Who does this benefit?: A consideration of social and structural demographics in the access and impact of retirement from college sport programming

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Sport retirement can reveal a host of difficulties for college athletes including minimal career preparation, mental health struggles, and identity foreclosure. While college athletes almost always note the challenges of leaving their sport behind, these challenges can be mitigated through transition programming. However, what types of programming are more useful, and for whom, is understudied. Through a mixed method survey, this study explored differences in access and impact of retirement from sport programming based on athletes' (n = 707) demographic differences (e.g., race, division), through the lens of Goodman and colleagues' (2006) three phases of transition. Findings revealed that Black athletes and those from working class backgrounds found programs to be more impactful than other demographic groups, supporting the argument for personalized retirement support. Additionally, Division II athletes not only had the greatest access to retirement programming, but also found programming to have more impact than other divisions. However, athletes noted that more programs are needed for every division.

Keywords: college athletics, retirement from sport, retirement from sport programming, sport programming, athlete well-being

Introduction

College sport participation is often portrayed as an educational and developmental opportunity for the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) 500,000-plus athlete participants (NCAA, 2022). Sport participation can cultivate teamwork, build resiliency, foster lifelong relationships, and bolster leadership skills (Chalfin et al., 2015; Weight et al., 2020). However, sport retirement can reveal a host of difficulties for college athletes including minimal career preparation, mental health

struggles, lack of body confidence, and identity foreclosure (Harrison & Lawrence, 2004; Smith & Hardin, 2018; Stokowski et al., 2019). Thus, athletes often describe their transition out of sport as difficult (Park et al., 2013).

A transition is an event or non-event resulting in a change in one's assumptions about themself and the world which then leads to changes in behaviors and relationships (Schlossberg, 1981). While college athletes almost always note the challenges of leaving their sport behind, the challenges may be mitigated through transition programming (Kiefer et al., 2023; Kloetzer & Taylor, 2023; Lavallee et al., 1997, 2018; Leonard & Schimmel, 2016; Park et al., 2013; Tyrance et al., 2013). Despite the growing literature on athletes' experiences with transitions out of sport and related programming, there is limited research on the timing of transition programming and its significance (Goodman et al., 2006; Kloetzer & Taylor, 2023; Smith & Hardin, 2020). Similarly, less is understood about which athletes have access to transition programming and if/how the athletes participating benefit from it.

Therefore, this study addressed the timing of sport transition programming and athletes' access to and impact of said programming. The study aims were addressed through an online survey with college athletes who were (a) about to retire within the academic year or *moving in* to their retirement (2022-2023), (b) athletes who recently retired and were *moving through* sport retirement (2021-2022), and (c) athletes who were retired for up to five academic years and had *moved out* of sport retirement (2017-2018 to 2020-2021). Additionally, with previous scholarship noting distinct subpopulations within athletics needing more support (e.g., Beamon, 2012; Paule-Koba & Rohrs-Cordes, 2019), specific attention was given to college athletes' social demographics (i.e., race, gender) and structural demographics (i.e., NCAA Division, retirement year, sport). Thus, through the lens of Goodman and colleagues' (2006) model of moving in, through, and out of transitions, this study addressed the following research questions:

1.   Are there demographic differences in athletes' access to sport retirement programming?
2.   Are there demographic differences in athletes' perceived impact of sport retirement programming?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation for this study was Goodman and colleagues' (2006) conceptualization of moving in, through, and out of a transition. Schlossberg (1981) defined a transition as an event or non-event resulting in a shift in an individual's assumptions about themself and the world which subsequently leads to behavioral changes. There are three kinds of transitions discussed in the general and sport-specific literature. First, anticipated transitions are predictable, such as an athlete moving from high school to college sport participation. Second, unanticipated transitions are unpredictable with the most researched type in athletics being a career ending injury (Rohrs-Cordes & Paule-Koba, 2018). Third, non-event transitions are project-

ed to occur but do not, such as an athlete expecting to be drafted by a professional sports team but going undrafted.

Transition scholars contend that transitions have no end points, but rather, transitions occur over time and in phases of continuous assimilation and appraisal as individuals (1) move in, (2) move through, and (3) move out of a transition (Anderson et al., 2011; Schlossberg, 1981; See Figure 1). While Goodman et al.'s (2006) model was originally used to explore employees' transitions in, through, and out of a job transition, these concepts have since been applied to transition literature examining college athletes' transitions (e.g., Harry & Weight, 2021; Kloetzer & Taylor, 2023; Oshiro et al., 2023). This study further extends the sport management field's knowledge of athletes' transitions in, through, and out of sport participation.

Figure 1
Visualization of Goodman et al.'s Three Phases (2006)
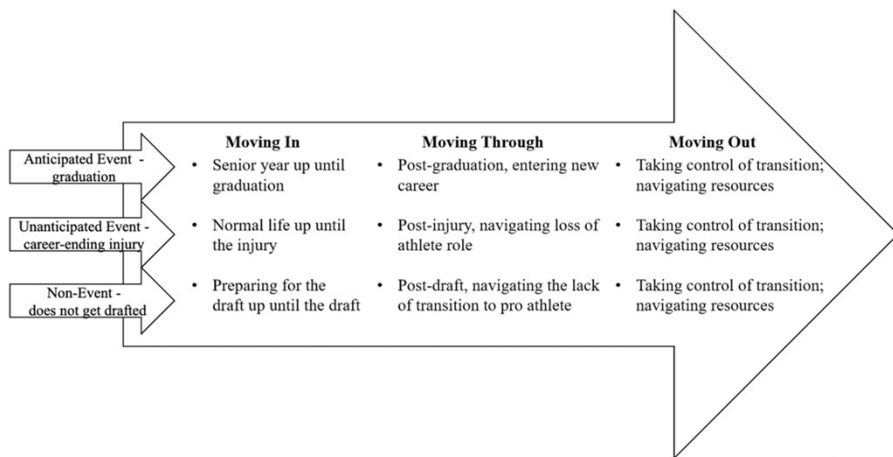
The beginning of any transition is either moving in or moving out. For example, an athlete who graduates is considered moving out of college and into a new career and phase of life. While moving in and out of certain scenarios, individuals are appraising their situations, considering eight key factors: trigger, timing, duration, control, assessment, role change, previous transition experience, and stress (Schlossberg, 1981).

The trigger for a transition situation considers what precipitated the transition and aligns with the notions of anticipated, unanticipated, and non-events described by Schlossberg (1981). The timing of the transition can be "on" or "off" time and is determined by a mixture of an individual's clock and society's clock. For example, an athlete graduating within their four years of eligibility would be considered an "on-time" transition out of sport/college, while an athlete withdrawing from college and returning a decade later would be an "off time" transition out of sport/college. Whether the transition is permanent, temporary, or uncertain defines the duration of

the transition. Control of a transition occurs if an individual believes they have or lack command or a "say" in their transition. Related to control is assessment, or who/what the individual believes is responsible for their transition and the individual's subsequent behavior to this assessment (Anderson et al., 2011; Schlossberg, 1981). Almost all transitions involve a role change, and this change is often considered a loss or gain of a role (Anderson et al., 2011; Schlossberg, 1981). A college athlete transitioning out of athletics and into a profession would lose their athlete role but gain their new career role. One's previous experience with a similar transition is determined by how effectively the individual worked through that previous transition and how that informs, and ideally eases, their current transition.

When it comes to assimilating to a transition—either in, through, or out—it is key individuals have proper social support (Schlossberg, 1981). This social support is comprised of internal support from significant others, family members, and friends, and institutional support such as resources (Schlossberg, 1981). Previous research has indicated the significance of support in athlete transitions, particularly regarding the transition out of sport participation. Indeed, athletes who lack support struggle most (Fuller, 2014; Miller & Buttell, 2018; Park et al., 2013; Stokowski et al., 2019). For athletes, social support during transitions out of athletics commonly includes parents/guardians, teammates, coaches, and other athletics personnel. Additionally, it is important for athletes to connect with others experiencing a similar transition. For example, Rohrs-Cordes and Paule-Koba, (2018) interviewed injured athletes who were forced to transition out of sport. Many athletes stated they did not know of peers who suffered a career-ending injury, expressing that engaging with others who had successfully navigated that situation or were in the process of doing so would have been helpful. This sentiment is congruent with Schlossberg's (2005) statement: "knowing that others are experiencing transitions like one's own provides a kind of emotional support" (p.178).

Institutional support for athletes during transitions can include education, seminars, and networking opportunities that provide strategies for athletes' transition navigation (Goodman et al., 2006). Strategies could span a host of areas including athletes' understanding of transitions, coping mechanisms, and fostering positive states of physical and mental health (Harry & Weight, 2021; Rohrs-Cordes & Paule-Koba, 2018; Smith & Hardin, 2018). As athletes use this support to navigate and assimilate to their transition, they are said to being moving through it. As they move through their transition, this support bolsters athletes' self-efficacy to succeed in their new role(s), balance new relationships, and form healthy routines (Anderson et al., 2011; Harry & Weight, 2021; Weight et al., 2020). Still, there is less understanding of social and institutional support in the moving in and out phases of retirement compared to the moving through phase.

Literature Review

College Sport Retirement

Perhaps the biggest shift athletes encounter as they move in, through, and out of sport retirement are changes with their identities, especially their athletic identity

(Lavallee et al., 1997; Park et al., 2013; Stokowski et al., 2019). In their seminal piece, Brewer and colleagues (1993) defined athletic identity as the "degree to which an athlete identifies with the athlete role" (p. 237). Research shows many college athletes, regardless of competition level (Houle & Kluck, 2015), often over-identify with their athlete role foregoing other roles, and thus the development of identities beyond athletics (Harry & Weight, 2021; Oshiro et al., 2023; Park et al., 2013). Thus, when sport participation comes to an end, be it through anticipated or unanticipated situations, or non-events, this transition poses potential challenges for athletes as they have not considered identities and roles outside of sport.

In hyper-focusing on their athlete identities, some athletes may struggle to navigate a variety of changes in retirement such as entering the workforce or graduate school (Lavallee et al., 2015; Tyrance et al., 2013), understanding changed financial responsibilities (Park et al., 2013), learning different exercising and eating patterns (Oshiro et al., 2023; Smith & Hardin, 2018), and adopting new-found hobbies, skills, or identities (Bopp et al., 2021; Lavallee et al., 1997; Stokowski et al., 2019).

With regard to retirement experiences, Stokowski and colleagues (2019) found, through a posted Twitter thread, that 57.3% of their sample of retired college athletes ($n= 178$) experienced a negative adaptation as they transitioned out of college sport, specifically that they did not feel ready and felt a sense of loss leaving college athletics. These findings are echoed by Smith and Hardin (2020) who interviewed Division I and III athletes on their perceptions of their transition out of college sport. Authors revealed retirement can be seen as an opportunity for growth; however, it was usually accompanied with feelings of sadness and uncertainty (Smith & Hardin, 2020). It is evident college athletes need specific attention and aid throughout this retirement process (Leonard & Schimmel, 2016; Smith & Hardin, 2020; Stokowski et al., 2019; Tyrance et al., 2013).

Previous research has found that retirement from sport programming, which can include creating a retirement plan and attending educational events, is a beneficial and crucial way to approach athletes' transition struggles (Lavallee, 2018; Leonard & Schimmel, 2016; Tyrance et al., 2013). In fact, athletes who participate in such programming experience higher levels of success, such as length of career, when transitioning from sport (Lavallee, 2018). Over the previous decades, the NCAA has demonstrated an increased interest in such transition programming. In 1994, the association implemented the NCAA Life Skills Program. This program requires each athletic department to have a personal and professional development program coordinator. However, curriculum is not standardized, yielding presumed various levels of access to programming, by institution (Tyrance et al., 2013).

Social and Structural Demographics

The following sections review current college sport retirement scholarship with specific consideration provided to structural (e.g., NCAA division, sport) and social demographics (e.g., gender, race, career-ending injury). To the best of our knowledge, no research has specifically examined international college athletes' experiences with sport retirement. Overall, knowledge surrounding specific needs by demo-

graphic groups (e.g., specific content, timing of programming) is limited, warranting further consideration (Hansen et al., 2019).

NCAA Division

In a survey of academic advisors and athlete development directors, Kiefer and colleagues (2023) found that 73% of Division I institutions have implemented some sort of retirement programming for their athletes versus 27% of Division II and III institutions (Kiefer et al., 2023). Additionally, most of the literature on college athlete transition prioritizes the experiences of Division I participants, which could be due to the fact that Division I has the most institutions offering retirement programming (Kiefer et al., 2023). For institutions not offering retirement programming, academic advisors and athlete development directors noted the key barriers were lack of funding and trained staff (Kiefer et al., 2023). Such barriers are more likely to emerge at the less lucrative competitive levels of Divisions II and III. Still, retirement programming is important for all NCAA athletes, regardless of division (Smith & Hardin, 2020). Miller and Buttrell (2018), conducted a systematic review of 14 articles pertaining to college athlete retirement finding an overwhelming need for proper retirement programming to specifically enhance athletes' coping skills and support systems (Miller & Buttrell, 2018). Concluding their piece, Miller and Buttrell (2018) called for additional research to assess institutional interventions for increasing resilience in retiring college athletes.

As a response to this call, Hansen and colleagues (2019) proposed an athlete transition workshop and piloted it with eight Division I athletes in their final year of eligibility, or while they were moving into retirement. This two-hour workshop was divided into four sections: psychoeducation, facilitating a health adjustment, processing the loss, and identifying additional resources (Hansen et al., 2019). Participants enjoyed the opportunity to hear from their peers on these topics but suggest a larger cohort and multiple workshops are needed to make a significant impact. The results of this study revealed retirement workshops are effective; however, exhibit these opportunities seem to be primarily happening at the Division I level.

Sport

Literature exploring athletes' needs and experiences has predominantly separated athletes into groups based on whether the sport they participated in was revenue generating (primarily football and men's and women's basketball; also considered to be "high profile") or non-revenue generating (all others; also referred to as lower profile; Paule-Koba & Farr, 2013), suggesting differences between groups. Through interviews with former men's Division I football and basketball players *(n =*15)*, Menke and Germany (2018) found revenue-producing athletes' experienced loss of identity and needed time to cope with the transition. Using exit surveys and interviews with former Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) football players (*n* = 17), Kidd et al. (2018) expanded upon this idea by noting the necessity of athletic devotion at the expense of academic enrichment. Thus, athletic time commitments are demanding and leave little room for exploration outside of sport. In fact, when it came time

to retire, revenue-producing sport athletes expressed lack of adequate preparation in their ability to apply academic skills outside of college (Kidd et al., 2018). Similarly, the athletes noted they did not connect with academic staff and faculty, which can contribute to their feelings of inadequate preparation (Kidd et al., 2018).

For athletes who participated in nonrevenue sports, findings differ on the nature of their retirement experiences in comparison to revenue sports. For example, Paule-Koba and Farr (2013) indicated, through their mixed-method questionnaire study, that nonrevenue Division I and Division III former college athletes ($n = 229$), exclusive of basketball and football, felt prepared for life after competitive sport and recognized the direct translation of skills taught through athletics (i.e., time management, work ethic) to their careers after college. Conversely, Harry and Weight (2021) found through semi-structured interviews with retired athletes ($n = 124$) that difficulty of transition experiences did not significantly differ between athletes in revenue and nonrevenue generating sports.

Gender

Currently, sport literature yields mixed results on the impact of one's gender on their transition experience. Women are known to have lower athletic identities (Lu et al., 2018); however, Harry and Weight (2021) quantitatively reported men experiencing smoother transitions than their women counterparts. In recent years, there has been a large, and warranted, uptick on research specifically exploring women's transition experiences as opposed to looking at multiple genders or men specifically.

In transition research on women, Oshiro and colleagues (2023) conducted semi-structured interviews with twenty former women college athletes. Athletes in their sample encountered numerous challenges concerning their physical activity, personal identity, and lack of institutional support through their retirement (Oshiro et al., 2023). Hardie and colleagues (2022) extended these findings through a specific lens of body image perception of women college athletes post-retirement. They found women experienced challenges of body image both internally (i.e., body types tied to one's athletic identity) and externally (i.e., impacts of societal pressures) as it related to their ability to adapt after college sport (Hardie et al., 2022).

In line with these findings, Smith and Hardin (2018) explored the identity transition when retiring from college sport. Semi-structured interviews with women athletes revealed challenges with identity development outside of sport, specifically when it came to establishing new social circles, creating new workout routines, and setting boundaries with their previous sport (Smith & Hardin, 2018). To the best of our knowledge, no research has specifically examined men or nonbinary individuals' experience with college sport retirement.

Race

Considering race, sport literature suggests this is a central factor in athletes' sport and education experiences and is thus also critical to understanding athletes of color sport retirement and related needs (Beamon, 2012; Harrison & Lawrence, 2003). Harrison and Lawrence (2003) utilized the Life After Sport Scale (LASS;

Harrison & Lawrence, 2002) and subsequently conducted a narrative analysis with 26 African American Division II college athletes. They found that a primary goal for these athletes was obtaining their degree which significantly impacted where their priorities laid and their ability to see "life after sport." However, participants noted this transition is still difficult, and relied heavily on familial support during this time (Harrison & Lawrence, 2003). Ofoegbu and colleagues (2022) echo this finding. They state their participants of color ($n = 20$) found familial and other social supports to have had a large influence on their transition out of sport and college and navigation of this new life. Lastly, Beamon (2012) suggested former Division I African American college athletes have been found to have exclusive athletic identities, which severely and negatively impacts their ability to transition from college sport. To the best of our knowledge, no study had been done specifically centering Latinx, Asian, or Native American athletes' transition from college sport experience.

Career-Ending Injury

Finally, Rohrs-Cordes and Paule-Koba (2018) suggested the NCAA implement policies mandating institutions continue offering amenities and support for athletes after their career has ended from injury. Further, injured athletes have come forward expressing the benefit of support groups which offer opportunities to engage with others in similar situations and explore their feelings of loss, fear, and acceptance of the end of their career (Rohrs-Cordes & Paule-Koba, 2018). Further, Paule-Koba and Rohrs-Cordes (2019) examined twenty-three athletic department handbooks to better understand the policies and procedures when an athlete suffers a career-ending injury. Results indicated these policies were vague and inconsistent, which could cause more unnecessary stress for injured athletes. Authors argued for the NCAA and its members to create policies aimed at protecting and supporting injured athletes who are transitioning out of sport (Paule-Koba & Rohrs-Cordes, 2019).

Moore and colleagues (2021) also completed retrospective interviews with Division I athletes ($n = 10$). They investigated the role and salience of one's athletic identity when an athlete suffered a career-ending injury. Through their interviews, Moore and colleagues (2021) concluded more transitions supports for pre- and post-injury, opportunities for encouraging healthy coping mechanisms, and development of additional identities.

Methods

Participants

Former NCAA athletes ($n = 707$) across all three divisions and representing all sports except rifle, rowing, and skiing completed the survey. Just over half (51.8%, $n = 366$) self-identified as men, with 46.7% ($n = 330$) self-identifying as women, and 1.6% ($n = 11$) self-identifying as non-binary. Participants' year of retirement ranged from 2017-2018 to 2022-2023 and the age range for participants was 18 to 31 ($M = 24.69$, $SD = 2.90$). Just over half the participants (53.2%, $n = 376$) self-identified as white and 33% ($n = 233$) identified as Black or African American. Representa-

tion of athletes from Asian, Native American/Alaska Native, or other descents were each under 10%. Over half of participants self-reported that they came from a middle-class household (52.3%, $n = 370$). Finally, 31.3% had an unplanned retirement (e.g., career ending injury).

Measures and Procedure

The data are part of a broader study that sought to examine transition from sport programming access, effectiveness, and areas of need across NCAA divisions. One article from this data is published (Authors, 2023), which focused on overall effectiveness of programming. The current study, however, has a distinct purpose of investigating demographic differences.

In order to examine demographic differences in athletes' access to sport retirement programming and perceived impact of said programming, a mixed method approach was utilized. For the quantitative portion, we created a Qualtrics survey and distributed it to participants via the primary researcher's social media (e.g., Twitter, Instagram). Further, 20 institutions from each division were randomly selected and their Associate Athletic Directors and Faculty Athletic Representatives were contacted and asked to send the survey to their athletes. Likert scale questions examined the availability of different types of programming (e.g., nutrition workshops, panel of retired athletes, graduate school counseling, working out workshops) offered by participants' athletics departments, if the programs offered were optional or mandatory, and how impactful, on a five-point Likert scale from "not impactful" to "very impactful", participants found the programming to be in different areas of their well-being.

The qualitative component of the study consisted of the final survey question: "If you could offer suggestions to your athletic department on their transition from sport programming, what would it be?"

Analysis

Quantitative analysis included one-way Analysis of Variances (ANOVAs), via SPSS version 28, between different demographics, access to types of programming, and impact of said programming. Below highlights the research team's division of demographic analyses, either looking at impact of programming or access and impact:

1. Impact of programming
   a. Gender: men, women
   b. Race: White, Black or African American, Asian, Native American/ Alaska Native, Other
   c. Parent Income: working class, middle class, upper class
   d. International Status: yes, no
2. Access to programming and impact of programming
   a. Sport: high profile (men's and women's basketball, football), low profile

    b.   Division: I, II, III

    c.   Presence of a career-ending injury: yes, no

Regarding qualitative analyses, the primary researcher used descriptive coding to examine each open-ended response ($n = 109$). Descriptive coding is utilized to identify participants' topics (Saldaña, 2015). This was an appropriate strategy as the qualitative question in the survey was intentionally framed broadly. Following the initial review of responses, themes were generated from the open-ended response codes, incorporating any sub-themes and/or examples that were necessary (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Two coding rounds were conducted. Following the second round of coding, two researchers met to discuss codes generated. Codes from the qualitative open-ended responses were also compared to the quantitative survey results to identify any similarities or differences. When appropriate, qualitative findings will be presented with quantitative results to help make sense of these results. Huml et al., (2023) and Wells et al., (2020) used similar qualitative data analysis when coding open-ended survey responses for samples of college sport employees.

Results

Categorized by Goodman et al.'s (2006) moving in, through, and out transition phases, our results highlight the access to and/or impact of sport transition programming based on the following demographics: gender, race, parental income, high/low sport status, NCAA division, and presence of career-ending injuries. To provide a more holistic understanding of the access to and/or impact of transition programming across the NCAA, the quantitative and demographic results are coupled with quotes from participants in each of the three transition phases (See Figure 2).

Moving In

The moving in subsample, which retired within the 2022-2023 academic year, was the smallest group consisting of 77 participants. Men participants found programming to be more impactful than women to their overall well-being [$F(1,74)$ = 7.72, $p = 0.007$]. Post hoc analysis revealed men athletes also found each of the subcategories (e.g., mental health, healthy lifestyle knowledge) more impactful than their women counterparts. Women participants noted the importance of timing (i.e., in-season vs. off-season) and specificity of programming that would help yield a lasting impact on athletes:

> I would suggest making some sport programming more specific and possibly mandatory through coaches to get more people to be involved. When athletes are in season it gets quite busy, and programming is put on the back burner.

Regarding race, there was only a significant impact, nutrition knowledge, with Black participants finding greater impact than other racial groups [$F(5,70) = 2.44$, p = 0.04] in programming focused on nutrition. This is congruent with parent income results, with those coming from working class families finding nutrition program-

Figure 2

Visualization of Results

		Moving In	Moving Through	Moving Out
Gender	Impact	All Programming Men Athletes	Mental Health Programming Men Athletes	All Programming Men Athletes
Race	Impact	Nutrition Programming Black Athletes	All Programming Black Athletes	All Programming Black Athletes
Parent Income	Impact	Nutrition Programming Working Class Athletes		All Programming Working Class Athletes
International Status	Impact	Career Prep Programming International Athletes		All Programming International Athletes
Sport	Impact & Access			
Division	Impact & Access	Career Prep & Guest Speaker Programming Access Division II ---------------------------------- All Programming Impact Division II	Career Prep & Nutrition Programming Access Division II ---------------------------------- All Programming Impact Division II	Career Prep, Nutrition & Exercise, Mental Health, Networking, Money Management Programming Access Division II ---------------------------------- All Programming Impact Division II
Presence of a Career-Ending Injury	Impact & Access	All Programming Access (minus Nutrition) No Injury ---------------------------------- Career Prep Programming Impact Injury	Guest Speaker Programming Access Injury ---------------------------------- Networking Programming Access No Injury	Mental Health, Career Prep, Alum Panels, Senior Day Programming Access No Injury

ming to be more impactful than other participants [$F(3,72) = 3.02$, $p = 0.04$]. International college athletes moving into their transition reported programming significantly impacted their career preparedness compared to those were are not international college athletes [$F(1,74) = 5.48$, $p = 0.02$].

Examining both access to and impact of programming, we found no significant differences to access to programming based on sport groupings. By division, results suggested Division II participants had more access to athletic department-offered career preparation [$F(2,74) = 5.90$, $p = 0.004$], mandated career preparation [$F(2,74) = 10.73$, $p = 0.001$], and guest speakers [$F(2,74) = 4.47$, $p = 0.02$]. Conversely, participants from Division I reported a higher likelihood of no offered programming from their athletic department [$F(2,74) = 6.56$, $p = 0.002$] than other divisions. When asked what they would like to see when it came to transition programming, a Division I participant stated any institutional support would be beneficial: "We don't really receive any guidance in this, so it would be interesting/nice to have more access."

Additionally, Division I and III participants noted two important aspects in their transition process: (1) workshops on how to work out after college, and (2) building relationships with alumni. For example, a Division III participant explained they wanted athletic departments to "Offer more opportunities for the things like career counseling, relationships with alumni, networking, working out after college, etc." Encompassing similar sentiments, a Division I participant stated, "Offer more services to student athletes while they're still at the school. Have more specific postgrad sessions for athletes only. Add more mental health/self-care events, etc."

When it comes to impact of programming, Division II participants found programming to be more impactful to their overall well-being than other divisions [$F(2,73) = 3.60$, $p = 0.03$] as well as all the different subcategories (e.g., mental health, healthy lifestyle knowledge). Lastly, compared to participants without ca-

reer-ending injuries, those with career ending injuries who were moving into their transition found programming significantly impacted their feelings of career preparedness [$F(1,74) = 5.54$, $p = 0.02$] and appreciation from their athletic department [$F(1,74) = 7.92$, $p = 0.006$]; however, there was severely limited access to transition programs for this subgroup. Participants with career-ending injuries reported only having greater access to athletic department-offered nutrition programming over those who did not suffer from career-ending injuries [$F(1,74) = 8.80$, $p = 0.004$].

Moving Through

The moving through subsample, which retired within the 2021-2022 academic year, consisted of 200 participants. Men reported significantly higher program impacts on their mental health well-being subcategory than women [$F(2, 197) = 3.72$, $p = 0.03$]. Regarding race, results suggested Black participants found programming to be more impactful on their overall wellbeing [$F(4, 195) = 2.90$, $p = 0.02$] as well as the different subcategories compared to other races. Yet, Black participants still noted the need for more consideration and action from their athletic departments regarding sport retirement. For example, one Black athlete moving through his transition stated: "Invest in the training and education of personnel involved in the transition to ensure a successful and smooth transition [of athletes]." Not only training, but Black participants also explained the need for greater attention to athletes' loss of identities, both student and athlete, with one saying: "Consider the lack of identity of retired athletes as a significant issue."

There were no significant differences in program impact amongst different parental income levels or based off international status. Regarding high and low profile sport status, there was no significant impact of access to or impact of transition from sport programming. However, considering division, participants in Division II still had greater access than other participants to athletic department-offered graduate school sessions [$F(2,197) = 4.47$, $p = 0.01$] and industry specific sessions (i.e., nursing) [$F(2,197) = 8.29$, $p = 0.001$], as well as mandated nutrition education [$F(2,197) = 3.30$, $p = 0.04$], career preparation [$F(2,197) = 8.00$, $p = 0.001$], graduate school counseling [$F(2,197) = 4.54$, $p = 0.01$], and industry specific sessions [$F(2,197) = 10.52$, $p = 0.001$]. Significantly, athletes in Divisions I and III experienced a greater likelihood of having no offered [$F(2,197) = 5.74$, $p = 0.004$] or mandated programs [$F(2,197) = 7.25$, $p = 0.001$] over those in Division II. Regarding impact of programs, Division II offered greater impact on participants' overall wellbeing [$F(2,197) = 8.71$, $p = 0.001$] as well as the different subcategories (e.g., mental health, healthy lifestyle knowledge).

Yet, despite these results, Division II participants still noted they felt their athletic departments could do more, specifically, "Programming on the mental and physical (i.e., workouts) changes of transitioning." Another participant suggested it would be beneficial for athletic departments to check in on their athletes after retirement: "Creating follow up programs for those that have transitioned just to check on them and how they're going about their new life" [DII]. Both of these sentiments are also reflected across the other two divisions. For example, a participant from Division

I stated they needed: "Counseling! The mental impact of parting with your athletic identity is heavy. Also tips for the future on finances, retirement, benefits, etc." Similarly, a Division III participant noted: "More opportunities to discuss/prepare for retirement from athletics, stronger alumni connections, more networking opportunities."

Lastly, compared to athletes without a career ending injury, those with career ending injuries had greater access to mandated guest speaker sessions [$F(2,197) = 10.50$, $p = 0.001$], but had less access to mandated networking sessions [$F(2,197) = 5.72$, $p = 0.004$]. No differences were found in the impact of programming based on career-ending injury status. Still, participants called for: "More support and appreciation for those that retire early."

Moving Out

The moving out subsample, which retired from the 2017-2018 to the 2020-2021 academic year, was the largest subsample consisting of 430 participants. Men significantly found greater impact on transition programming in overall well-being [$F(5,424) = 8.62$, $p = 0.001$] and all different subcategories than women participants. Women emphasized transition programming should offer more:

> Access to information or programming on nutrition, exercise, and mental health would be helpful as all these things change drastically after leaving sport and having some tips or guidance would be great. Literally everything about each of these aspects of my life changed and I had to learn to adapt quickly.

They also suggested even a simple acknowledgement of potential difficulties from members of the athletic community would have helped them feel more prepared during this transition process:

> I wish it would have been talked about more. Retirement is pretty much a universal experience for collegiate athletes, but it's never actually spoken about in terms of the challenges it can present mentally and physically. I wish someone could have prepared me more for it prior to it happening.

Examining race, Black participants found greater impact on transition programming in overall well-being [$F(5, 424) = 8.62$, $p = 0.001$] than all the different subcategories than other racial groups. Additionally, the same findings held true for participants coming from working class backgrounds [$F(4, 425) = 5.51$, $p = 0.001$]. Many participants from working class backgrounds noted there is still a lot of work to be done: "To offer anything at all. We had no programming, so unless we went looking for it, we didn't have knowledge of it." Additionally, when building programming, participants emphasized they wanted athletic departments to, "[Make] the program [a] more holistic, education-based athletic experience."

When examining international status, international participants experienced a greater impact from transition programming in overall well-being [$F(2, 427) = 5.84$, $p = 0.003$] and all other subcategories than domestic participants. As with the other subsamples, international athletes moving out of the transition expressed how there was still need for improvement in transition programming. In specific, one partici-

pant noted, "Programming needs to be purposeful rather than just created to meet requirements. Also, athletes are forgotten once they leave, some follow up surveys could be impactful."

There was no significant difference in program access to or impact of transition programming by sport. By division, Division II participants had greater access to athletic department sponsored nutrition workshops [$F_{(2,427)}$ = 4.16, p = 0.02], sport psychologists [$F_{(2,427)}$ = 12.85, p = 0.001], exercise workshops [$F_{(2,427)}$ = 6.57, p = 0.02], career preparation [$F_{(2,427)}$ = 8.91, p = 0.001], industry specific sessions [$F_{(2,427)}$ = 15.30, p = 0.001], and money management sessions [$F_{(2,427)}$ = 4.89, p = 0.008]. They also had greater mandated access to athletic department sponsored graduate school counseling [$F_{(2,427)}$ = 8.64, p = 0.001], networking sessions [$F_{(2,427)}$ = 3.96, p = 0.02], graduate school information sessions [$F_{(2,427)}$ = 3.96, p = 0.02]. Similarly, athletes in Division I and III were significantly more likely to report no offered [$F_{(2,427)}$ = 11.52, p = 0.001] or mandated [$F_{(2,427)}$ = 31.24, p = 0.001] programs. By impact, Division II participants reported the highest amount of program impact on overall well-being [$F_{(2,427)}$ = 13.24, p = 0.001] and all other subcategories.

Those without career-ending injuries had greater access to athletic department-offered [$F_{(2,427)}$ = 5.80, p = 0.003] and mandated sport psychologist appointments [$F_{(2,427)}$ = 9.87, p = 0.001], as well as offered career preparation [$F_{(2,427)}$ = 16.63, p = 0.001], alumni panels [$F_{(2,427)}$ = 6.67, p = 0.001], and senior days [$F_{(2,427)}$ = 4.29, p = 0.01]. However, no difference was found for the impact of transition programs amongst these two groups. Participants who had career-ending injuries stressed the need for greater access to psychological services during their retirement but did not mention specific time frames (i.e., moving through their retirement). As an example, one participant noted: "Injured athletes and retirees need more professional psychological counseling to help them cope with their injuries."

Discussion

Access and impact of sport transition programming varies based on demographic and situational factors. With this in mind, the findings extend the transition literature and offer a host of practical implications for athletics personnel working with athletes as they move in, through, and out of college sport.

In line with previous scholarship, athletes across our sample—regardless of transition phase—expressed the need for more transition programming (Hansen et al., 2019; Kiefer et al., 2023; Oshiro et al., 2023; Rohrs-Cordes & Paule-Koba, 2018). Kiefer and colleagues (2023) discovered that almost 75% of Division I athletic departments offered transition programming compared to roughly one quarter of athletics departments in Divisions II and III. Interestingly, our findings noted that Division II athletes not only had more access to transition programming, but also perceived the programming to be more impactful on their wellbeing and transition processes. Thus, simply having access to programming may be significant and create

a positive outcome on athletes' transitions. We hypothesize this Division II finding occurred for a few reasons.

First, critics contend that Division I is generally more commercialized and focused on athletic prowess and success with less emphasis on athlete development and preparation (Clotfelter, 2019; Gurney et al., 2017). On the other hand, Division III is the least commercialized NCAA division and centers academic achievement with sports serving as more of an extracurricular activity (Our Division III Story, n.d.). Division II operates in between these two competition levels with its mission statement noting the importance of athletes' holistic development and balance (Our Division II Priorities, n.d.). With this mission, Division II athletes might have more robust options for transition programming as such opportunities are potentially more directly tied to division's purposes compared to Division I and III.

The timing of the programming was also an important consideration. First, when it comes to the three transition phases, former college athletes who were further removed from their sport exit, or classified in the *moving out* phase, were significantly more likely to express appreciation and describe enhanced development from participating in transition programming. Additionally, this group of athletes also pressed for more programs to be available for retiring athletes; the current offerings are not enough. While Goodman et al. (2006) described timing of a transition as being "on" or "off" timing like an anticipated or unanticipated transition (Schlossberg, 1981), our findings suggest the timing factor in this framework could be expanded in a few ways.

Timing in Goodman and colleagues' (2006) work could be reframed to include when the transition program is offered or mandated, such as in an athlete's junior or senior year. However, the timing for the individual athlete and where they are in the transition phase (in, through, or out) is also critical. It is possible that athletes who were in the moving out phase of their sport exit perceived the significance of the programming as more impactful due to their personal growth and maturity and the time removed from sport participation which offered more opportunities for deeper reflection on the transition process. This reflexivity is also in line with previous work on athletes' transition perceptions (Harry & Weight, 2021; Park et al., 2013). Additionally, timing aligns with athletes from our studying requesting that athletic department staff "check in" on those who are transitioning in, through, and/or out of sport. Checking in offers opportunities for athletic departments and personnel to bolster alumni networks which athletes across all subsamples and in certain groups (i.e., athletes with career-ending injuries) expressed would have been helpful in their transition experiences (Rohrs-Cordes & Paule-Koba, 2018).

Furthermore, key findings emerged regarding which demographic groups were most impacted by programming. When compared to their women counterparts, men across all phases noted transition programming was more impactful. While the previous literature on athlete transitions is mixed on the impact of these kinds of programming for men versus women (Park et al., 2013; Smith & Hardin, 2018), previous literature does consistently note women athletes tend to develop more of their

student and potential career identities compared to men athletes (Lu et al., 2018). This emphasis on athlete identity of men versus women athletes could be due to the historically more commercialized nature of men's sports and the focus on men athletes' athletic success rather than academic achievements (Gurney et al., 2017). Furthermore, men may be socialized into favoring athletic identity development over student or other identities because they have more opportunities for lucrative professional careers compared to women (Kidd et al., 2018; Tyrance et al., 2013). In this way, transition programming could be more helpful for men whose identities are more strongly attached to sport, compared to women who have more diversified identity profiles and have been socialized to prepare more for life after sport. Additionally, literature suggests women athletes experience higher levels of both stress and anxiety and are also more vocal about their needs regarding changes in body image, exercise, and nutrition after college sport (Hardie et al., 2022; Oshiro et al., 2023, Smith & Hardin, 2018).

Black athletes and those from working class backgrounds also found programming to be more impactful when compared to other demographic groups. Black athletes found the programming beneficial across all three of Goodman et al.'s (2006) phases, while athletes from working class families found transition programming most beneficial *moving in* and *moving out* of their sport exit. These findings support the previous scholarship noting the importance of athletic departments providing additional institutional support (Hansen et al., 2019; Kiefer et al., 2023), especially for athletes from historically marginalized backgrounds. Enhanced and personalized transition support is helpful for individuals from these groups given sport cultures and structures critics contend exploit Black athletes and athletes from less affluent backgrounds, who may be more likely to be first generation college students (Beamon, 2012; Gurney et al., 2017; Kidd et al., 2018).

Additionally, statistical analyses determined there were no differences based on athletes' participation in high versus low profile sports. This counters much of the previous scholarship which notes athletes in higher profile sports, particularly football and men's basketball, have a more difficult experience retiring from college athletics (Kidd et al., 2018; Menke & Germany, 2018). This finding could possibly be attributed to the lack of formal development of transition from sport programming. College athletic departments are beginning to put resources into this area of athlete development, as shown in the sample; however, it is not to the point where we see the typical distribution of resources across sport and/or division. Such findings indicate that, regardless of the sport or visibility, most athletes encounter potential struggles when leaving their college athletic careers behind. Further, all three divisions were included in this sport categorization. Data findings could be caused from the notion that the experiences of a Division I football player are likely different from those of a Division III football player.

Our findings also corroborate previous studies demonstrating athletes with career-ending injuries express desires for more institutional support navigating their unanticipated transition (Rohrs-Cordes & Paule-Koba, 2018). Importantly, while athletes with career-ending injuries and those without did not report statistically sig-

nificantly different results on the impact of transition programming, athletes moving out of sport retirement with career-ending injuries did have statistically significantly less access to transition programming and institutional supports. Such findings are somewhat surprising, and disappointing, given the additional support injured athletes need when it comes to navigating their unanticipated loss of their athlete identity and roles (Park et al., 2013). However, these findings are also not surprising given the commercial environment of athletics and the "next person up" attitude present in team and sport cultures (Oshiro et al., 2023). Thus, injured athletes are often forgotten or feel forgotten, which was also expressed in athlete narratives in this sample. This phenomenon is particularly problematic as it illustrates a disconnect between the NCAA's stated purpose of athlete well-being (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2024) and athlete's experiences.

Practical Implications

Based on our findings, we urge athletic departments to (1) allocate increased resources toward sport transition programming, (2) consider program timing, (3) offer specific programming based on athletes' social and structural demographics, and (4) provide more programming around nutrition and exercise education, as well as access to mental health services and alumni networks.

Increased Resources

From athlete narratives, transition from college sport programming is limited. Yet, our research suggests programming, when athletes have access to it, is impactful in the entirety of their retirement process: moving in, through, and out. The importance of allocating resources (time, money) must be acknowledged by athletic departments across all three divisions, to yield significant impact. Increasing funding and support for transition programming will not only help athletic departments acknowledge this can be a difficult process for athletes (Kloetzer & Taylor, 2023), but it will also increase transparency of the potential difficulties of this process. Greater transparency through programming could yield greater autonomy of athletes in their own retirement experience. This encouragement is essential in all phases of transition (Goodman et al., 2006).

Examples of increased support look different depending on the institution. An inexpensive avenue is to invite former athletes to speak on their transition experiences. Not only did participants note they found this to be helpful, but also, it is relatively simple for athletic departments to put together and offers an opportunity to cultivate relationships with alumni. Additionally, partnerships with offices around campus or in the community can provide needed resources to athletes. For example, an athletic department without a nutritionist or nutrition team could partner with a local nutritionist for educational sessions on proper fueling post-college athletics. The NCAA currently requires Division I athletic departments to provide an academic center for athletes. NCAA-provided recommendations and formal support for retirement programs within academic centers would be an appropriate way for the NCAA to supply retirement programming resources in the academic category. It is important

to note that in 2024, the NCAA will offer up to two years of insurance coverage, post-eligibility, for athletes who suffered career-ending injuries (National Collegiate Athletics Association, 2023). While this is an integral step, there is still more that needs to be done to consider care for the whole athlete.

Program Timing

Our results indicate program timing flexibility is essential. Literature suggests starting programs during an athlete's junior year, or earlier, can be an appropriate way to fit in programming without overwhelming the athlete. However, this needs to be even more flexible (Oshiro et al., 2023; Stokowski et al., 2019). Athletes move at their own pace when it comes to this transition and have different needs as they move in, through, and out of sport retirement (Goodman et al., 2006; Schlossberg, 1981). Being able to offer programs at different points in an athlete's retirement can help them take control of their transition and choose what would be helpful (e.g., an alumni panel) and when (e.g., immediately after their last season of play).

We suggest more program offerings should occur post-retirement, as athletes are getting adjusted and *moving through* their transition out of college sport. They have a chance to prioritize this adjustment period and immediately utilize program takeaways in their everyday lives. A proposed recommendation is providing access to mental health resources through the institution for the academic year following their retirement (Oshiro et al., 2023).

Athlete Demographics

Additionally, with regards to timing, transition from sport programs need to consider athletes from different backgrounds when creating program options. An individualized approach, such as providing different programming to fit the unique needs of women, is key in meeting the needs of retiring athletes within an athletic department. Our data suggests that women specifically need more programming than their men counterparts. Additionally, our data revealed that Black athletes found programming to be most impactful. Results do not point to specific differences in programs that need to be prioritized for demographic groups. This is likely because more programming is needed all around. Yet, participants were extremely vocal on what they thought was needed (e.g., alumni panels, nutrition education). Thus, practitioners should consider surveying athletes as a way to start understanding the different needs across the athletic department. This is specifically vital as different demographic groups are more likely to be commodified by different entities within intercollegiate athletics.

Finally, participants urged for greater attention and distribution of resources to those with career-ending injuries. Perhaps there is greater prioritization of rehab for these athletes; however, we believe that coupling this with transition programming (e.g., joining the retirement class in exercise workshops, guaranteed access to mental health services) is important for transition adaptation of these athletes.

Programming Specifics

Our data sample suggests programs that center career preparation, social capital building, and graduate school can be helpful. However, most needed for athletes are programs that involve nutrition and exercise education (Oshiro et al., 2023; Smith & Hardin, 2018), as well as access to mental health services and alumni connections (Smith & Hardin, 2020; Stokowski et al., 2019). These categories were salient to athletes as they either experienced issues in these areas or they felt as if they did not have the knowledge in these areas to be prepared for retirement.

Additionally, focusing on specific types of programming can enhance athletes' feelings of control over their own transition, something sport literature currently suggests is lacking (Authors, in press). Offering specific types of programs, such as nutrition workshops and alumni panels, can give athletes the opportunity to learn, take control of their retirement, and create their own strategies (e.g., take notes during a session and implement tips into their own life; connect with an alum whom they can text with transition questions). This is a direct way athletic departments can help foster athlete autonomy in their own transition experience.

Finally, checking in on athletes either post-graduation was frequently mentioned by participants. To them, it felt as if athletic departments were "using" them and did not care about their well-being after they were done with their sport. Check-ins with retired athletes at various times when they are moving through and out of retirement can be a simple way for athletes to feel acknowledged and cared for and counter some negative perceptions of the athletic department. Coupling this idea with the timing of programming, an email that reaches out with available resources for retired athletes is a straightforward way for athletes to feel supported.

Limitations and Further Research

This research is important in understanding the different needs of athletes as they retire out of college sport. That said, this study has some limitations. First, transitions, including those out of sport, are not linear processes, and individuals can cycle between moving in, through, and out of a transition based on changes in their environments, roles, and four S's (situation, self, social support, strategies; Schlossberg, 1981). However, this research was more rigidly structured with athletes systematically categorized, based on years since sport retirement, into moving in, though, and out of transition groups. It is likely some athletes in our sample were waffling between these different categories and future research should look to explore the movement back and forth with more nuance.

Second, athletes were direct and pointed in open-ended responses regarding recommendations for practitioners. Responses lacked some detail to gain greater understanding of the current picture of transition from sport programs. Third, this dataset lacks specificity into how programs impacted retiring athletes and the longevity of that impact. This is an important feature to consider specifically regarding the *moving out* phase of transition. Parsing out different social and structural demographics is helpful in understanding differences of access and impact but does not

yield a complete picture of specific athlete needs without considering intersectionality, identity-based intersections that reveal experiences as systemic versus isolated (Crenshaw, 1991).

With these limitations in mind, future research should continue to ask questions targeting the needs of retiring college athletes. In-depth interviews or focus groups could be utilized to gain greater understanding of programs in practice and in-depth experiences. Different categorizations of sports (i.e., individual versus team sport) could yield greater understanding and unique needs of athletes during retirement. Additionally, conducting a longitudinal study could provide more insight of the full impact of retirement programming, and thus greater knowledge on how to structure the timing of different retirement programs. Lastly, it is essential to consider the importance of intersectionality and how that affects athletes' retirement experiences. While our study categorized athletes' demographics separately, we recognize that in reality, athletes' various identities (i.e., woman, Black, high-income, injured, etc.) converge constantly and are not truly separated in their day-to-day lives or experiences. Future research should consider the intersection of demographics (i.e., Black and woman) and how retirement programming can better cater to these identities.

Conclusion

Despite understanding the positive value of transition from college sport programming can have little is understood regarding the timing of programming as well as who has access to and benefits from programming (Goodman et al., 2006; Kloetzer & Taylor, 2023; Tyrance et al., 2013). Thus, this study explored the timing, access, and impact of sport retirement programming based on athletes' social and demographic differences. Findings illustrated that timing flexibility of programming is beneficial and could leave athletes feeling like they have more autonomy over their retirement process. Additionally, different types of programming had greater impact for certain athletes, suggesting that an individualized approach to retirement programming could be advantageous for athletic departments. Lastly, this study revealed the need for greater access to retirement from college sport programming and continued research in this area of study.

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