

Part 4: Performance Termination

PUTTING SPORT PSYCHOLOGY IN CONTEXT

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Introduction

To thoughtfully and successfully implement an intervention in the context of sport psychology requires that the difficulties that an athlete experiences be identified and that the best intervention be used to assist the athlete. This often requires that the difficulties presented by an athlete seeking sport psychology services be categorised into the following four categories.

- I. Performance development
- II. Performance dysfunction
- III. Performance impairment
- IV. Performance termination

The interventions that will be best suited to the difficulties experienced by the athlete will differ according to the above categorisation. In part one performance development was addressed, in part two performance dysfunction was addressed, in part three performance impairment was addressed and now in part four we look at performance termination.

Part IV: Performance termination:

This category is characterised by an athlete that faces the end of their career through a serious injury or through retirement from the sport, for example, an athlete that decides to retire from the sport after suffering a severe injury and surgery to their ankle.

This termination of their sporting participation may come unexpectedly or it may be a calculated choice by the athlete. Either way the termination of participation can be regarded as a transition period in the life of the athlete. Things to consider in this transition period include cause of the termination, personal impact of the termination, personal resources available and in which direction will the athlete move after this transition.

Thought many athletes, especially when they retire from the sport on their own terms, go through their transition period relatively smoothly; there are often cases where difficulties are experienced.



Let's look at a more detailed example of a performance dysfunction case.

The Story of Rachel Here is an example of a hockey player to illustrate a typical performance dysfunction termination:	
The situation	The potential long term effects
Rachel is studying business management at university and because of her talents as a young hockey player is on a full sports bursary. She was captain of her first team at school and earned her provincial colours in her final year. Her parents are both working in retail, with her mother working in a cosmetics store and her father as car salesman.	Rachel was doing well and due to her sporting success at school was able to gain financial support for her studies.
Her first hockey season for her university went well and she received the best newcomer award at the end of season prize giving. She also did well at university where got two distinctions in her first year.	Her performances continued on the sports field and she strengthened her position to keep getting financial support for her studies.
During a training session early in her second season she went over her ankle and severely damaged her ankle ligaments. She received surgery but was advised by the doctors that she will not be able to play hockey again.	Her injury was sudden and due to the serious nature of the injury had a lasting impact on her future plans for her life.
Her bursary was not renewed for her third year and her parents could not afford to pay the tuition for her last year of studies. She grew increasingly worried about her future and her marks for her end of year exams dropped significantly. She feared that she will not be able to finish her studies and realise her dream of one day owning her own business.	Her plans for her future have been thrown off course and the uncertainty of her future placed a heavy emotional burden on her.

Rachel's career came to a halt due to an unexpected injury on the sports field. The sudden realisation after injuring her ankle that her entire future had been influenced by this injury had a drastic impact on her emotionally. Because of the unexpected nature of the termination from participation it is advisable to keep a lookout for symptoms that can be associated with a traumatic event. Despite her hockey being her financial means to build her preferred academic and professional career, she could also place great emphasis on her hockey as defining a large part of her identity. Now that the hockey is gone, she might start on the downward spiral of making negative and damaging identity claims.

Interventions in cases of performance termination often include the following:

- 1) Building a supportive base (often friends and family),
- 2) Promoting self-awareness and exploration,
- 3) Coming to terms with emotions and effects of the termination,
- 4) Planning for the future of the athlete.

Summary

To summarise, the performance termination category is characterised by an athlete that faces the end of their career through a serious injury or through retirement from the sport. Despite the sudden or calculated nature of the athletes' departure from the sport it can have emotional, personal, social, financial and career implications. Coming to terms with the effects of and thorough planning often allow athletes to make the transition from their active sporting lives to what may lay ahead of them 🌈