasons for this technocentric approach and the consequent negative impacts is the stress of selection and then reaching success in high performance sport. The pressure of being selected into an elite programme is high, the American National Collegiate Athletic Association (2012) reported that for every 5000 high school basketball players, one will end up playing professionally. Athletes adapt to this mentality by treating their bodies like machines which is an issue when they leave their sport and don’t know how to deal with all the

³⁰ Barker, D., Barker-Ruchti, N., Wals, A., & Tinning, R. (2014). High performance sport and sustainability: a contradiction of terms?. *Reflective Practice*, 15(1), date accessed 8/5/2020

³¹ Stier, J., & Blomberg, H. (2015). The quest for truth. Retrieved 7 November 2021, from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281664485_The_quest_for_truth_The_use_of_discursive_and_rhetorical_resources_in_newspaper_coverage_of_the_mistreatment_of_young_Swedish_gymnasts

emotions they are experiencing. Barker et al (2014)³² suggests that athletes need to be treated like the farming industry (page 18). Their resources are not infinite, they cannot continue their entire lives like machines. They need to have access to the right resources at the right time in order to become not only the best athlete but also the best person that they can be. These ongoing resources cannot be guaranteed, i.e injury can drastically change the circumstances an athlete is in. The ANCAA findings are supported by my own research, when interviewing current Auckland elite youth gymnasts³³. I found when asking them what they defined as a successful training, the most common response was that if they were aching the next day and struggled to get out of bed in the morning, then they had trained well. Pain to this degree is not successful training but rather unhealthy training which can result in ongoing health complications in the future for youth athletes. Overtraining, along with a no pain, no gain philosophy has become glorified and is seen as the way to get to the top, neglecting physical and mental health.

These responses indicate that the sporting culture encourages both athletes and coaches to endorse a technocentric approach to athletic development, further encouraging athletes to fall into the trap of letting their sport determine their value and associate their identity with their results. In teaching athletes to view their bodies as machines, it develops an ideology that they are only built for one purpose, to win competitions at any cost therefore when transitioning out of elite sport, athletes will have to put themselves through the mental strain of having to try to find another purpose in life.

³² Barker, D., Barker-Ruchti, N., Wals, A., & Tinning, R. (2014). High performance sport and sustainability: a contradiction of terms?. *Reflective Practice*, 15(1), date accessed 8/5/2020

³³ 7/07/2020 at Tristar Gymnastics Club, Mt Roskill, Auckland

Coupled with the underlying technocentric attitude is the commodification of athletes. American Golfer Matt Harman, explains the commodification of athletes as players only existing to fulfill the function of winning for a fan's favourite team. When the player moves teams, and prohibits them from fulfilling their function, the player is no longer of any use³⁴. This attitude is seconded by R Carwill (2021) article titled: How do athletes commodify themselves?³⁵. The article details how athletes also brand themselves, selling their brand to companies as a way to further their own brand and turning their value into a commodity, selling it for profit. The implications that this value of athletes have is that it highlights athletes' failure to translate athletic success to success outside of sport. After athletes retire, they do not have this source of income from their branding and partnerships that they once had, leading to increasing bankruptcy.

The Balance is Better philosophy neglects to address this underlying technocentric approach to elite sport which is one of its key limitations. What we now need is a collective action that looks at removing this toxic sporting culture where athletes can be seen as invincible. The question that now needs to be asked is "what is the cost of gold?". If we look at the worldwide decision to go ahead with the Tokyo 2021 Olympics, despite a worldwide pandemic with COVID-19, how much of a risk did this cost the athletes, and for what purpose, for them to fulfill their value as a mere commodity? Although according to a recent Tokyo government survey³⁶ only 0.1% of people in Tokyo

³⁴ Harman, M. (2021). The Commodification of NFL Players. Retrieved 16 October 2021, from <https://www.thebackyardbanter.com/the-commodification-of-nfl-players.html>

³⁵ Carwill, R. (2021). How Do Athletes' Commodify Their Personal Brand?. Retrieved 16 October 2021, from <https://brokenclipboard.wordpress.com/2016/04/15/how-do-athletes-commodify-their-personal-brand-that-s-a-clown-question-bro/>

³⁶ Tokyo 2021 and the risks facing the Olympics. (2021). Retrieved 16 October 2021, from https://www.actuarialpost.co.uk/article/tokyo-2021-and-the-risks-facing-the-olympics-19288.htm?utm_source=slipcase&utm_medium=affiliate&utm_campaign=slipcase

are at risk of contracting COVID-19, that is 11 of the approximately 11,000 competing athletes and a further 200 of the volunteers involved that are at risk of suffering long term respiratory issues due to the continuation of Tokyo 2021. Is this risk worth the cost of gold? It could be argued that elite sport needs to be treated more like recreational sport. According to Barker-Ruchti (2014) the main goal of participating in recreational sport is to improve both physical and mental wellbeing³⁷. If we begin to look at elite sport in this way, athletes would begin to develop a much more positive athletic identity, and therefore realise who they are other than just a sports machine. They would learn that they are a valid human who is able to feel emotions and learn from failures, which would set retired athletes up for life in a much better way. This collective action starts with the sporting community creating a culture that primarily fosters athlete health which would then filter through to the coaches. This could achieve a more healthy and sustainable path to the podium and inevitably set up such athletes better for life after sport.

Levelling the Playing Field: Is balance really better?

When researching the main issue athletes were experiencing in regards to retiring, athletic identity came up as a prevalent theme. According to athlete Malcolm Lemmons(2020), athletic identity is defined as “the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role and looks to others for acknowledgement of that role”.³⁸ According to Life after sport: the relationship between athletic identity and mental health outcomes after sport retirement Giannone (2016)³⁹, there is a strong correlation

³⁷ Barker, D., Barker-Ruchti, N., Wals, A., & Tinning, R. (2014). High performance sport and sustainability: a contradiction of terms?. *Reflective Practice*, 15(1), date accessed 8/5/2020

³⁸ Malcolm Lemmons, A. (2020). What Every Athlete Should Know About Athletic Identity. Retrieved 4 November 2020, from <https://an.athletenetwork.com/blog/what-every-athlete-should-know-about-athletic-identity> ³⁹ Giannone, Z. A. (2016). *Life after sport : the relationship between athletic identity and mental health outcomes after sport retirement (T)*. University of British Columbia. P78 onwards

between exclusive athletic identity and negative mental health outcomes. The results from Giannone (2016) study of multiple large Western Canadian universities showed that athletes in the higher athletic identity group reported more significant depressive symptoms than athletes with lower athletic identity. These findings are paralleled by Brewer (1993)⁴⁰ which showed that athletic identity has a positive correlation with state anxiety and elevated depressive symptomatology after retirement. When athletes stop sport, they are letting go of a whole part of their life. The athletes brain needs to be rewired and may struggle to function the way they used to because of how everything has changed which means that they are at risk of no longer finding meaning in the important things which can lead to spiralling depression.

Contrasting this, Ahmadabadi, Zahra et al (2014) shows that psychologists believe one of the most important skills during sport that can be taught and practiced is mental skill.⁴¹ They say that it is impossible to reach one's full potential and achieve at the highest levels without the mental skills. The situation of athletic identity increasing success in sport has occurred because those who associate more deeply with the athletic role, tend to be more motivated to train better and harder which inevitably leads to their improved success. This research is supported by that of Rebecca Chidley (2019) that claims athletic identity leads to a strong sense of self and sureness of who you are. Accordingly, in order to achieve at the highest levels, there is a significant amount of mental fitness and preparation needed, and athletic identity can help an athlete succeed. This research alludes to the attitude that in order to succeed properly

⁴⁰Brewer, B. W., Van Raalte, J. L., & Linder, D. E. (1993). *Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS)* [Database record]. APA PsycTests.

⁴¹ Ahmadabadi, Zahra; Shojaei, Masoumeh; Daneshfar, Afkham (2014/06/01) *The relationship between athletic identity and sports performance among national rowers during different season of competition, Volume 10*

in sport, it needs to be an athlete's entire life. This attitude has been adopted by many elite athletes and coaches, believing that balance is not better but rather having one goal, one focus in life which is sport allows success at the highest level.

Evaluating these differing perspectives on whether balance is really better, shows that how an athlete perceives themselves is critical to how they deal with difficulties that they have to overcome. Although some athletes may argue that their sport in itself provides balance, with gymnastics being spread over 4-6 apparatus or triathlon being three sports combined into one, it is vital to realise that the balance is needed outside of the sport. In addition to this, balance does not mean that a part of an athlete's life, such as their dedication to training needs to be compromised, but rather built on through other aspects of life.

Race tactics: Exploring a strength based approach

"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much" (Hellen Keller, 1904).⁴² The support of community to an individual is so vital for their Hauora. It creates a sense of belonging, a place where they have people who they care about and who care about them. As previously discussed, a prominent theme throughout the Balance is Better Philosophy is the holistic development of athletes. The Philosophy details how it has a goal of helping athletes to be the best they can be not just in sport, but in life. This suggests that in relation to the issue of retirement among elite athletes, they are providing a plan to give athletes experience and knowledge which may equip them for use later in life. However, it can be argued that the Philosophy seems to leave athletes 'in the deep end' when they finish

⁴² Alone We Can Do So Little. Together We Can Do So Much – Quote Investigator. (1904). Retrieved 2 November 2020, from <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2014/04/21/together/>

their career and are no longer of use to the sporting organisations, which is a key facet of possible subsequent psychological issues.

When choosing a critical action a strength based approach is needed. Appreciative inquiry is an approach that applies the socio-ecological perspective and helps people move toward a shared vision for the future by engaging others in strategic innovation, on a societal level. Research into the community aspect of sport and how it has a positive correlation with athlete wellbeing, leads to a solution embracing this community aspect and encouraging the build up of support networks around an athlete.

Who's in the lineup?: What other solutions already exist?

NZRPA is doing a significant amount of work with transitioning athletes. They have employed a strategy in order to assist those retiring because the reality of professional sport is that all players have to retire from the game at some point in their lives⁴³. Their strategy consists of a focus on education during sport to help their players obtain qualifications or skills in order to make employment after rugby easier. Their survey showed that 46% of retired athletes were unemployed at some stage post-retirement, with 47% believing that playing elite sport inhibited their ability to work. The work that the NZRPA are doing with education during rugby careers is seemingly successful, with 93%⁴⁴ of players saying that it helped them with the transition. However, a fault with this strategy is that it implies a one size fits all model. Not all athletes are going to want to attend an educational institute, some are going to want to partake in an apprenticeship or be involved in practical study. It is also an inequitable action, as not all athletes will be

⁴³Retired Athletes Survey. (2020). Retrieved 2 November 2020, from <https://www.nzrpa.co.nz/pdf/NZRPA-Retired-Player-Survey-FINAL.pdf>

⁴⁴Ibid 35

able to afford to attend university, so what we need is a critical action that takes the essence of the community involvement, but it is more equitable and personalised.

Another strategy currently being implemented is Athlete 365 Career+, run by the Olympic Organisation. The initiative, created in 2005 has the goal of empowering athletes to maximise their education and employment opportunities, and so help them stride confidently towards a successful dual or post-sports career. They aim to do this by providing resources, allowing athletes to develop such skills. A survey taken by Athlete 365, under the Olympic Organisation found that 50% of retired athletes struggled to keep motivated in their daily life.⁴⁵ The strategy shows success with on average athletes spending 55% longer on the site than they did when it first launched, which demonstrates how the programme is reaching more people. This action is personalised, as it provides individual support to athletes who are looking into careers. It is also equitable because everyone can access this programme, as it is free of charge and largely based online. It is inclusive as it caters for all Olympic sports, with individualised programmes to each of the sports. However, a fault of the Athlete 365 Career+ strategy is that it is not very well known. It is important to create a strategy which advocates for and is known to all athletes so everyone who needs the support can get involved.

Breaking the records: What does the perfect future look like?

There is no other place in society that glorifies perfection and suffering quite like sport (L. Henderson 2021)⁴⁶. Is this the culture we want to create for this generation and

⁴⁵Athlete365 Career+. (2020). Retrieved 10 November 2020, from <https://www.olympic.org/athlete365/career>

⁴⁶ Henderson, L. (2021). Athletes struggle to find purpose, identity after sports. Retrieved 15 October 2021, from

generations to come? In a perfect world, wellbeing would be the top priority for our athletes, with all aspects of it considered not just physical. In particular, the biophysical principle of sports psychology is evidently important, with athletes needing to recognise who they are and who they *want* to be. There needs to be a focus on what the athletic identity means to individuals. In order for the athletes to have the best wellbeing possible, the Philosophy needs to look and consider all dimensions of Hauora. Therefore in relation to the issue of retirement of athletes, athletes need to be trained to have a healthy athletic identity, so that they feel as though they belong to their sport, but not too strong that it takes over everything they are.

In a perfect world, the socio-ecological perspective would be applied with not only interpersonal relationships with an athlete being considered, but also between the individuals and society, namely National Sporting Organisations and large companies. It would help athletes to realise that they are not on their own in this sporting world, it is not them competing against the entire world. Athletes need the support of their communities and wider society who have their best interest at heart rather than the vested interest that has been alluded to in the Balance is Better Philosophy. This strategy of applying the sociological perspective, would also echo in removing commodification of athletes, no longer equating them to a materialistic value based on their success. This would enable athletes to see themselves as more than just a machine, thus minimising the technocentric approach, more than a brand but rather a human being, with emotional, spiritual, and physical needs like every other person.

https://gazette.com/news/athletes-struggle-to-find-purpose-identity-after-sports-special-report/article_ea000d90-220f-11ea-b1ac-9f79e1310dd8.html

Crossing the finish line together: Taking critical action

Taking an appreciative inquiry approach, and dreaming of the 'perfect world' that could be created, a critical action would be to enforce funded mandatory tertiary education study or part time apprenticeships for all elite athletes competing at the highest level (e.g Olympics or Commonwealth Games). This would ensure that elite athletes are not only committing their entire lives to sport, but are also either studying or gaining practical skills, enabling them the opportunity for employment later in life. According to Karen Gallagher (2019) "The worst thing you can do is not extend yourself beyond sport"⁴⁷. Extrapolating the strength of community support identified in the Plan, athletes can be introduced to areas of interest outside of their sport, to new people and communities who will be able to help them in the future. Forming new connections outside of sport will also give athletes a feeling of belonging to somewhere, after they leave their sporting whanau, hence building a wider support network. By partaking in tertiary study or apprenticeships, athletes are also able to study what is of interest to them, whether it is something to do with sports, or something entirely different. It will consider all different people and recognises that progress is not linear, one size does not fit all, which was another key strength identified in the Plan. This action would be considered as part of the training programme, with professional athletes having to attend extramural classes within their training schedule. The action would be implemented through sporting clubs, with the support of coaches and managers who would help to schedule these additional commitments within the training schedule. It would be hoped that this action would create a shift in attitudes and values

⁴⁷ Athletes struggle with transitioning to life after sports. (2019). Retrieved 10 November 2020, from <https://globalsportmatters.com/business/2019/11/26/some-athletes-struggle-with-life-after-games-end/>

toward sport with coaches and sporting bodies recognising that education and work are both an important part of player development, equal to that of the development of fitness and skills. The action would need to be government funded or funded through corporate sponsorship. If it were to be endorsed, it would ensure that all athletes were able to gain this education or work, regardless of their social or economic background. This would make it an equitable action as everyone is given the opportunity to gain a tertiary qualification. However, it must be ensured that athletes are well-supported during this stage so that they do not get overwhelmed with the pressure of trying to manage both studying and training. It would be beneficial if the athletes could take university courses, or engage in apprenticeships over a longer period of time, to spread out the workload so that it is not too much over too little time. On the whole, this critical action would help athletes who undergo non-normative transitions as it is essentially preparing them for their inevitable retirement, making the transition easier on the athletes wellbeing.

Direct consequences of this action at personal, interpersonal and societal level may include athletes experiencing less pressure to prolong their sporting career as they potentially feel more comfortable in the face of retirement. Interpersonally, athletes have the opportunity to form relationships with new people outside of the sporting world, building up this community around them. Societally, a cultural shift in the way that elite sport is viewed could be seen, with sport being understood as a part of a person's life, not a person's entire life. The indirect consequences of the strategy could be more athletes experiencing financial stability and a decrease in mental health issues due to them having built up other aspects of their lives. Looking into potential negative consequences of this action, some athletes may not recognise or understand the value

of having work or education outside of sport, so there may be a loss of interest. However, to avoid these negative impacts, breaking the paradigm and influencing positive change, we need to educate athletes about how important it is that they set themselves up for life after sport, and therefore build interest in the educational/working development programme. From a socio-ecological perspective, this critical action would impact not only the individual athletes, but also their relationships with others and the sporting communities of New Zealand as a nation. In attending educational institutes or apprenticeships, athletes are given the opportunity to discover more about themselves, which will help them to form relationships with others. It would be hoped that athletes would embrace the opportunities they were given to not only live out their sporting dream but also discover new dreams, improving their relationship with sporting communities, hence creating a better health outcome for all.

The thrills of your sporting career can only last so long and, like every other athlete, you will soon have to adjust to a new life and a new career.⁴⁸

This report has discussed the reasons for athletes experiencing psychological reactions during their retirement out of elite sport. The purpose of the critical examination was to determine what it was that made retirement from sport so hard on elite athletes, and how the Balance is Better Philosophy was helping or hindering the issue. It is recommended that a critical action of mandating tertiary education study or part time apprenticeship whilst participating in elite level sport, would enable athletes to spread their interests and abilities, hence helping them later on in their lives. One of the more significant findings

⁴⁸Career+: The chance to boost your life options. (2020). Retrieved 5 November 2020, from <https://www.olympic.org/athlete365/de/career-de/career-the-chance-to-boost-your-life-options/>

to emerge from this investigation is how strong a community of people around an individual can be. The relevance of community support, in regards to the retirement of elite athletes, is especially interesting, when looking at how we as a nation can best support our talented athletes. The evidence suggests that the social determinants of health are a key factor in the risks associated with retirement from elite sport, as well as the strength of an individual's athletic identity. In general, therefore it seems that all transitions out of elite sport will be different, and athletes need to be supported accordingly in order to best benefit their Hauora.

I have learnt that although I love my sport and it always will be a part of me, I must consider what comes after sport. I want to have dreams of the world that extend far beyond the realms of the track. I want the opportunity to find my passion outside of running because I know it cannot last forever. I want to be part of a network of people who support me, because “in the end, a community of friends let you rise and then stand tall” - Kurt Philip (2018)⁴⁹.

So who am I? What I do is not who I am

I have many identities in my life. I am a daughter, a sister, a friend, a student and will always be an athlete. My self worth is not defined by my past, but rather by who I choose to be and what I have learnt from the experiences that my sport can provide me with. Yes, I am an athlete, but I am also so much more than that and my vision moving forward is to become the best person I can be outside of my sport looking towards a bright future, with the support of my whānau and others around me.

⁴⁹ A Community Of Friends by Kurt Philip Behm. . Retrieved 10 November 2020, from <https://allpoetry.com/poem/13773689-A-Community-Of-Friends-by-Kurt-Philip-Behm>

Scholarship Exemplar 2021

Subject	Health and Physical Education	Standard	93501	Total score	16
Annotation					
<p>The candidate constructed a report with a logical structure which included a well-planned introduction, appropriate research, a range of ideas, challenged assumptions, and substantiated conclusions.</p> <p>The candidate set the scene by providing a relevant quote supported by personal experiences, and a background on other athlete experiences. A logical structure was exemplified by outlining the purpose of examining issues associated with retirement from elite sport, contributing factors, and a critique of Sport New Zealand's <i>Balance is Better</i> report. While the response had a strong New Zealand context, the introduced focus on elite athlete retirement was somewhat narrow. The discussion around athlete retirement was coherent and supported, with a natural development of ideas throughout the response. The report is concluded by mirroring the introduction through the candidate's own experiences.</p> <p>A critical perspective was present throughout the report and the candidate consistently applied and interconnected appropriate issues, theories, and perspectives. They applied a theoretical basis to the report and questioned and challenged the ideas and practices with insight and perception. This includes using the <i>Balance is Better</i> report and philosophy as a foundation to challenge and critique aspects of New Zealand's sporting environment and mindset. Short comings and missed opportunities are identified and linked to the topic.</p> <p>The candidate successfully explores a range of philosophies with models of wellbeing being applied to athlete's experiences. The concepts and ideas related to hauora explored were integrated into the response, as well as contrasting this by acknowledging the aspects of hauora that were not valued by the <i>Balance is Better</i> report. Findings from the World Health Organisation, Balance is Better, and other local organisations were integrated into the report to provide a solid base of information. The Te Pae Mahutonga model of wellbeing is applied to an athlete's experiences while identifying differences between this and western models of wellbeing. Research and experiences help to balance the theoretical and practical take on athlete retirement.</p> <p>The socio-ecological perspective is logical and integrated into the report through being supported by research and being tied to athlete well-being.</p> <p>The candidate further develops their scope in pages 12 and 13 by introducing new research and statistics followed by personal insight, reflecting on how the status of sports in New Zealand might result in different experiences.</p> <p>The candidate includes a broad look at attitudes and values in Aotearoa New Zealand by considering the <i>Balance is Better</i> philosophy, elements of bias in the report, and exploitation of athletes.</p> <p>In the latter third of the response, the candidate independently reflects on existing practices in New Zealand Rugby, solutions and future proposals, and concludes with thoughts about future implications to athlete retirement in New Zealand. The conclusion is concise and articulates the key findings and key messages that surfaced throughout the response.</p> <p>Overall, this response is a good example of a Scholarship level response. The candidate has produced a logical, balanced, and coherent report that convincingly demonstrates understanding of athlete retirement while critiquing and challenging existing ideas.</p>					

Confirmation of check	Y / N
This exemplar has been checked for similarities with current online exemplars.	Y