On the Transition into Elite Rugby League: Perceptions of Players and Coaching Staff

Rachel A. Jones\textsuperscript{1,2}, John W. Mahoney\textsuperscript{2}, and Daniel F. Gucciardi\textsuperscript{3,}\ast

\textsuperscript{1}School of Psychology, The University of Queensland
\textsuperscript{2}School of Human Movement Studies, The University of Queensland
\textsuperscript{3}School of Physiotherapy and Exercise Science, Curtin University

Authors’ Note

Appreciation is extended to Brian Canavan and James Johns for their assistance with participant recruitment, as well as three anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments on an earlier version of this manuscript.

\ast Address correspondence to Daniel Gucciardi, School of Physiotherapy and Exercise Science, Curtin University, GPO Box U1987, Perth, Western Australia. Email: daniel.f.gucciardi@gmail.com.

Accepted for Publication in Sport, Exercise and Performance Psychology: 30\textsuperscript{th} September 2013
Abstract

Transitions need to be effectively managed to allow for successful progression through developmental stages in many life domains. In this study, we aimed to generate new insights into within-career athletic progressions by exploring players’ and coaching staff’s perspectives on the transition from sub-elite to elite level rugby league within an Australian context. A personal construct psychology approach including experience cycle methodology was used to interview 17 purposefully recruited male rugby league players ($M_{age} = 21.71, SD = 2.79$) who had been or were part of an elite rugby league squad, and 9 staff ($M_{age} = 47.14, SD = 11.13$) who had experience working with transitioning rugby league athletes. Overall, 21 themes (11 combined, 5 unique for each group) were extracted from the participants’ discourse using a thematic analysis, all of which were separately conceptualised into 3 global themes: personal attributes, environmental factors, and critical incidents. Our findings provided support for the robustness of a holistic, lifespan developmental perspective of career transitions in sport contexts. The theoretical integration of this lifespan perspective with the Job Demands-Resources model is discussed as a fruitful avenue for future research and theory.

Keywords: experience cycle methodology; job demands-resources model; personal construct psychology; within-career transitions
Within-Career Transition 2

On the Transition into Elite Rugby League: Perceptions of Players and Coaching Staff

Contemporary sport transition scholars have defined career transitions as periods of normative (i.e., predictable, anticipated, voluntary) and non-normative (i.e., unpredictable, unanticipated, involuntary) events throughout the developmental life course of athletes that are characterised by “a set of specific demands related to practice, competitions, communication, and lifestyle that athletes have to cope with in order to continue successfully in sport or to adjust to the post-career” (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007, p. 713). With the recent shift towards a holistic, lifespan developmental perspective of career transitions in sport contexts (e.g., Stambulova, Alfermann, Statler, & Cote, 2009; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004), there is an increased recognition of the centrality of key transitional periods other than career termination for performance excellence and psychosocial well-being in the life course of an athletic career (for reviews, see Gordon & Lavallee, 2011; Park, Lavallee, & Tod, 2013). The limited research on within-career transitions in sport is surprising since it was almost 20 years ago that Stambulova (1994) identified six normative transitional periods of an elite athletic career: (1) the beginning of sport specialisation, (2) the transition to more intensive training in the chosen sport, (3) the transition from junior to senior/high achievement sport, (4) from amateur to professional sports, (5) from peak to the final stage, and (6) the transition to the post-career. Aligned with recommendations of leading sport transitions scholars to broaden their focus beyond career termination (e.g., Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007; Stambulova et al., 2009), we aimed to contribute to this body of knowledge on career transitions in sport by exploring athletes’ and coaching staff’s perceptions of the transition from sub-elite to elite sport.

In what can be considered an extension of Stambulova’s (1994, 2009) empirical and substantive work on her athletic career transition model, Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) emphasised the importance of the “whole person” including both athletic and non-athletic (e.g., academic, vocational) challenges and transitions within a broader set of events across the developmental life course. Their conceptual model encompasses normative transitions faced by athletes at athletic,
individual or psychological, psychosocial, and academic or vocational levels. The athletic level of
development draws from Bloom’s (1985) three stage model (i.e., initiation, development, mastery) and also includes a discontinuation stage to capture career termination. The second level is designed to capture the major stages in an individual’s psychological development (i.e., childhood, adolescence, (young) adulthood). The third level is focused on changes in psycho-social development relative to one’s athletic development, and denotes important social agents (e.g., parents, coach, peers, romantic partners) as perceived by athletes. The fourth and final level is concerned with stages and transitions of an academic (e.g., primary to high school) and vocational nature. Thus, Wylleman and Lavallee have captured the concurrent, interactive, and reciprocal nature of normative transitions within a lifespan (i.e., whole-career) and holistic (i.e., development in different domains) perspective.

It is both conceptually and practically important that we gain insights into why some athletes thrive through transitions into higher levels of competition, whereas others struggle to cope with the demands they confront. Within an Australian sport context, approximately 50% of athletes make the transition from the sub-elite to elite level experience difficulty in the form of challenges such as financial problems, self-doubt, and illness, and only 33% of athletes successfully transition into the senior level (Oldenziel, Gagné, & Gulbin, 2003). Other scholars have estimated the success rate at which athletes successfully transition into elite sport at around 17% (Vanden Auweele, De Martelaer, Rzewnicki, De Knop, & Wylleman, 2004). Elite athlete development is also a major financial expenditure for many governments. For example, in the four years prior to 2012, the Australian and British Governments invested over $AU380 (approx. US$390) million and £265 (approx. US$415) million, respectively, to help their athletes succeed at the London Olympics (Australian Government, 2012; UK Sport, 2012). Substantively, the transition into elite sport is a phase in which individuals typically confront a variety of challenges and demands across different domains of their life. Indeed, sources of stress for elite athletes can encompass environmental (e.g., selection, finances, training environment), personal (e.g., nutrition, injury), leadership (e.g.,
coaching styles, relationship with coach), and team issues (e.g., team atmosphere, support network; Fletcher & Hanton, 2003). Therefore, the transition into elite sport is an ideal period to better understand the concurrent and interactive nature of such factors of a holistic perspective on transitions (cf. Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004).

Several commonalities as well as unique findings can be gleaned from initial research on within-career transitions (Bruner, Munroe-Chandler & Spink, 2008; Finn & McKenna, 2010; Pummell, Harwood, & Lavallee, 2008). Consistent with theoretical expectations (e.g., Schlossberg, 1981; Stambulova et al., 2009), within-career transitions have been found to encompass dynamic and complex periods that are characterised by many normative and non-normative events or non-events that can be problematic for the attainment of personal goals and the maintenance of psychosocial well-being. Additionally, across each of the studies conducted to date, it appears that the transition to higher levels of competition is associated with a variety of stressors or demands that are consistent with the four levels (i.e., athletic, psychological, psycho-social, academic/vocational) of Wylleman and Lavallee’s (2004) developmental model of transitions.

Unique findings across the available research can also be found in the dynamics of these four developmental layers. For example, coaches’ reports of English athletes’ experiences are emphasised by strains that are outside of the sport context (Finn & McKenna, 2010), whereas sport-related strains characterised the reports of Canadian athletes (Bruner et al., 2008). Despite these encouraging results, further research is required to ascertain the robustness of these findings and generate new insights into an integrated account of within-career transitions. Research that is guided by theory is especially important given the largely descriptive and atheoretical nature of previous research (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007).

Central to both conceptual (Stambulova, 1994, 2009; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004) and empirical evidence (Bruner et al., 2008; Finn & McKenna, 2010; Pummell et al., 2008; see also, Gordon & Lavallee, 2011; Park et al., 2013) on sport transitions is the notion of coping; that is, the process of drawing on (internal and external) resources to manage those demands and challenges
that athletes confront in a given developmental period and which have implications for continuation in their sport or adjusting to life after sport. Thus, the successful negotiation of any career transition is dynamic and involves a complex interplay between the available coping resources and the normative and non-normative challenges or demands they confront and which occur across different domains of one’s life. In keeping with this conceptualisation of coping, we propose the Job-Demands-Resources model (JD-R; Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001; for a review, see Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) as one theoretical model that can help organise existing evidence as well as offer a framework for the interpretation of new findings. Despite the primary tenets of the JD-R model having been empirically supported in a variety of workplace contexts and occupations (e.g., Bakker & Demerouti, in press), the model has not yet been applied to sport contexts.

Within the context of the JD-R model (Demerouti et al., 2001) there are two defining characteristics of the work environment. The first set of conditions relates to job demands and includes those physical, social, or organisational aspects of the context that require sustained psychological and/or physical effort and which are associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs. Job demands are central to the “impairment pathway” in which there is direct positive relationship with negative outcomes (e.g., job strain, burnout) or an inverse relationship with positive outcomes (e.g., engagement, well-being). With regard to previous within-career transition research, for example, elite adolescent ice hockey players reported a decrease in self-confidence from overly critical feedback from their coaches (Bruner et al., 2008), whereas event riders associated limited communication from sport organisation as a deficiency in organisational support (Pummell et al., 2008). On the other hand, job resources are those physical, psychological, social, and organisational factors that help individuals meet performance requirements, buffer against strain, and/or promote growth and development. Job resources are central to the “enhancement pathway” in which there is direct positive relationship with positive outcomes (e.g., engagement, well-being) and an inverse relationship with negative outcomes (e.g., job strain,
burnout). With regard to previous within-career transition research, for example, elite adolescent ice hockey players reported a link between emotional support from teammates and performance (Bruner et al., 2008), whereas event riders associated a positive “team spirit” from informational support provided by teammates and peers (Pummell et al., 2008). In addition to these main effects, a key tenet of this model is that the combination of high demands and low resources leads to negative outcomes, whereas the combination of high demands and high resources leads to positive outcomes (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

In summary, the central aim of this study was to contribute to the body of knowledge on career transitions in sport by exploring players’ and coaching staff’s perspectives on the transition from sub-elite to elite level rugby league within an Australian context. Rugby league is an international sport played in over 30 countries with Australia currently the top ranked country (Rugby League International Federation, 2012). Rugby league has been played competitively in Australia for 104 years (NRL, 2012). The National Rugby League (NRL) was developed in 1998 and administers Australia’s national competition (the highest level of national competition excluding State of Origin) which consists of 16 teams (including a New Zealand team; NRL, 2012). There is two career pathways into the NRL. Each NRL team has an under 20s side that participates in the National Youth Competition (NYC) which comprises the second-tier (or sub-elite) level of the Club pathway. Alternatively, athletes can follow the State League pathway comprised of independent, second-tier, open-age state competitions such as the Queensland Cup (Q-Cup) and New South Wales Cup, from which NRL clubs recruit players associated with their feeder teams (NRL, 2012).

Three key extensions of previous research were considered in our study. First, with the available studies on within-career transitions having occurred in Russian (Stambulova, 1994), British (Pummell et al., 2008), English (Finn & McKenna, 2010) or Canadian contexts (Bruner et al., 2008), our research context offered an assessment of the extent to which these previous findings extend to a culture (i.e., Australian) and sport (i.e., rugby league) not previously examined. Second,
Within-Career Transition 7

we examined the perspectives of players who were at different stages of the transition process; that is, players who were positioned at a sub-elite level with the prospect of transitioning into an elite team, currently in the process of transitioning into the elite level, had transitioned successfully (i.e., are still playing fulltime at the elite level after several years), had transitioned into the elite level and struggled to maintain their spot, and had an opportunity to transition but did not make it into the elite level. Third, although athletes’ viewpoints are important due to their proximity to lived experiences, the perspectives of coaches and other personnel (e.g., development managers) remain an untapped resource because they drive the selection process and pass on information to relevant selectors (Morris, 2000). The perspectives of coaching staff are rarely featured in the transition literature and can therefore offer new insights into the transition into elite sport, as well as enhance the scientific rigour via multiple perspectives. In so doing, consistencies among rating sources (e.g., common themes reported by players) and unique perspectives between ratings sources (e.g., themes reported by players and not coaches) can be revealed.

Method

Participants

Seventeen male rugby league players aged between 19 and 29 years ($M = 21.71$, $SD = 2.79$) were purposefully recruited from the NRL and the Q-Cup. Six NRL clubs and one Q-Cup club were represented. All participants had between one and five years ($M_{subelite} = 2.82$, $SD = 1.33$) playing experience at the sub-elite level (defined as the competition one step below NRL level, e.g., NYC, New South Wales Cup, Q Cup). Players with a minimum of one year experience training with an NRL squad or who were contracted to an NRL squad for the first time in 2011 (counted as 1 year) were recruited to participate and had a range of experience ($M_{elitesquad\ (years)} = 2.76$, $SD = 1.35$, Range = 1 – 5; $M_{NRLGames} = 15.06$, $SD = 19.37$, Range = 0 – 65). The players were at different stages of their rugby league careers with some anticipating the elite transition (i.e., were contracted to an elite NRL team but had not yet played a game of NRL, defined as second-tier players, $n = 3$), some currently in the process of transitioning (transitioning players who had played some NRL games
but were not playing NRL fulltime and had played less than 26 games or an entire regular season of
NRL in total, \( n = 7 \), those who transitioned successfully (i.e., are still playing fulltime at the elite
level after several years and had played more than 26 games of NRL, \( n = 4 \)), those who transitioned
into the elite level for several years but struggled to maintain their spot on a fulltime basis (partially
transitioned, \( n = 1 \)), those who transitioned successfully but were now playing at a second-tier level
to finish their career (completed transition, \( n = 1 \)), and those who had an opportunity to transition
(i.e., received a contract with the elite squad) but did not make it into the elite level (failed
transition, \( n = 1 \)). A number of different cultural groups were represented by the participants
including French, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Polynesian, and Caucasian.

Nine male coaches and support staff aged between 27 and 60 years (\( M = 47.14, SD = 11.13 \))
were also recruited from the NRL and Q Cup for this study. Support staff roles included strength
and conditioning (\( n = 2 \)), development coach (\( n = 2 \)), football operations/coaching and development
manager (\( n = 2 \)), head coach (\( n = 1 \)), and player welfare (\( n = 1 \)). Five NRL clubs, one Q Cup club,
and the NRL organisation were represented. Coach or support staff members had extensive years
experience in their respective roles (\( M_{\text{elite}} = 10.00, SD = 8.90, M_{\text{subelite}} = 5.44, SD = 4.38 \)) and all but
one were working at either an elite or sub-elite level of rugby league at the time of the interview.

**Interview Schedule**

Semi-structured interview schedules were developed separately for players and coaches. The
general structure of both interview guides was based on Morgan and Krueger’s (1998) five main
question areas: opening questions, introductory questions, transition questions to link to the next
area, key questions, and ending questions. We developed key substantive questions using
experience cycle methodology (ECM; Oades & Viney, 2000), which is grounded in a personal
emerged within the sport psychology literature 20 years ago with Butler and colleagues’ application
of the performance profile technique (Butler & Hardy, 1992; Butler, Smith, & Irwin, 1993; for a
review, see Gucciardi & Gordon, 2009b) and has been reignited through investigations of mental
toughness (e.g., Gucciardi, Gordon, & Dimmock, 2008; Jones, Hanton, & Connaughton, 2002) and
choking in sport (e.g., Gucciardi, Longbottom, Jackson, & Dimmock, 2010). Central to PCP is the
notion that individuals act as “personal scientists” who are actively engaged in forming and testing
theories about their world through their ongoing experiences. Furthermore, cognition, affect, and
behaviour are not considered independent entities within a PCP framework but rather comprise
features of a holistic system that stem from a common underlying process of anticipation and
construction that is cyclical in nature (Kelly, 1955/1991). It is this view of human beings as holistic
entities that conceptually aligns PCP with the emphasis on the whole system and the
interdependence of its parts espoused by contemporary transition scholars (e.g., Stambulova et al.,
2009; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004).

ECM provides a useful framework for capturing the cyclical process by which people are
said to operate within the context of PCP (Kelly, 1955/1991). Briefly, people develop certain
hypotheses or anticipations of the events or situations in their life. They then involve or invest
themselves in this anticipation of their world, which is actively experienced through their encounter
with the event or situation (akin to data collection for a scientist). Having experienced the event,
people compare their encounter with their initial anticipation to ascertain whether their expectations
were dis/confirmed. Finally, their decision regarding the assessment of the experience with their
anticipation leads to constructive revision in which existing constructs may be strengthened or
revised, or new constructs are developed for subsequent cycles of experience. Interview questions
were slightly modified to suit the transition phase of players (e.g., past tense for players who have
already transitioned into the NRL). Specifically, ECM was employed to ascertain participants’
perspectives on the anticipation phase (e.g., “What (were) you expecting when you (were about
to) start training with the NRL squad?”); the investment phase (e.g., “What did (will) it mean to you
to play NRL?”); the encounter phase (e.g., “What was (is) your experience moving into the NRL
squad?”); the dis/confirmation phase (e.g., “How did things go compared to what you initially
thought would happen?”); and the constructive revision phase (e.g., “If you were to go through the
whole transition experience again, what would you do differently?”). Consistent with a PCP approach (i.e., dichotomy corollary), coaching staff were asked to compare and contrast the experiences of players who have successfully transitioned with those who were unsuccessful for each of these phases of the experience cycle. Clarification and elaboration probes (e.g., “Can you tell me what you mean by…?” and “Could you tell me a bit more about that?”) were used throughout the interviews to add meaning to the data (Patton, 2002). Interested readers can contact the corresponding author for a copy of the full interview guides.

**Procedure**

Ethics approval was obtained from the authors’ institution prior to the commencement of the project. Participants were recruited via personal contacts with NRL and Q-Cup teams who identified and contacted staff and players who met the selection criteria. All participants approached consented to participate and only two potential participants (one staff and one player) were unable to arrange times to attend an interview due to work commitments. The lead author conducted all interviews to ensure consistency both in the conduct of the interview and the process of building rapport. Each interview was conducted either face-to-face or via phone and took approximately 45 to 90 minutes and occurred during the competitive season (over a period of five months).

Transcription and data analysis occurred simultaneously with data collection. Where possible, a copy of the interview schedule was sent to participants prior to the interview.

**Data Analysis**

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using recommendations for inductive thematic analysis (Patton, 2002). First, the interview transcripts and audio files were revisited several times before analysis to gain a clear appreciation of the participants’ discourse. Second, the raw data were coded into an initial classification system by breaking each interview into small segments of meaningful information units. Third, the individual meaning units were organised into categories, then reviewed to create broader themes that identified patterns in the data and set clear boundaries distinguishing different themes. The player and staff data were analysed as separate
groups. Common themes within each group were compiled into a final list for each group with unique themes viewed as anomalies (Gilham, 2005). The final two lists of themes were then compared to ascertain similarities and differences.

**Research Credibility**

Triangulation and member checking were employed to enhance research credibility. All participants were given the opportunity to view a copy of the interview transcript and invited to verify its accuracy and amend or clarify their responses as desired; no participants requested changes or updates to their transcript. Triangulation of sources was achieved by interviewing a number of athletes at different stages of development and by including staff data to increase the number of sources of information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Additionally, the first two named authors independently analysed the data, and then collaborated to compare similarities and differences to arrive at a common classification scheme. The corresponding author acted as a “devil’s advocate” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and completed an audit trial upon completion of the analysis process (e.g., checking raw data and classification scheme; Patton, 2002).

**Results and Discussion**

The results are presented in three sections. First, we provide a summary of the similarities and differences between our findings and those of previous within-career sport transition research. Second, we discuss the similarities and discrepancies between players and coaching staff. Finally, we conclude with a comparison of players’ views across different transition phases. Descriptors of players provided in the Participants section (e.g., “second-tier player”) are employed throughout the results section to contextualise the discussion. We draw from tenets of the JD-R model (Demerouti et al., 2001) to describe and interpret the findings of our study.

**General Findings**

A visual representation of the global themes and themes discussed by the participants is displayed in Figure 1. Further detail for each theme, including descriptive summaries and verbatim quotes, is provided in Table 1. Overall, the findings supported the notion that the transition process
is a fluid balance of personal and environmental demands and resources across four developmental domains (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Specific themes reported by the participants were largely consistent with previous research on within-career transitions in sport (Bruner et al., 2008; Finn & McKenna, 2010; Pummell et al., 2008). For example, ice hockey athletes reported similar athletic, psychosocial and psychological themes to both rugby league players and coaching staff including earning playing time (similar to opportunity), readiness for elite competition (cf., role expectations and initial experiences), personal development (cf., personal growth), and role of teammates and billets (included in the support theme; Bruner et al., 2008). Comments regarding coachability and demonstrating competence (physicality and ability) were not highlighted in the player themes, yet they were mentioned by coaching staff. In the UK, coaches identified a similar perception of athlete transitions as coaching staff in the current study, identifying transitions as potentially stressful, high in physical demands (physicality and ability theme) and requiring personal maturity (personal growth) and capacity to handle change (cf., coping strategies; Finn & McKenna, 2010). Similar sources of strain (or demands) discussed within themes of the current study (physical intensity, self-management, coach relationship, earning respect from senior athletes and coaches, managing free time, parents, girlfriends) were also identified in Finn and McKenna’s study. Work ethic, support, intrinsic motivation, positive and negative experiences (cf., initial and subsequent) were themes in common with those reported by event riders (Pummell et al., 2008). The findings were also consistent with performance indicators reported by NYC coaches who emphasised that important cognitive (psychological) resources such as attitude, character, personality, discipline, and learning ability are needed at the elite level (Cupples & O’Connor, 2011). Collectively, therefore, the current findings provide evidence to support the robustness of the holistic perspective of sport transitions (Stambulova, 1994; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004) and the findings of within-career transition research.

Despite these similarities with previous sport transition research and theory, several differences also emerged. First, the level of agreement among participants and importance assigned
to attributes differed between studies. For example, work ethic was the most common theme reported by participants in this study, whereas the most common theme reported by ice hockey athletes was readiness for transition (Bruner et al., 2008). Second, psychological, psychosocial, athletic, and academic domains have been emphasised in previous research (Finn & McKenna, 2010; Pummell et al., 2008), whereas participants in this study did not report themes associated with the academic or vocational domain (consistent with research in ice hockey; Bruner et al., 2008). The limited discussion on the academic or vocational domain in the current study indicates the importance of considerations associated with the sport-type and culture for understanding transition demands and resources (i.e., college versus academy or club environments). This difference may be due to the young age at which rugby league players specialise and peak (Schulz & Curnow, 1988), leading to increased pressure to focus on rugby league and consider career at a later time. It may also be reflective of the setting in which the interviews took place (all at rugby league clubs or offices) and the face validity of the study and expectations participants had of the researchers. Third, themes including confidence, interpersonal attractiveness, identity, off-field behaviours, injury, stage development, getting ahead of one’s self, as well as the global theme of critical incidents did not appear in previous research on within-career transitions, perhaps due to our sampling of a wider range of participants across the transition period than previous studies.

**Player and Coaching Staff Comparisons**

As depicted in Figure 1, a number of similarities and differences in the demands and resources identified across Wylleman and Lavellee’s (2004) levels of development were evident between the two groups of participants. Both players and coaching staff identified themes from the athletic, psychosocial and psychological levels, with no mention of the academic/vocational level, and agreed on the importance of work ethic as both a demand and a resource. Common resources included stage development and opportunity within the athletic level; confidence, coping strategies, personal growth, and interpersonal attractiveness within the psychological level; and support within the psychosocial level. Club culture, off-field behaviours and role expectations were agreed upon.
demands within the psychosocial level. However, several themes were unique to either the players or coaching staff. Players, for example, highlighted the importance of intrinsic motivation (resource, psychological level), whereas coaches identified physical ability and stature (demand and resource), coachability (resource, athletic level), and identity (resource, psychological level) as personal attributes that can facilitate or impede a successful transition into the elite competition. Players but not coaching staff mentioned extrinsic motivation (resource) under the global theme of environment. Interestingly, one of the development coaches reported that young players tended to get paid “too much too soon” while not enough money was being spent on senior players to maintain a balanced and contented player group. A variety of responses was evident under the global theme of critical incidents. Staff uniquely identified getting ahead of one’s self (leading to increased demands, psychological level), whereas only the players identified injuries (demand, athletic level) as well as initial (generally characterised by high number of demands or impairment pathway) and subsequent experiences (characterised by an increase in resources or failure, athletic level).

The differences in responses between groups appeared to reflect a difference in consideration of experience cycle phases. For example, coaching staff tended to focus on external experiences especially during the encounter phase, describing the players’ engagement during the transition (behavioural focus), whereas players focused on internal experiences (i.e., thoughts and feelings), particularly in the anticipation phase, describing physical and psychological readiness for the transition, and the dis/confirmation phase (Oades & Viney, 2000). Players also reported internal attributions regardless of the outcome or demands they experienced throughout the transition process. This attribution style was most clearly demonstrated in players’ responses when asked how they would change their experiences given the opportunity to go through the transition again. All players took responsibility for the path that they had taken and stated that they would not change anything (despite some of the pathways taken being identified as problematic) since doing so appeared to be seen as assigning blame to others or external events for the outcome, which in turn
appeared to be viewed as an unfavourable characteristic. This trend in the players’ discourse is interesting considering that external attributions are an important part of optimistic thinking, an established adaptive coping strategy (Seligman, 1991). The decision-making process and role responsibility of each group of participants also may have played a role, that is, coaching staff spend much of their time assisting players to develop physical skill and attributes. This finding is consistent with previous reports of athletes’ experiences which demonstrate a shift from others introducing and reinforcing psychological characteristics to athletes taking ownership of their own psychological development during the specialisation years, indicating a shift in roles for both athletes and coaching staff (MacNamara et al., 2010). For example, the strength and conditioning coaches were the main participants who identified the importance of physicality and ability as a key theme, consistent with their occupational focus.

Additional nuances between groups were identified. Every participant in the study identified work ethic as a primary contributor to transition success, with a number of participants citing it to be the most important theme. Interestingly, the players dismissed the importance of physical size and skill in lieu of work ethic and other personal attributes and environmental themes; one of the partially transitioned players stated that “it’s the person who trains the hardest, puts in the time, puts in the effort...they can always come in on top...even though they’ve got less ability.” In contrast, coaching staff emphasised physicality and ability, “from my experience, the number one thing is pure talent and then the other thing would be their actual physical attributes as in size, speed, skill.” This discrepancy might be explained by differences in implicit theories of athletic abilities (cf. Dweck & Leggett, 1988), such that the players appear to endorse an incremental theory (i.e., personal attributes such as intelligence or personality are malleable and open to development through effort) whereas the coaching staff supported an entity theory (i.e., personal attributes are stable, trait-like whose opportunities for change are not within one’s control). However, it became apparent throughout the players’ discourse that their main focus and responsibility was responding to challenges in an appropriate way (i.e., psychological aspects).
Having an understanding of the expectations of the club or environment (i.e., knowing what to expect) was reported to aid the transition process by allowing the players to mobilise resources to appropriately prepare for possible demands. One of the biggest difficulties players reportedly faced was that most of them did not know what to expect when initially transitioning into the NRL squad, and even transitioning from club to club, because different club cultures dictated different expectations in terms of behaviour. This ambiguity interfered with players’ physical and psychological readiness to transition because planning allows for preparation and increased feelings of control and improved self-efficacy (Alfermann, Stambulova, & Zemaityte, 2004). One second tier player stated, “the standard they expected was a surprise...[the club] expected pretty much for me to be perfect...I didn’t believe I was up to it.” The consequences of this uncertainty led to misinformed behaviours (e.g., becoming extremely unfit during the off-season making it difficult to catch up with the rest of the squad) and complacency, or anxiety due to the unknown, reducing physical and psychological readiness to transition. The general level of agreement on most themes between players in contrast to the low level of agreement on themes identified by the coaching staff provided a clear demonstration of the inconsistent message being sent to the players, interfering with their preparation or anticipation phase. Role clarity, which helps reduce uncertainty regarding the organisation’s expectation on employees, has been revealed as an important antecedent of an individual’s commitment to their organisation (Saks, Uggerslev, & Fassina, 2007) and both task and contextual performance (Whitaker, Dahlin, & Levy, 2007). Discrepancies between coaching staff views tended to be a reflection of their coaching philosophies, club culture and their current roles. For example, the partially transitioned player reported his differing experiences at two NRL clubs, If you make a mistake at [NRL Club 1] at training like if you drop the ball, (the coach) was like, “oh yeah, don’t worry just restart and we’ll do it again”, but if you drop a ball at training at [NRL Club 2], you’ll get your head bitten off...[Coach 2]’s standards are a lot higher...it doesn’t mean that they’re going to (perform) better, it’s just the way they train.
This example reflects the need for organisational fit as a consequence of an athlete’s readiness to transition, with increased readiness (due to clear role expectations and an understanding of the club culture, i.e., information as a resource) leading to increased ability to fit or to make an informed decision regarding a club that does fit, perhaps leading to the enhancement pathway main effect (cf. JD-R model; Demerouti et al., 2001).

The coaching staff also discussed the importance of having a balanced identity (cf., foreclosed identity; Murphy, Petitpas, & Brewer, 1996), a theme not mentioned by the players. Some players’ responses were indicative of a foreclosed identity (i.e., committed to the athlete role without exploring identity elements); for example, one transitioning player reported that many of his friends were going out and exploring different social options and alternatives (i.e., going through psychosocial moratorium; Erikson, 1968) while he decided not to join them because he did not want to take his focus off his career. Another second-tier player mentioned that he missed some of his final High School Certificate exams to join NYC pre-season, reducing his career options outside of football. Contrary to the single-minded focus (indicative of foreclosed identity) among the player reports, the coaching staff underscored the importance of self-exploration and developing a strong sense of self throughout the transition process. A player welfare manager reported the importance of “broadening a person’s identity, which is about the self-esteem thing. It becomes clear that if you engage in something else, if you’re a good family person, if you’re a church person, or whatever it be…you’ve got to have a bit of an outlet that takes you away from that single focused desire because it actually helps that desire.

Many of the players mentioned the importance of balance; however, this theme was mentioned in relation to trying to balance the workload of mandatory study or work during NYC or mental recovery.

**Transition Stage Comparisons**
Aligned with the theoretical framework (Kelly, 1995/1991) that guided our methodological approach (Oades & Viney, 2000), the key themes reported by the players can be considered in relation to a cycle of experience, beginning with the anticipation phase (i.e., knowing what to expect, confidence, or lack of). During this phase, the second-tier players appeared to interpret this phase in the context of demands and reported experiencing nerves, “down times” and awe at the greatness of the opportunity to join the NRL squad; for example, one player stated, “I couldn’t believe I was in the top squad and I didn’t prepare for it.” The transitioning players also focused on the demands during this phase and tended to discuss the pressures, fear and intimidation of playing with superstars. The partially-transitioned player reported being unsure of what to expect whereas the player who failed to transition overstated his resources and indicated that he thought he knew what to expect, “I thought I’d do it easy. I thought just training. I’m good at it. No concerns at all.” Those players who successfully transitioned tended to report being concerned with meeting expectations (i.e., planning how to use resources to manage demands and to perform and fit culture). The anticipation phase is followed by an investment in the transition experience based on intrinsic (i.e., love of the game) and extrinsic (i.e., incentives) motivations. Consistent with self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), those players who emphasised an intrinsic motivation for playing at the elite level were more likely to have successfully transitioned when compared with those who reported extrinsic motives.

Differences in players’ perceptions were evident during the encounter phase of the cycle of experience, specifically relating to entering the NRL squad (i.e., first NRL game). The second-tier players tended to report an initial feeling of being overwhelmed by demands including being away from family and under preparing (i.e., loss of resources), leading to difficult initial experiences and in some cases reduced performance (impairment pathway). For example, a second-tier player stated that he did not adequately prepare for the pre-season demands: “That first year I just went under the weather...as soon as I had a bad pre-season I was out of the picture,” potentially delaying his opportunity to play NRL which occurred after data collection; he progressed into the transitioning
category after mobilising resources, making some changes and switching to the enhancement pathway, “I knew after having that year under my belt what I had to do to turn it around…” The transitioning players tended to also identify a number of demands at first, however, appeared to be able to adapt by utilising resources. A transitioning player summed up the adaptation process as follows:

It all comes down to you’ve made mistakes and those mistakes are going to help you go along or you’re going to improve and you’re going to not make those mistakes a second time round, it’s going to make you a better player and mentally strong the next time you come round.

Five out of the seven transitioning players went on to successfully transition into the NRL. These players were able to identify what was needed to adapt to the demands placed on them during the encounter phase and perceived these demands as challenges rather than threats (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). One of the transitioning players who dropped out of rugby league shortly after the study to pursue another sport identified a continuous lack of support from coaches and coaching staff and appeared to view this situation as a threat, “the coaching staff were taking its toll on me (and) I couldn’t really give much more”. The partially transitioned player and the player who failed to transition tended to have a negative view of the encounter phase, whereas the successfully transitioned players reported feeling confident to meet the demands they faced. One successfully transitioned player reported that his initial experience was positive, however, his second year (subsequent experience) was more challenging, “the second year is the hardest because everyone expects you to know what to do and that can be a bit more pressure”. The player who had completed the transition tended to be negative about his encounter experience, perceiving a number of threats, particularly in terms of support, leading to a less than ideal experience and achievement level (cf. JD-R impairment pathway). The apparent discrepancy between what was anticipated and what occurred during the transition experience among the discourse of the players who did not
Within-Career Transition 20

successfully transition or partially transition suggested a greater likelihood of an unsuccessful transition and difficulties adapting to their initial experiences.

Themes relevant to the encounter phase included off-field behaviour, work ethic, support, confidence, coping, personal growth, and interpersonal attractiveness. In particular, those players who made successful transitions tended to have their expectations confirmed when entering the transition process or were able to adapt quickly using effective coping mechanisms, reporting a high level of support either from peers or family/romantic partners. One successfully transitioned player stated, “A lot of help came from the boys (players)…(they) just made everything much easier for me and I felt welcomed…they always gave me a kick up the bum if I was out of line which was good.” However, there was an exception to this general trend in the players’ discourse whereby the participant who had completed the transition reported that the first time he attempted to transition his expectations and predictions were not confirmed, particularly relating to his cultural needs, leading to disengagement for a time. He underwent a process of construct revision and renewed investment, leading to a successful transition, during which he reported an increased ability to manage the challenges he faced.

The coach told me straight up, “you are doing well but you won’t get in front of these (NRL players) until they retire.” Psychologically that f*#ked me up pretty well. I gave up…Having a year off gave me a bit of desire…the thing I actually needed was to get a bit of hunger, a bit of fire in the belly. I had to learn to eat properly and to maintain myself and those are the two things that got me back.

After the process of adaptation occurred, all participants reported that balance, defined in terms of managing training with work (especially during NYC), managing free-time by having something outside of football and having a balanced mindset, was fundamental to maintaining a successful transition.

Out of the players who had been through the transition, a number of revisions and confirmations were made as a way of making sense of the transition. One successfully transitioned
player stated that the transition was about making the right choices on and off the field, whereas other successfully transitioned players discussed the importance of consistency in performance, doing what others are not willing to do (work ethic) and being clear-minded, having a goal to work towards. One of them stated, “Just being consistent in your performances. Just getting there but not losing focus of where you are and taking it for granted…just like a clear mind- just knowing what you want.” The partially transitioned player felt that the shock of his initial experiences had kept him from reaching his peak and advised future transitioning players to spend time gathering information to avoid a similar experience. “I would probably say that they need to talk to their coach and try and get as much advice as possible about what they’re not doing or what they should be doing or talk to older people.” The player who had completed the transition emphasised support and reiterated that he felt he had been let down in that area. The player who failed to transition reported regretting his refusal to conform to club expectations and not working harder.

The most evident differences between players’ perceptions occurred within the context of discussions regarding the environment, particularly relating to the subculture of rugby league. According to subculture research, sports such as rugby league are characterised by hegemonic masculinity in which males dominate and characteristics such as aggressiveness, strength, drive, competitiveness, heterosexuality, homonegativism and self-reliance are valued, along with an emphasis on the physical body, leading to behaviours such as hazing (Waldron, Lynn, & Krane, 2011). Such a culture is often contradictory as it encourages risky and dangerous off-field behaviours such as binge drinking and drug use. The two players who reportedly had the most difficult transitions perceived that the club they were playing for at the time did not care or support them. The player who did not transition successfully reported acting in a way consistent with hegemonic masculinity, specifically frequent binge drinking behaviour, leading to acceptance from his fellow players but alienation from his coaches. He described his relationship with the club and his NRL coach as follows:
I didn’t know if they knew me to be honest. It wasn’t good with the head coach. A couple of the assistant coaches it was good like I could have a bit of a joke with them but it was never good with the head coach. That was my bad…We hated each other…[Q: How did that happen?]…Me getting on the (alcohol) and playing up and being in his office. Being in his office was like being back in school getting yelled at.

This player recognised that he could have taken responsibility for his actions which may have resulted in a different outcome; however, he recognised the importance of support from the club and the coach and the contradiction between the expectations of the subculture to perform on and off the field. These findings are consistent with tenets of basic psychological needs theory, particularly as it pertains to one’s perceptions of relatedness support in the social environment (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Several participants stated that a mismatch between one’s own culture/upbringing and the team’s culture led to adjustment difficulties. The player who failed to transition described his difficulty transitioning from the country into a city team: “All you do in the bush is play footy and drink [alcohol]...you get into a fight and it’s not a big deal...but in the city it’s a massive deal...you go to court and get sanctioned by the club.” Amidst these discussions on club culture it was revealed that hazing was important to earn group membership, consistent with previous findings regarding the outworking of hegemonic masculinity in male-dominated sports (Waldron et al., 2011). A player who successfully transitioned laughed when he recollected his experience of hazing:

I think [NRL Player] gave me a bit of a touch up and wrestle one day…That happened to him too when he was younger so it just gets passed down...it can be hard...a lot of the older guys often can push you a little bit in certain way... to not let the younger guys get ahead of themselves [i.e., arrogant] when they’re there and just to concentrate and just train hard and do the best they can on and off the field as well.

Another player who had partially transitioned reported that he saw hazing as being similar to bullying at school with other players pointing out weaknesses, “just like being picked on, being the
new person…if there’s something different about you…some people just target it.” Players’ appraisals of hazing differed based on their stage of progression through the transition process with those earlier in the process more likely to appraise hazing as a threat, whereas those who had successfully transitioned tended to perceive it as a challenge (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

**Substantive and Practical Implications, and Conclusions**

The available sport transition research has been criticised for being largely descriptive and atheoretical (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). Thus, this study is timely as we have drawn from complementary theoretical frameworks to inform our interview guide and sampling strategy (i.e., PCP; Kelly, 1955/1991) and interpretation of the findings (i.e., JD-R; Demerouti et al., 2001).

Additional strengths of this study included the integration of both athlete and coach perspectives, alongside a broad range of athlete perspectives that covered major periods of the transition into an elite sport team. Collectively, these strengths permitted a well-rounded assessment of the substantive robustness of previous findings and conceptual models on sport transitions, and helped generate new insights into this area of research. For example, the use of ECM alongside our sampling of athletes at different stages of the transition process helped identity differences in perspectives on the anticipations of the changeover into elite rugby league, for example, between players who had successfully transitioned against those who were unsuccessful.

We also revealed the usefulness of the JD-R model (Demerouti et al., 2001) as a complement to existing conceptual models of sport transitions (Stambulova, 2009; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004) and framework to help organise new empirical evidence. As with the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), we speculate that demands and resources within each level of the holistic, lifespan developmental perspective of career transitions will have direct or main effects with negative (e.g., ill-being, underperformance) or positive outcomes (e.g., well-being, high performance), as well as interactive effects between demands and resources within (e.g., high athletic demand coupled with high athletic resources) and between these four levels (e.g., high psychological demands coupled with low psychosocial resources). Indeed, Wylleman and Lavallee
Within-Career Transition 24

(2004) have alluded to the interactive nature of transitions in different life domains. Perceptions of
demands and resources are inextricably linked within the coping process (Lazarus & Folkman,
1984) and, therefore, when integrated with the holistic, lifespan developmental perspective of career
transitions in sport contexts (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004) provide an element of parsimony
together with a level of explanation that considers the complex number of themes that emerged in
this study and previous transitions research.

Despite these strengths to our research, the study was not without limitation and these issues
should be considered in future research. For example, our focus on male athletes and coaches limits
the extent to which these findings can be generalised to female perspectives. Additionally, our
adoption of “one-off” or cross-sectional interviews that relied primarily on retrospective recall does
not permit an examination of individuals’ changing experiences and life course patterns;
longitudinal qualitative approaches in which individuals are interviewed at multiple points during
their transition would prove fruitful in this regard (McLeod, 2009).

In summary, we sought to understand a group of people striving to succeed in their context
by exploring players’ and coaches’ perspectives on the transition from sub-elite to elite level rugby
league within an Australian context. Specifically, both groups of participants reported that a number
of personal attributes and environmental factors – mobilised through critical incidents and exhibited
through consistency and a balanced lifestyle and focus – were fundamental to a successful
transition. The importance of having adequate resources to match the demands of the transition was
a key feature of the participants’ discourse. These themes were integrated using established theories
(i.e., developmental model of transitions, coping, JD-R theory) to suggest that demands and
resources from each global theme influence within-career transitions by occurring across four broad
levels of development (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). From a practical standpoint, these findings
underscore the importance of resource building interventions for athletes, coaches, and sport
organisations. For example, educating athletes to take a proactive approach to goal regulation
(Bindl, Parker, Totterdell, & Hagger-Johnson, 2012) could help develop their readiness for
important transitions across their athletic career. More broadly, educating coaches and organisations on how to create an environment that fosters self-determination, and developing more in-depth and individualised transition programs to clarify expectations and individual needs, could also assist with improving outcomes for transitioning athletes.


doi:10.1177/0146167211413125

doi: 10.1037/a0024368


doi:10.1080/10413200801998556


doi:10.1016/j.brat.2005.06.006


doi:10.1080/02640410903089798


Figure 1. Schematic overview of the global themes and their associated themes as reported by players and coaching staff, players only, or coaching staff only.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme and Description</th>
<th>Representative Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work Ethic</strong>: A player’s capacity and willingness to remain determined, disciplined and effortful in fully preparing one’s self for training, competition and the lifestyle of being an elite footballer</td>
<td>I think probably the effort, just…trying your heart out every game, doing everything you can be doing… doing more than what you have to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Confidence</strong>: Belief or degree of certainty that one has the ability to achieve his goals</td>
<td>If you can have that belief that you can do it or, even if you didn’t do it the first time…you go and practice that and you’re going to get it eventually.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coping Strategies</strong>: The ability to use positive strategies or mechanisms to overcome and adapt to on and off-field stressors such as media and performance pressures, fame, family</td>
<td>A lot of other guys had contracts before me. I didn’t make all the representative teams…and for a while there [NRL Club] didn’t want me (either) but then I just worked hard and ended up getting in the Australian schoolboys team and it went from there (into an NRL career).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interpersonal Attractiveness</strong>: A player’s ability to integrate into the team environment particularly relating to being of good character, being personable, having a good attitude and being respectful</td>
<td>Honesty to yourself, to your team mates…that comes with everything like don’t cut corners…just be on time, be early and all that stuff that makes a person. Just being a real positive guy. Don’t be negative; just always be really happy and caring about others…always willing to help…never saying no. Just really reliable too…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal Growth</strong>: Growth both on and off-field across developmental domains in terms of developing maturity, independence, striving for ongoing improvement, taking responsibility or ownership for behaviours, personal development, and self-awareness</td>
<td>It made me grow up pretty quickly…you’ve got no choice. No one’s going to cook your dinner if you don’t cook it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intrinsic Motivation</strong>: An intrinsic enjoyment of rugby league football</td>
<td>It was the footy development that came with being part of a group that you wanted to be part of and where you wanted to do well…that enjoyment made me want to learn and become a better footballer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support</strong>: Help and resources provided by others</td>
<td>Having key people on your side that actually care about you, that are giving you constructive criticism…making you feel good about yourself, training buddies…people that can help motivate you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Club Culture</strong>: The general club environment imposed by the club’s philosophy, (including club expectations), and the players’ expectations (e.g., hazing, intimidation, player acceptance)</td>
<td>That’s what’s good about [NRL Club]…it’s like the culture there is like your family because everyone’s come from somewhere else and you pretty much just take everyone in and become one family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Off-Field Behaviour</strong>: Problematic behaviour that occurs outside of the rugby league club and playing environment, particularly those involving drugs, alcohol and gaming</td>
<td>You see so many freaky players get (dropped) for doing something stupid…like one night out doing something dumb can end your whole career…once you’re in the scene you’ve got to realise you’re in the scene…you’re targeted by media. You’ve just got to keep a level head when you’re out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role Expectations</strong>: Having an understanding of the expectations of the club and environment</td>
<td>I think…trying to get as much information about the way NRL trains…ask past players what they went through so you can know what to expect…Like for me…I was talking to no one really…I just went in…trying to get as much information about the way NRL trains…ask past players what they went through so you can know what to expect…Like for me…I was talking to no one really…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Extrinsic Motivation</strong>: Having extrinsic rewards for motivation (e.g., money)</td>
<td>A couple of little incentives along the way obviously helped. Like scholarships and things like that and trying to make those (representative) teams when I was young.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage Development</strong>: Completing a stepwise progression through the different levels of competition</td>
<td>You’ve got to do your apprenticeship; go through the 20s and if you’re good enough from there then the club will pick you up and then you’ll play first grade footy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opportunity</strong>: Everything falling into place to provide a chance to play NRL. Also, creating an opportunity for a better life.</td>
<td>Just growing up in New Zealand and the bad environments that we were living in…Education-wise nothing was very good back then and…the boys I was hanging around with (got me into trouble). That’s the main reason I moved here; to try and get away from all that kind of stuff. I was just really focussed when I got here to get out of it and do something with my life. Training full time rugby league 5-6 days a week was taking its toll on me. (I was) just one of them little kids coming in and wanting to get out…For the first 2 years I was just sort of going there, just walking around and I was saying, “yeah, get out of here, I’ve got better things to do”…That was really tough making the switch from Q Cup and I was training 3 days a week and just cruisey training but now training 5 or 6 days a week you got to be mentally prepared to train and get the most out of it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subsequent Experiences: Players’ second and third year experiences in the NRL squad</td>
<td>The second years and following you see the good players who can have everything down pat of what they’ve got to do during the week or they get away from football, they do certain things that can be a big part of why players play so well on the weekend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injuries: The occurrence of injuries that take one out of the playing roster for one or more matches</td>
<td>I was playing with (osteoitis pubis) for about 2 years on and off. So I got the operation at the end of last year…it just sort of dragged out and this is only my second game back (at Q-Cup level) now. That’s been the most frustrating thing…knowing that I should be at that level (NRL) – I was at that level.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Perceptions of coaching staff including a representative quote.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme and Description</th>
<th>Representative Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work Ethic: A player’s capacity and willingness to remain determined, disciplined</td>
<td>If (players) come into the professional environment with a background of...having had developed a work ethic through their earlier lives...they seem to fit into that team environment a lot easier.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and effortful in fully preparing one’s self for training, competition and the lifestyle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of being an elite footballer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence: Belief or degree of certainty that one has the ability to achieve his</td>
<td>If you’re strong in yourself you’ll stand up for your own beliefs...you won’t be as easily misled to do the wrong thing or to skip a session or be a bit lazy...to make the right decisions based on your own ethics, ideals, ambitions and character.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>goals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping Strategies: The ability to use positive strategies or mechanisms to overcome</td>
<td>There are talented players that just can’t keep up with the full-time training program...they are overwhelmed by the demands and challenges so we need to help them develop better ways to cope and make the most of these experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and adapt to on and off-field stressors such as media and performance pressures, fame,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal Attractiveness: A player’s ability to integrate into the team environment</td>
<td>Players who are truthful and trustworthy and respectful to you as opposed to some arrogant and brash young athletes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>particularly relating to being of good character, being personable, having a good</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attitude and being respectful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Growth: Growth both on and off-field across developmental domains in terms of</td>
<td>Successful players have to be prepared to take ownership and accept responsibility...to critique their own game with the coaches to get that feedback and be able to work out what they need to do and then to go about it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>developing maturity, independence, striving for ongoing improvement, taking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>responsibility or ownership for behaviours, personal development, and self-awareness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physicality and Ability: Rate of physical development and time to maturity as well as</td>
<td>It’s having the necessary skill obviously to be that professional with skills that are required to fulfill that role and obviously depending on what position it’s really important to not be one-dimensional...you’ve got to be able to have multi-skills in terms of what’s needed. That skill component you can’t underestimate that as well as all the others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skill and ability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coachability: Being willing and able to learn new skills</td>
<td>Your ability to absorb information, taking feedback, act on it and be prepared to keep working on it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity: Knowing who one is, what one’s values are and what defines one as a person</td>
<td>You’re not just an athlete, you’re someone else as well...and you’re not going to be the best at everything...knowing your strengths and weaknesses...having a vision of what you want to be.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>outside of sport</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support: Help and resources provided by others</td>
<td>It’s important to have a variety of positive and encouraging support networks that assist in all areas of life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Club Culture: The general club environment imposed by the club’s philosophy,</td>
<td>If you have a culture of alcohol abuse you just can’t change that overnight. It’s got to start from the youngest levels...The organising body have got to have a strong philosophy on what they really want to achieve.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(including club expectations), and the players’ expectations (e.g., hazing,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intimidation, player acceptance)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-Field Behaviour: Problematic behaviour that occurs outside of the rugby league</td>
<td>As far as events that are going to disrupt the player...we’ve had a number of different incidents with young players who are just tempted by different things...the drink and the gambling and late nights etc are the major issues that you encounter when you bring players into this sort of environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>club and playing environment, particularly those involving drugs, alcohol and gaming</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Expectations: Having an understanding of the expectations of the club and</td>
<td>We as a club...(are) trying to be about 5 or 6 years ahead so our next generation will come up and it’ll (the requirements) be second nature to them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity: Everything falling into place to provide a chance to play NRL. Also,</td>
<td>Even though you’re at the peak of your ability limits, the peak of your fitness...you’ve still got to wait for that opportunity to present itself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>creating an opportunity for a better life.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting ahead of One’s Self: Prematurely assuming that all the work is finished and</td>
<td>I think too many guys come in and think they’ve made it once they get picked…They’ve been the king pin on their side...they get to our environment where everyone’s on a level footing and they don’t know how to make that next step.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>one’s achieved all one needs to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>