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BETWIXT AND BETWEEN:
THE LIMINALITY OF THE FORMER COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYER

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Kathy B. Parker

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my loving and wonderful parents, Mr. and Mrs. R. A. Parker, who have always sacrificed their dreams so that I could follow mine. It is also dedicated to my grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. J. K. Ezell and Mr. Royce Parker, for their love and faith. Finally, I dedicate this work to the memory of my grandmother, the late Mrs. Bessie Parker, who has watched over me as my own personal angel.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the experiences of former college football players upon exiting their intercollegiate careers and to explore the liminal period in which they pass from something that is known (their college athletic career) to something that is unknown. In order to address the suggestions of the literature, this study utilized an interpretist approach and a qualitative methodology to explore these experiences. Participants consisted of seven former NCAA Division I collegiate football players who completed their eligibility within the last three years and were at least eight months removed from collegiate football competition. These participants were also not under contract with any professional teams at the time of their interviews. The qualitative technique of in-depth, dialogic interviewing was employed in this study, and questions were of two types: (a) phenomenological; and (b) ethnographic. Interviews averaged three hours per participant and ranged from 1 1/2 to 6 hours of total interview time. Emerging themes included: (a) the transition from high school to college ball was a major one in which players felt isolated from the coaches, and they felt a previously unknown pressure from media and fans; (b) relationships with coaches were negative, or non-existent; (c) participants perceived that

they were powerless, and that coaches and athletic administrations retained full control over their lives and impacted their futures; (d) participants tended to place blame externally; and (e) there were varying degrees of narrowness of identity, perceived alternatives, and coping styles. These themes illustrated that participants tended to be past-oriented, and that multi-dimensional, process-oriented frameworks which take an interactive approach were more applicable to the data than uni-dimensional theories. The themes were discussed in relation to applicable theories. Micro-level analysis led to a discussion of locus of control and personal power, and the impact of these factors on the transition experience. The lack of strong ethnic differences in perceptions was discussed and contrasted with current literature. Future directions for research were explored, as well as implications for counselors, sport psychologists, and coaches.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

A group of buddies hikes up the hill to the football stadium at State U. for the opening game of the season. One has his earphones on, listening to the pre-game show and hoping for last-minute word on the seriousness of an injury to a starting running back. The others carry an assortment of State U. media guides, State U. blankets, and State U. seat cushions, while wearing school colors everywhere from their caps to the laces of their tennis shoes. As they walk, they pass the media trucks, the program hawkers, and the ticket scalpers, thankful that their expensive season tickets save them the hassle of paying even more for a seat. The stadium is overflowing. Upwards of 60,000 people (more than the population of this college town on any other day) anticipate the kick-off. One of the buddies turns to another and asks, "Whatever happened to that center we had last year? Did he finish his eligibility? We sure could use him now, particularly if Greer is out for the season." The other replied, "I don't know. Seems like he hurt his knee in the third game last year--remember?--I don't think he ever came back after that." Another chimed in, "You know, I could have sworn I saw him working at Jones' Market

about six months ago, but I just knew that couldn't have been him." The fourth companion summed it up, "Man, we just can't keep good centers on this team. They either wind up getting hurt or finishing their eligibility. They just drop off the face of the earth."

"Whatever happened to . . ." is usually the phrase that precedes comments about ex-intercollegiate and professional athletes . . . that is, if there are any comments at all. When they are no longer in the public eye, for the most part, they are no longer in the public's mind, unless their former athletic prowess is called to memory, or they wind up in a jail cell or on the Senate floor. Most retired athletes go on to "normal" lives as sales people, civil service workers, teachers, and coaches, and are never again the public center of attention that they were as athletes. Only a few make it to the elite professional sport ranks, and even those few can look forward to short sport careers. Regardless of whether the athlete considers this transition from competitive collegiate sport her or his death, of sorts, a welcome relief from public scrutiny, or a springboard to the pros, it is definitely a transition requiring adjustment. In fact, transition seems to be an insufficient term to describe the process. Perhaps another term is more appropriate.

Let's assume that someone is interested in "whatever happened to" the hypothetical football center mentioned

earlier. He could very well be found at Jones' Market, or back in school finishing his studies, or another somewhat tenuous position, perhaps even on the fringe of professional football. Wherever he is, however, it would not be surprising to find him in the state of liminality.

Liminality is a term most often associated with the field of anthropology, but it seems to fit like the proverbial glass slipper on the topic of sport career withdrawal. In past research, many methodological problems have been encountered when attempting to define this population for study. Some refer to it as "retirement," or "exiting," or "withdrawal," etc. The traditional approach has been to treat sport career exits as events rather than processes of transition. Greendorfer and Blinde (1985) suggested a reconceptualization of the identity of the sport retiree, and suggested that the context may very well be dependent on the specific sport setting. Capturing a time frame and a context have been difficult. For example, does one truly "retire" or "exit" from a sport if one still competes at a recreational level, or coaches? If athletes still have not accepted the end of their sport career many years after the official event, have they actually made any transition? What about the athlete who turns down participation in a research study of retired athletes because, four years after a collegiate career, the athlete

insists that (s)he has not retired and is still trying to catch on with the pros?

The term liminality would explain why these research populations have been so hard to define. Turner explained the state of liminality as "ambiguous, neither here nor there, betwixt and between all fixed points of classification" (1974, p. 232). Bennett and LeCompte (1991) further developed the concept by defining liminal points as "social or developmental transitions--periods after leaving one clearly identified social status state and before entering the next or another" (p. 79). They went on to explain that society usually reacts to liminal people with ambivalence and clarified:

. . . not necessarily as a commentary on their character; it is simply that, having left one state and not yet properly entered into the new one, a liminal person is innocent of the proper way to behave, and as such, must be resocialized in order to learn the rules of his or her new status in life. (Bennett & LeCompte, 1991, p. 79)

This concept of liminality is a very appropriate concept to apply to the former intercollegiate football player who has not been resocialized into a new life role, whether this new life role is that of professional athlete or "normal" student. It is particularly appropriate in that it is not as "generic" a term as transition, which could mean any adjustment to any change. A liminal person is one in the throws of uncertainty and unfamiliar sanctions, and is a very vulnerable human being (Bennett & LeCompte, 1991;

Turner, 1974). In the case of football, this concept could include the athlete who is still trying to impress professional scouts and get an audience with a professional football team. It could also include the athlete who is "not good enough" for the pros, but has no idea where to go from here, or does not want to accept the new role.

It is important to remember that the socialization process of elite athletes tends to leave them with narrow self-identities and roles. Thomas and Ermler (1988) best explained how young athletes are separated from other students at early ages once their talent is recognized, and the athletic self is nurtured to the decrement of other roles. By the time the elite athlete has reached college, people usually refer to him as "the football player," not the student. In effect, in many cases, when the liminal person is an athlete, it is not merely a matter of changing a social status state, but of changing who (s)he is in totality.

The specific concept of liminality has not been addressed in sport literature. There is a small body of literature investigating "retirement" or "termination" from sport, and, more recently, there have been a few studies redefining and modifying the concept as a transition. However, these studies concentrate, for the most part, on the athletes who have completely severed their ties with sport as competitors and who look back retrospectively at

their retirement or transition. While limited in concept and application, a brief review of these studies is warranted for context.

Just as retiring athletes have been ignored by the public, they have also been ignored in research until recently. Anecdotal accounts of adjustment problems by former "superstar" athletes may have triggered some scientific interest. In particular, the autobiographies of Jerry Kramer (Kramer & Schaap, 1969), a former professional football player; Bill Bradley (1976), a former professional basketball player; as well as Jim Bouton (1970) and Pat Jordan (1973), former professional baseball players, highlighted the uniqueness and the depth of commitment which describe a sport career and the changes that leaving such a career can produce. Bradley (1976) commented:

In return for fame and fortune, the athletes must live with never again experiencing the intensity or a degree of involvement provided by sports once the sport career is over. . . . Loss of social recognition is almost immediate. Athletes in the United States are quickly forgotten by once ardent fans and media. Even friends 'seem to disappear' when they can no longer share in the glory. (p. 58)

Bouton (1970) described the moment he was cut from his baseball team in this way:

As I started throwing stuff into my bag, I could feel the wall, invisible but real, forming around me. I was suddenly an outsider, a different person, someone to be shunned, a leper. (p. 106)

Media journalists began to add to the body of anecdotal evidence that ex-athletes did not "just disappear off the

face of the earth." In the late 1960's and 1970's, several magazine articles and books were written about former athletes, mostly from a pessimistic view point (Johnson, 1972; Kahn, 1972; Kaplan, 1977; Plimpton, 1967; Rozin, 1979).

With the exception of Weinberg and Arond's (1952) study entitled "The Occupational Structure of the Boxer," empirical investigation and scholarly contemplation of the phenomenon of sport career termination began its sluggish and slow progress in the late 1960's and in the 1970's. The early pioneers included: Mihovilovic (1968), a Yugoslavian gerontologist who investigated the situation of former national team soccer players; Hare (1971), who provided another look at the sport of boxing with his article, "A Study of the Black Fighter"; Hill and Lowe's (1974) theoretical discussion suggesting utilization of Sussman's Analytic Model of Retirement from the general sociology literature as an appropriate model for investigating sport career retirement; Ball (1976), a sociologist who utilized content analysis of anecdotal data concerning professional football and baseball to draw a comparison between involuntary exiting from sport and ultimate failure in sport; and two studies (Arviko, 1976; Haerle, 1975) investigating both the career patterns after sport and the life satisfaction variables of former professional baseball players.

Then, in the 1980's, anecdotal, theoretical, and empirical attention toward sport career termination increased. Media articles and autobiographical works (Blount & Kiersh, 1982; Evert & Kirkpatrick, 1989; Gilbert, 1980; Goldman, 1984; Gup, 1989; Halberstam, 1989; House, 1989; Kiersh, 1983; Lieber, 1989; McCarver, 1987; Myslenski, 1986; Telander, 1989; Weber, 1985) addressed the adjustment to post-sport life of various athletes, usually male professional athletes.

From a theoretical point of view, the early to mid-1980's saw a decided attempt to force a uni-dimensional theory across all sport career transition situations. Researchers seemed to fall into one of three "camps": (a) gerontological theory (Rosenberg, 1981a), in which sport retirement is linked to retirement from any "normal" type of employment; (b) thanatological theory (Lerch, 1984; Rosenberg, 1984), in which sport career retirement is compared to social death; and (c) rebirth theory (Coakley, 1983), which suggests that sport retirement is likened to a social rebirth instead of a social death.

Empirical studies of the 1980's tended to employ one of the above three frameworks. Studies employing the gerontological perspective (Lerch, 1981; Reynolds, 1981; Rosenberg, 1981b) were quantitative in nature, and the typical variables utilized by gerontologists, i.e., life satisfaction, health, education level, and pre-retirement

attitude, were compared to sport-related variables such as sport fame, level of sport commitment, etc. Results were often equivocal and methodological problems were frequent. A major difficulty with gerontological theory as applied to sport was that relatively few researchers were able to find any significant relationship between isolated sport-related variables and adjustment difficulty. As a result, gerontological theory lost favor with researchers (Allison & Meyer, 1988; Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985), not only because of a lack of significant findings regarding the relationship between "normal" chronologically-based retirement and sport career retirement, but also because this approach did not provide for the intense commitment and narrow self-identity of athletes.

While still afforded more status than gerontological frameworks, thanatological, or social death frameworks, also began to garner some displeasure because of the narrowness of scope, the presumption of a negative perspective, and the lack of generalizability to a majority of athletes (Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985). While support has been found for this framework (Hallinan & Snyder, 1988; Blinde and Stratta, 1991), Coakley (1983) noted that most athletes make the transition to new life styles without severe distress and that the data from many studies, including Mihovilovic's (1968), might be interpreted more positively by other researchers. Coakley felt that previous pessimistic

findings might be more reflective of methodological problems than of the actual data.

Rebirth theory (Coakley, 1983) has found some support in empirical works (Allison & Meyer, 1988; Curtis & Ennis, 1988). However, this optimistic approach was obviously limited to a portion of athletic retirements and did not adequately address those athletes experiencing trauma and severe stress upon exiting their sport careers.

Most of the research and theory presentations to this point have been rigid and uni-dimensional. It was almost as if the proverbial cart came before the horse, in that researchers were trying to find that cause-effect relationship and predict retirement outcome before understanding the process itself. This tendency toward reductionism was noted by Greendorfer and Blinde (1985) who cautioned:

Indirectly, these data may not only be suggesting that sport retirement is transition (rather than event), but they may not be portraying the multidimensionality and complexity of the sport retirement process. From one perspective the process could be viewed as considerably less deterministic than that which has been portrayed in previous research. (p. 107)

Greendorfer and Blinde (1985) called for a more longitudinal assessment of sport career retirement with an emphasis on the process rather than the formal event. They, along with Allison and Meyer (1988), suggested that it was perhaps appropriate to back up and re-examine the phenomenon with an emphasis on building the knowledge base by delving

into the perceptions and personal reactions of the athletes themselves rather than relying on researcher-imposed criteria.

What has followed in recent years is a shift toward a more qualitative research perspective and a shift toward a transitional model. In particular, Pearson and Petitpas (1990), and Swain (1991) have advocated the applicability of Schlossberg's Model of Transitions (1981) as a framework for studying withdrawal from sport. Additionally, Swain's (1991) qualitative study, along with that of Blinde and Stratta (1991) illustrate the appropriateness of the more holistic perspectives for subject matter that cannot be broken down into isolated variables.

While the current trend in research in this area is toward qualitative studies, there appear to be no studies of a qualitative nature dealing specifically with intercollegiate football. Additionally, most studies confine themselves to participants who have completely severed their ties with their competitive sport careers. Therefore, these participants have already made their retirement decisions, or they have had their decisions made for them. It would be interesting to look specifically at this period of time in which decisions are made which determine life course changes.

As stated in the above overview, the literature suggests that the knowledge base surrounding the athlete in

transition is insufficient, and researchers (Allison & Meyer, 1988; Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985) are calling for a more holistic approach to gain depth of understanding and athlete-perspective on the transition experience. Most existing research involves professional skill levels, yet the issues confronting collegiate athletes as they exit collegiate careers may be very different from those confronting professional athletes (Lapchick & Malekoff, 1987; Ogilvie & Howe, 1982). In their study of intercollegiate athletes, Kennedy and Dimick (1987) found that 66% of black athletes and 39% of white athletes participating in revenue-producing sports (football and basketball) anticipated a professional sport career after college. Because we know so little about the transition process, particularly as it pertains to the intercollegiate athlete, and because the reality is that only 2% of these athletes actually make it to the professional ranks, further research in this area is needed.

Additionally, the work of Blinde and Stratta (1991), suggests that previous quantitative orientations may not have adequately captured the essence of the transition process. In their qualitative study, they found serious trauma and disruption which " . . . stands in contrast to that typically reported in the sport retirement literature on college athletes" (Blinde & Stratta, 1991, p. 15).

Purpose of the Study

The purposes of this study were: (a) to gain insight into the experiences of former collegiate football players upon exiting their intercollegiate careers, and (b) to explore the liminal period in which they pass from something that is known (their college athletic career) to something that is unknown. In order to address the suggestions of the literature, this study utilized an interpretist approach and a qualitative methodology to explore these experiences.

Definitions

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions apply:

Exit--to leave; in this study, to leave the intercollegiate football career.

Experience--"an instance or segment in one's life of personally encountering something and making this instance the object of one's consciousness; the totality of cognitions given by perception, that is, all that is perceived, understood, and remembered" (Flexner, 1987). In this case, the segment of life relating to the liminal period after the end of the intercollegiate sports career.

Former intercollegiate football player--Division I-A NCAA football player who has completed his eligibility to play collegiate football.

Liminality--social or developmental transition; period after leaving one clearly identified social status state and before entering the next or another (Bennett & LeCompte, 1991).

Retirement--in this study, retirement refers to the formal end of the intercollegiate football career.

Transition--"the process of moving, passing, or changing from one position, state, stage, subject, concept, etc., to another" (Flexner, 1987); in this case, from the intercollegiate football career to a new stage; while retirement is the **event**, transition is the **process** of changing from the intercollegiate football career stage to another stage.

Assumptions of the Study

The following assumptions were made in reference to this study:

1. The subjective experiences of the athletes are important in understanding the nature of the liminal period of former intercollegiate athletes.
2. The former intercollegiate athletes who participated in this study were able to articulate their experiences of liminality.
3. The interview is a valid method of eliciting information about subjective experience.

4. The participants in this study reported honestly their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions concerning their experience.

Scope of the Study

This is a qualitative research study. Therefore, the results are not generalizable to the total population.

Erickson (1986) tells us that:

. . . the primary concern of interpretive research is particularizability, rather than generalizability. One discovers universals as manifested concretely and specifically, not in abstraction and generality.
(p. 130)

It is appropriate, then, to consider this as a study of a small group of individuals, with the intent of presenting as much insight, description, and detail about the experiences of these individuals as possible. The objective is to enrich and deepen the body of knowledge, but not to generalize and make future predictions. Results should be interpreted from this context.

Significance of the Study

To understand the possible significance of this study, it is important to understand the life world of the college athlete and how far that life world is from the "real world." Myslenski (1986) summarized:

The pampered treatment he has long received may have left him without basic skills for coping with life, skills like reading and writing, looking for a sale or balancing a checkbook, and now he suddenly confronts a

mystifying world that is normal to most. The countless people who have long stroked his ego may have left him with an unrealistic appraisal of himself and his value to the world, and now he suddenly confronts a society that is indifferent to his physical skills and is asking if he has any others. . . He has long felt himself invincible. . . but now he must confront his own wretched mortality. (p. 20)

Thomas and Ermler (1988) presented a powerful case for the moral obligations of the athletic establishment to provide for the needs of athletes during transition from sport. They built their case on the existence of a "power relationship" (p. 142). In such a relationship, as applied to sport, the athletic establishment is able to exert its will, regardless of the resistance of the athlete. Their position was that as long as this relationship exists, certain responsibilities are inherent in free society. These obligations are usually delineated by codes of ethics, ethics committees, legal injunctions for informed consent, etc., in such fields as medicine, law, and education. The client/patient in these situations is considered dependent, and is also ". . . an informed and autonomous decision maker whose individual welfare comes before institutional outcomes" (Thomas & Ermler, 1988, p. 142).

The significance of this study and other studies like it is that it may provide insight, not only to researchers, but also to those athletic institutions and systems that might wish to address the needs of this population. The study may also provide valuable insight for athletes,

themselves, in that they can realize that other athletes may be having similar experiences.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

"Retirement" from sport is a relatively new area of interest in sport sociology and psychology literature. Although it naturally lies on one end of a continuum after the process of socialization into sport and the sport involvement itself, researchers have, until recently, ignored the withdrawal portion of the continuum. That fact, in itself, is enlightening. Perhaps it tells us that, even as scientists and "experts" on sport sociology and psychology, we consider the athlete important enough to receive much research attention, while ex-athletes are not worthy of our attention. If our priorities are a reflection of society's priorities, is it any wonder that anecdotal literature is filled with painful testimonies of once-revered ex-athletes trying to cope with the termination of their sport careers?

In reviewing the literature on the topic of "retirement" from a sport career, four themes emerge:

- (a) There is no general consensus as to the best theoretical and conceptual approach for studying sport career transitions.

- (b) There is a paucity of research on the subject, and the information that is available is inconsistent.
- (c) There are many methodological problems with the existing studies, including the fact that the very term "sport career retirement" has not been consistently defined.
- (d) Most studies approach sport career retirement from a sociological and quantitative perspective, analyzing mostly demographic data. Few studies approach retirement from a psychological or social-psychological point of view, utilizing perceptions and perspectives of the athletes themselves.

The purpose of this chapter is to present the available literature on the subject of sport career retirement and/or transition while addressing the issues presented above.

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks of Sport Career Retirement

In keeping with sound scientific policy, researchers investigating the topic of sport career retirement sought guiding theories that might explain the process of adjustment to a non-sport dominated life. Quite naturally, researchers turned toward the general sociological and psychological literature for possible solutions.

Sussman's Retirement Model

The first attempt to organize information on retirement from sport under the flag of a specific theory or model appears to be that of Hill and Lowe (1974). The authors pointed to Sussman's (1971) retirement model in the general sociological literature as an applicable model to withdrawal from sport. Sussman's model took an interactional approach and was specifically intended for studying retirement based on aging, but Hill and Lowe proposed that both occupational retirement and sport retirement have commonalities such as: (a) a negative connotation, (b) a reduction in value, (c) a damaging of self-identity, and (d) a necessary re-adjusting to new roles. Hill and Lowe (1974) felt, however, that the variables in Sussman's (1971) model had not received the proper attention from researchers in the sport realm.

Degradation and Cooling Out

Another early work which is considered somewhat of a landmark study is the late Don Ball's (1976) article, "Failure in Sport." A cursory glance at the title might lead to the belief that this is subject matter entirely different from sport career withdrawal. However, Ball defined forced sport career withdrawal, or retirement, as the ultimate failure, because the retiree can no longer achieve goals, and (s)he is singled out from her/his corresponding position. Because of its visibility and

measurability, the sport setting was chosen by Ball to investigate two concepts of reactions to failure:

(a) degradation (Garfinkel, 1956); and (b) cooling-out (Goffman, 1952). He specifically termed the degradation concept a "pathological model" that leads to "identity destruction," while cooling-out was presented as more of a benign activity that allowed the "failee" to maintain identity, but required an alteration of that identity. He utilized two anecdotal accounts of the day-to-day operations of professional sport, Jim Bouton's (1971) Ball Four for baseball, and George Plimpton's (1967) Paper Lion for football. Ball's (1976) conclusions were: (a) the professional baseball system treated its "failees," i.e., those who had been cut, released, or sent down to the minor leagues, in a manner associated with the degradation concept, and that professional football reflected the cooling-out approach; and (b) that the differences between the two sports rested in their social organizational framework. He further noted that football players tended to have higher levels of education (because of the mandatory collegiate route to the professional ranks), which perhaps made alternatives to the sport career more readily available and more palatable.

Uni-dimensional Theories

Degradation and cooling-out concepts, as utilized by Ball (1976), can be seen as the forerunners to two of the

three predominant uni-dimensional theories which were proposed over the next decade to guide sport career retirement studies. Degradation is quite similar to the approach of thanatological theory, while cooling-out is more reflective of a gerontological approach. Gerontological theory, in which sport retirement is linked to retirement from any "normal" type of employment, and thanatological theory, in which sport career retirement is compared to a social death, were very popular until the mid-1980's. In 1983, a third category, rebirth theory, was proposed by Coakley which suggests that sport retirement is likened to a social rebirth instead of a social death.

Gerontological Theory

Gerontological theory, from the general sociological literature, was the first of the three explanations to be applied to sport career retirement. Gerontological theory encompassed several specific "sub-theories." In 1981, Rosenberg reviewed the general sociology literature on retirement and commented as to its application to sport. His focus was on professional athletics. He made the following observations about these gerontological "sub-theories."

First, disengagement theory holds that retirement is a mutual disengagement between society and the retiree for the benefit of both (Cumming, Dean, Newell, & McCaffrey, 1960; Cummings and Henry, 1961). There is an implication that the

retiree voluntarily defers to the younger replacement and devotes herself/himself to a remaining life of inactivity. Rosenberg (1981a) rejected this theory's applicability to sport, pointing out that: (a) voluntary retirement is not the norm in professional athletics, and (b) athletes generally assume another major occupational role after sport careers are over.

Second, activity theory, also known as substitution theory, states that as roles are lost, new ones are substituted to maintain the previous activity level (Havinghurst & Albrecht, 1953). Rosenberg (1981a) postulated that activity theory might be well-suited for professional sport in that the successful ex-athlete is one who finds a new role to substitute for athletics.

Third, exchange theory is related to activity theory in that successful retirees have weighed alternatives and adjusted social networks (Dowd, 1975). Exchange theory requires a perspective by the athlete and a realization that physical skills have deteriorated, and that she/he can no longer exchange these skills for rewards from the employer.

Fourth, subculture theory looks at retirement in terms of moving into a subculture with different norms than those of mainstream society (Rose, 1965). Rosenberg (1981a) noted, however, that retiring athletes were moving out of, not into, the subculture.

Fifth, continuity theory may be applicable to athletes, according to Rosenberg (1981a), because it notes that a continuity of roles is difficult if the role that is lost is extremely important to the retiree (Atchley, 1980). The extra time and energy generated by the previous role cannot be absorbed by the remaining roles.

Finally, social breakdown theory states that, as a role is lost, the retiree may receive negative labeling, which causes the individual to withdraw (Kuypers & Vengston, 1973). This may lead to greater role loss and a downward spiraling effect. Rosenberg (1981a) found relevance to athletics in this theory by noting the recognition and adoration afforded the currently competing athlete contrasted with the negative labeling of the ex-athlete (no life skills, low education level, narrow social network). Athletes tend to believe this negative labeling and withdraw further.

Rosenberg (1981a) concluded that social breakdown and exchange theories have most relevance for athletes, although he felt that all were relevant in some manner. However, gerontological theory has recently lost much of its luster in application to sport career retirement. Allison and Meyer (1988) concluded:

In addition to problems of lack of equivalence between work disengagement and athletic career disengagement, data to this point have not provided strong support for any of these theoretical orientations. (p. 213)

Additionally, Greendorfer and Blinde (1985) commented that findings in the literature " . . . call into question the usefulness of social gerontological concepts" (p. 102).

They faulted the studies guided by this perspective for an inability to distinguish consequences of leaving a sport from consequences of "normal life transitions" (p. 102).

Curtis and Ennis (1988) added their criticism:

These gerontology theories have been conveniently available for extrapolation to leaving elite sport roles. However, they would seem to provide a poor fit; they result in a rather incomplete understanding of sport role disengagement. These theories were intended for, and best apply to, final retirement from the work role. (p. 103)

Thanatological Theory

Thanatological theory and its application to sport career retirement was also addressed by Rosenberg in 1984. His review, along with that of Lerch's (1984), is insightful, if more pessimistic. Drawing from Ball's (1976) "Failure in Sport" article, which was singled out as breaking ground for connecting thanatological theory and sport, Rosenberg (1984) noted the acute importance of self-concept and identity to the athlete. He discussed disengagement from an athletic career in terms of a social death in which one becomes viewed as a "non-person." Rosenberg discussed Kastenbaum's (1981) definitions and categories of social death comparing them to athletics, as well as those of Glaser and Strauss (1965), Richard Kalish (1966), David Sudnow (1967) and Charmaz (1980). These works

are not reviewed as part of this chapter, and it is suggested that Rosenberg's (1984) article provides a more detailed account of these concepts.

Lerch (1984) stated that, while the relationship between "real" death and social death had not been fully explored, he pointed out two concepts which " . . . reveal interesting parallels between the socially dying athlete and the physically dying hospital patient" (p. 263). Both Lerch and Rosenberg discussed the application of these two concepts to the sport setting: (a) Glaser and Strauss' (1965) awareness contexts, and (b) Kubler-Ross' (1969) stages of dying. Glaser and Strauss' awareness contexts theory is based on the assumption that the participants in a physical death scenario (patient, family, and hospital staff) must make a judgement as to whether or not the patient's condition is terminal. Four contexts are possible: (a) closed awareness, i.e., the patient is unaware of impending death, but the hospital staff is aware; (b) suspicion awareness, i.e., the patient suspects the terminality, but staff and family protect her/him by withholding facts; (c) mutual pretense awareness, i.e., all interactants are aware of the situation, but choose to ignore it; (d) open awareness, i.e., all participants know the truth and openly acknowledge it. Kubler-Ross' stages of death concerns the patient's coping stages when informed

that she/he is dying: (a) denial; (b) anger; (c) bargaining; (d) depression; and (e) acceptance.

While Rosenberg (1984) preferred to utilize the Kubler-Ross (1969) concept in the sport setting, Lerch (1984) found relevance in both approaches and used anecdotal examples to illustrate the two theories. Among the most interesting is the example offered for suspicion awareness, in which he utilized Bouton's (1971) work for an example. Bouton told of his evaluating his own status on the team by using the manner in which he was addressed by the pitching coach:

If he looked past you, over your shoulder as if you didn't exist, it was all over and you might as well pack your bag because you could be traded or sent down at any moment. (p. 17-18)

Lerch (1984) also utilized Bouton's autobiography to illustrate Kubler-Ross' stages of dying. Bouton's (1971) commentary, in fact, seems to parallel quite closely the stages suggested by Kubler-Ross.

Both authors concluded that many relationships could be drawn between sport career retirement and thanatological theory, although, as yet, few studies had been done to examine the relationship. However, Greendorfer and Blinde (1985) found fault with this approach in terms of its generalizability to the majority of athletes. Experts suggest that thanatological theory presents a picture that is too narrow in scope and is felt to assume a negative perspective. While anecdotal accounts from various athletes would certainly seem to provide evidence to support this

theory, they offer no explanation for those that seem to adjust quite satisfactorily during transition from sport, and perhaps even welcome retirement as a positive event.

Rebirth Theory

Coakley (1983) presented the rebirth theory which challenged these previously mentioned fatalistic perspectives and suggested that retirement from sport presents opportunity. Coakley suggested that retiring from sport should be viewed as " . . . a beginning rather than an end" (p. 2). He likened it to a form of graduation, and indicated that one experiences social rebirth rather than social death. Coakley listed numerous studies which were conducted under the assumption that sport career retirement translated into a negative event (Ball, 1976; Hill & Lowe, 1974; McPherson, 1980; Rosenberg, 1980, 1981b). He made an interesting observation that social gerontologists in their early stages viewed "real life" retirement in much the same pessimistic fashion, but recent literature had revised this perspective to the extent that, despite the fact that problems might exist, retirement itself was not the causative factor of these adjustment difficulties (Atchley, 1980; George, 1980). Coakley felt that sport sociologists would eventually reach these same conclusions as the knowledge about sport career retirement grew.

Indeed, two recent studies which appear to support Coakley's rebirth thesis are those of Allison and Meyer

(1988), and Curtis and Ennis (1988). Allison and Meyer looked at a sample of retired female tennis professionals and found that retirement did not elicit traumatic adjustment problems. Retirement was actually eagerly anticipated by many athletes in their sample so that other roles might be pursued. Similarly, Curtis and Ennis found in their study of former Canadian Junior hockey players that there was " . . . no evidence of negative consequences of disengagement" (p. 87).

Even in evaluating what few studies previously existed, Coakley (1983) reported that, although some adjustment was involved, most subjects did make successful adjustments (Arviko, 1976; Haerle, 1975; Lerch, 1981; Reynolds, 1981). However, while thanatological theory may present an overly pessimistic view, rebirth theory is certainly not applicable in cases such as those described by McCarver (1987) in anecdotal literature:

Many athletes think there is no life after baseball. The dreadful thing to contemplate is that for many of these guys that proves to be correct. (p. 159)

Process and Transition Models

While most past research centers on investigating retirement as an **event**, a relatively new approach has been that of emphasizing the processual nature of sport career retirement. Greendorfer and Blinde (1985) proposed such a perspective which focused on, among other things, the continuity of behaviors instead of termination of behaviors,

the definition of retirement as a process rather than an event, a shifting of priorities over a developmental time span, and a normal adjustment of a mild nature. This approach found some validation in their empirical work, which will be discussed in more detail later in this paper. Earlier works which keyed on this process-oriented definition of retirement include that of Haerle (1975), which looked at the athlete's career patterns over the lifespan, and Prus (1984). Prus discussed: (a) the processes that control how people become involved in roles, i.e., seekership, recruitment, closure, and drift; (b) how these roles are maintained and intensified, i.e., ideology, identity, commitment, activity, and relationships; and (c) why one becomes disinvolved from a particular role. While noting that literature on disinvolvement from sport was limited, mainly because of the unavailability of former athletes, he suggested that the same factors facilitating continuity of a role, once firmly established, inhibit disinvolvement from the role. In other words, the more the individual becomes embedded in the role of athlete, the more preparation and effort is needed to discontinue the role.

One of the more interesting frameworks developed to study sport career retirement was presented by Svoboda and Vanek (1982). Drawing from several general theoretical approaches to psychological stress, they developed a "system model" to explain elite athletes' retirement from sport

careers. Influence can be seen from Sussman's (1971) model, as well as from the concept of retirement as **process**. Along these lines, Svoboda and Vanek proposed that the transition from a sport career actually begins when the athlete first becomes aware that one day (s)he will leave sport. Their model addressed both exogenous and endogenous factors that affect this awareness and the resulting coping mechanisms. For whatever reason, this particular interactional model has been all but ignored in subsequent literature.

Finally, very recent works by Pearson and Petitpas (1990) and Swain (1991) spoke of the applicability of Schlossberg's Model of Transitions (1981) as a framework for studying withdrawal from sport. This model supports withdrawal as a process over time and speaks of three components: (a) nature of transition; (b) coping resources; and (c) assimilation and perception over time. In the qualitative study that resulted from use of this perspective (Swain, 1991), Schlossberg's model was found to be applicable to the study of retirement from sport.

Empirical Studies in Sport Career Retirement

These previously mentioned conflicting theoretical perspectives would seem to indicate that our comprehension of the dynamics of sport career retirement/transition is, as yet, incomplete. Also, most researchers agree that systematic approaches to empirical studies have fallen short

of the mark. Empirical studies of any sort on the subject of sport career retirement are few in number. Until recently, existing research has been of traditional quantitative methodology, usually of a sociological perspective, with the main purpose being to identify and isolate visible variables for prediction purposes. Many scientists lament the lack of attention to qualitative studies which explore the perceptions and perspectives of the athlete who actually experiences the retirement (Allison & Meyer, 1988; Blinde & Stratta, 1991; Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985; Prus, 1984).

Studies of Professional Athletes

Most studies of professional athletes address the male, team sport athletes. Early works generally relied on gerontological theory, with life satisfaction as the critical variable. In some cases, job satisfaction and occupational status were substituted for life satisfaction. Such variables were usually measured by Likert scale, or similar techniques.

Haerle (1975), Arviko (1976), Lerch (1981), and Rosenberg (1981b), used professional baseball players as subjects in their studies. Haerle used a questionnaire to gain information from 335 ex-baseball players, and generally concluded that retirement was somewhat stressful, but that transitions from the sport careers were fairly successful. Haerle based these generalities on coded responses to

questions addressing the socio-psychological dimension and the occupational dimension. Of interest for purposes of this study, Haerle found that three-fourths of his sample were past-oriented, and did not begin to think about, or plan for, retirement until they were in the last quarter of their careers (early to mid-thirties). He also found, through a path analysis, that first jobs after the end of the sport career were affected by sport fame (path coefficient 0.53), but this factor was far less important in successive employment. Education tended to have the strongest effect (path coefficient 0.39) in overall occupational achievement.

Arviko (1976) and Lerch (1981) provided similar studies, and both found that ex-players were generally satisfied with their lives. Arviko (1976) asked 153 ex-baseball players to rate their present occupational and life satisfaction. He found that those players who expanded on their social roles while still playing were more satisfied with their lives and jobs. Commitment to religion, education levels, and income levels were also positively related to life satisfaction as defined by the players.

Lerch (1981) sent questionnaires to 511 ex-baseball players. He used continuity theory (gerontology) as the basis for his study, and he concluded that no sport variables were significantly related to sport retirement adjustment. No relationship was found between: (a) length

of sport career, (b) level of sport performance, and (c) sport commitment, and life satisfaction after sport. Significant predictors were the non-sport related variables of health, post-sport income, education, and pre-sport retirement attitude. These variables still only explained 15% of observed variation in life satisfaction. Lerch concluded that " . . . the most satisfied retired baseball player differs little from the most satisfied conventional retiree" (p. 145).

Rosenberg (1981b) also looked at the first job held by the athlete after the end of the athletic career. He surveyed administrators of 21 of 26 clubs in major league baseball and found that most clubs were unaware of the current status or whereabouts of their ex-players. Rosenberg noted that, quite possibly, " . . . the real information in these responses is that for all intents and purposes, the teams neither care about nor are interested in the fates of their former employees" (p. 5). Research results were based on answers for about one-fourth of the individuals for whom the teams had addresses. Rosenberg found that 65.7% of the respondents remained in sport in some capacity, usually as a coach, scout, or minor league manager.

Along with Lerch (1981), Reynolds (1981), in his study of 596 ex-professional football players, also failed to find a significant relationship between any sport-related

variables and either (a) job status or (b) job satisfaction. Sports fame did not relate to current job status. Major factors related to job status were non-sport in nature (race, education level, and father's occupation).

It is noted that all of these studies had very low response rates, which leads to the question of representativeness of samples. Arviko (1976), Lerch (1981), Reynolds (1981), and Rosenberg (1981) had response rates of 38%, 45%, 22%, and 25%, respectively. In Rosenberg's study, 21 of 26 teams responded, but they only had information for a total of 25% of the athletes. Rosenberg called for a standard operating procedure of testing for response bias in future studies.

Talamini (1989) utilized an archival content analysis to find that 74% of ex-baseball players held high prestige jobs, as determined by the Statistical Abstract of the United States and the United States Department of the Census. Of this 74%, 28% of the jobs were in baseball, and 30% were in somewhat related fields, e.g., sporting goods salesman, recreation director, TV sports personality, etc. Talamini concluded that only 42% of ex-players were totally severed from sport when their playing careers were over.

Semyonov (1986), questioning 205 retired pro soccer players, tested the hypothesis that a professional soccer career assisted in occupational mobility in Israel. He utilized a Likert scale to examine socio-economic background

and achievement level in sport; Kraus' 100-point prestige scale to measure father's occupation and the dependent variable of the subjects' current occupational level; and one question to ascertain ethnicity. His results indicated that one's achievement level in sport did not serve as a route for upward occupational mobility, and that the only variables which did affect mobility were education level and ethnicity.

Studies of professional female athletes and professional individual sport athletes are few in number. However, three studies are worthy of note. Allison and Meyer (1988) recently surveyed 28 retired female professional tennis players utilizing an open-ended questionnaire and taking a process-oriented approach. Results were that female tennis athletes generally did not find retirement adjustment traumatic, and, in many cases, retirement was even eagerly anticipated. However, the sample in this study was very small (20 of 28 athletes returned the open-ended questionnaires for analysis), so Allison and Meyer (1988) suggested caution in interpreting the data.

Both empirical efforts worthy of mention in individual sports, only, involve studies of boxers, and both are dated works. Weinberg and Arond (1952) studied 95 ex-boxers and found that, after retirement, the majority of these individuals experienced loss of job status, self-esteem, and

emotional problems which were generally associated with attempting to find employment. The Weinberg and Arond (1952) study did not address ethnicity or the socio-economic background of the boxers' families. However, Hare (1971) found that socio-economic background and minority status were significant variables in adjustment to a non-sport career for his sample of boxers.

The previously mentioned qualitative work by Swain (1991) was conducted utilizing three in-depth interviews each with ten participants from a combination of male professional team and individual sports. The themes emerging from this study were reported in terms of Schlossberg's Model of Transitions (1981), in which the three components are: (a) nature of transition; (b) coping resources; and (c) assimilation and perception over time. The nature of transition was: (a) that withdrawal from sport was found to be a process over time which began before the end of the sport career; and (b) catalytic events, such as injury, trades, demotions, etc., triggered awareness within athletes that their sport career was short term. Coping resources included a searching for direction and sometimes a reaching out. Perceptions over time were expressed as a sense of relief once a decision about retirement was made, and there was a pursuit of new opportunities. Most participants found that the transition process was relatively easy. According to the author, the

key to whether the process was considered easy or not was in whether there were internal shifts in personal values.

Studies of Elite Amateur and National Team Athletes

Empirical efforts involving other skill levels (elite amateur, intercollegiate, interscholastic, etc.) are also scarce. Mihovilovic (1968) contributed one of the first systematic works utilizing elite Yugoslavian male soccer players. His is one of the few studies using descriptive data obtained in interviews documenting perceptions of athletes toward retirement. His conclusions were that retirement involved a painful adjustment for these players, and that there was usually an attempt to "cling" to the sport career as long as possible. Mihovilovic found that as few as 5% of the soccer players retired voluntarily. Most retirements were forced and sudden.

In contrast, Coakley (1983) re-examined Mihovilovic's data and found results that differed from the original pessimistic conclusions. Using the same database, Coakley noted that, despite the severe manner in which the athletes left the sport, they appeared to adjust quite well, considering that over 82% remained physically fit, 84% remained non-drinkers or continued to consume alcohol at their previous level, 60% frequently communicated with teammates, and 90% stayed in the sport in some capacity.

The previously mentioned Svoboda and Vanek study (1982) utilized a system model of stress to investigate the

retirement of male and female European national team members. The instrument utilized was a questionnaire. It is noted that the total sample was 163, but only 30 of these were females. Svoboda and Vanek found that retirement stress existed, although in different forms and intensities depending on the athlete. Only 17% of the athletes indicated that they experienced no adjustment difficulties. After retirement, almost all continued sport activity in some fashion. Athletes who completed the questionnaires indicated that their most important goal during their competitive years was "to be the first" (71.95%). However, although possessing this high need to achieve in sport, only 59.76% indicated such a resolution to continue this need to achieve in their new professions.

Werthner and Orlick (1986) contributed an insightful qualitative work with successful Canadian Olympic athletes. Results were based on in-depth interviews with twenty-eight retired male and female athletes who had either been medalists or had finished in the top six in individual sports or in the top half in team sports. Guiding questions were: (a) how did they rate their lives in general; (b) how much personal control did they feel; and (c) what was their level of self-confidence. These three questions were asked for three different time frames: (a) active competition; (b) immediately after retirement event; and (c) at the time of the interview. Werthner and Orlick (1986) indicated that

the majority of these athletes felt that they had experienced relatively difficult adjustments in transition. Seven factors were identified from the transcripts as appearing to effect the level of adjustment difficulty that athletes experienced: (a) availability of alternative focus; (b) whether or not they had a sense of accomplishment (had achieved goals); (c) coaching; (d) injuries; (e) sport association problems; (f) finances; and (g) support of family and friends.

Curtis and Ennis (1988) surveyed 109 male former Canadian Junior hockey players who had retired from a particular club over the previous twenty years. The sample ranged in age from 17 to 40. A beginning response rate of 72.3% is worthy of mention, even though the original responders were reduced from 139 to 109 due to the fact that some were still playing collegiate or professional hockey. Curtis and Ennis utilized three dependent variables suggested by previous literature: (a) life satisfaction, (b) employment, and (c) marital status. For these variables the authors found no evidence of negative consequences of leaving sport. However, in qualitative inquiries, Curtis and Ennis (1988) noted that many of these junior hockey players mentioned feelings of loss at the time of retirement, but they continued to be involved in the sport in some capacity, which appeared to attenuate negativity.

Studies of College Athletes

In college athletics, as in professional sport, earlier studies utilized male, team sport participants as subjects, and measured functional adjustment rather than emotional adjustment. Dubois (1980) and Sack and Thiel (1979) concentrated on football players from an occupational standpoint. Utilizing a questionnaire, Dubois (1980) compared 160 ex-athletes with 450 non-athletes in terms of the effect of athletic status on subsequent occupational status and earnings. Athletic status was found to have no significant effect on either dependent variable. Dubois (1980) concluded that athletic status does little to influence later occupational success and earnings.

Sack and Thiel (1979) also conducted a comparative study of 218 football players and 264 non-athletes who graduated from Notre Dame between 1946 and 1965. A survey response rate of 64% was noted. They pointed out that football players' socio-economic status was much lower than non-athletes while in college. However, both athletes and non-athletes of similar backgrounds progressed well beyond their background in subsequent careers. The authors found that first string football players showed higher current income levels than second string and reserve players, and that first stringers were more likely to become top ranking executives in their businesses (34% as opposed to 13% second team players and 14% reserves). Also, non-athletes were

significantly more likely to pursue graduate degrees than athletes.

Kleiber, Greendorfer, Blinde, and Sandahl (1987), and Greendorfer and Blinde (1985) published what appear to be the only extensive works dealing with both male and female intercollegiate athletics. Kleiber et al. (1987), utilized a questionnaire to poll 427 athletes (a 38% response rate). Measuring life satisfaction as the dependent variable, they found a significant main effect for career-ending injury (negative relationship between injury and life satisfaction), and no effect for games started nor awards received. There were no interactions.

Greendorfer and Blinde (1985) used survey information taken from a total of 1,123 former athletes. They utilized the process-oriented approach and found that patterns, for the most part, were similar for males and females. They also did not find significant evidence that athletes experienced adjustment difficulties. Greendorfer and Blinde suggested that the results of the study point to the need for more time-span studies, because a clear pattern of lessening interest in sport and increasing interest in education and social life occurred between the freshman and senior years.

However, Adler and Adler (1985), in a qualitative study of 38 Division I male basketball players, found the opposite of Greendorfer and Blinde (1985). Adler and Adler (1985)

found that the shift in interest was toward basketball and away from academics over the college time span.

Hallinan and Snyder (1988) conducted a unique study which deserves mention in that it used a case study methodology to investigate forced disengagement of the female collegiate athlete from a thanatological perspective. Conclusions from the four case studies presented were that their experiences closely followed those that Kubler-Ross (1969) presented in her stages of dying theory.

Studies of Interscholastic Athletes

In high school sport, Sands (1978) studied 153 former high school football and basketball players and found that, although sport was considered important at the time they played it, the end of their competitive involvement did not produce trauma. It was considered a phase from which they had to move on.

Summary and Critique of the Literature

The topic of sport career "retirement," or transition, is in its infancy, in comparison to other areas in sport psychology and sociology. The theoretical base for studies in this area has been unstable, and has borrowed from the general sociological and psychological literature. This seems to have resulted in both forced fittings of theories and/or equivocal findings within empirical studies based on such borrowed theories and models. Recently, a trend toward

more interactive, multi-dimensional theories, such as transition models, and system models, has been noted, and there have been less frequent attempts to hypothesize in terms of uni-dimensional approaches, such as gerontological theory, thanatological theory, and rebirth theory. However, there still seems to be the tendency toward grouping all sport career retirement situations together, with little regard for the specific contexts of the sport setting. Also, there have still only been a few attempts to bring the athletes, themselves, in as experts, and to see, through their expert eyes, the experience of exiting elite sport careers.

Almost all existing works in the area of sport career retirement point to the lack of empirical studies. Studies were conducted with various theoretical frameworks, and sometimes, with no evidence at all of guiding frameworks. Also, these studies utilized many different dependent variables, from functional adjustment variables of job earnings and mobility, to emotional adjustment. In addition to the lack of studies, varied theoretical frameworks, and different dependent variables, researchers have also pointed to the questionable representativeness of the existing studies, not only due to low return rates on questionnaires, but also to a lack of information on female athletes (Coakley, 1983; Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985; Allison & Meyer, 1988). Additionally, previous works utilize conflicting

operational definitions of "retirement" and "sport career." By way of example, do we address the youngster that no longer competes on an elementary football team a "retiree"? What about the whole area of "burnout" when the athlete leaves the sport prematurely? What exactly is a "sport career"? Does it include being a coach, a trainer, a scout? If so, most of the existing studies about sport career retirement have utilized individuals who have not yet retired!

The most consistent finding of the previously discussed inconsistent empirical literature appears to be that sport fame does not translate into upward mobility in occupational status (DuBois, 1980; Haerle, 1975; Reynolds, 1981; and Seymonov, 1986), and that factors that do affect job status and earnings are the non-sport related variables of ethnicity and education.

Additionally, Greendorfer and Blinde (1985), Swain (1991), and Werthner and Orlick (1986), spoke of the necessity of an alternative focus upon, or prior to, retirement, in order to ease transition. Greendorfer and Blinde (1985), in particular, noticed a reprioritization of focus and interest over the collegiate athletic career span, and they also found that their sample experienced relatively mild adjustment, suggesting some relationship between the two factors.

However, what do we really know about the **experience** of leaving a sport career, and what role does socialization into sport, as well as the perceived nature of the sport culture and the active sport career itself, play in the experience? This study addressed these issues, and the emerging themes are explored in the following pages.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this investigation was to describe the experiences of former intercollegiate football players as they exited their collegiate sport careers. What follows is a rationale for selection and development of methodology and a description of the methodology itself.

Rationale for Selection and Development of Methodology

The theoretical frameworks, or philosophies, or ways of knowing that researchers bring to their studies, inform the type of research questions that they ask, as well as the particular methodology they choose for data analysis. In this case, the research question was:

What was the experience of former intercollegiate athletes as they exited their collegiate sport careers?

Experience cannot be measured effectively in quantitative fashion, and, in qualitative research, the researcher becomes a part of the study. It is vital, then, that biases and assumptions be explored at the beginning of the research endeavor.

To understand the pre-existing assumptions of this research setting, it is necessary at this point to differentiate between two global ways of knowing in the

social sciences: (a) positivist, and (b) interpretist. Positivists and interpretists fundamentally differ in how they seek to "understand" a phenomenon. The positivist seeks understanding through explanation with the goal of prediction and control. Interpretists seek understanding through interpretation and "seeing" through the eyes of another, not to control, but to more effectively interact with one another.

Positivists such as Comte and Durkheim designed studies or theories consistent with the need to explain and predict phenomena. Positivists look for facts and cause-effect relationships which they assume to be available, because, in this way of knowing, there is only one "truth" to know. However, the interpretist perspective stresses multiple realities dependent upon interpretation. Pluralism is sought rather than withdrawn from, or controlled for. For the interpretist, there can be as many "truths" as there are individual experiences of these "truths" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984).

This study was guided by an interpretist framework. "Interpretist" is a general term encompassing many more specific philosophies, such as symbolic interaction, existential sociology, existential phenomenology, etc. (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Because these more specific theories basically belong to the same "family," they

will be grouped together under the interpretist heading from this point forward.

Because the research question posed for this project springs from an interpretist world view, and because it seeks knowledge of participants' perceptions and first-person experiences, qualitative research methodology was chosen for this study. The purpose of the project was not to generalize, but to describe the experiences of a small group of individuals in such a way as to increase the knowledge base.

Description of the Research Process

In the previous sections, the theoretical framework of this study was established, and the foundation for development of the research question was set. The next steps of the research project were as follows: (a) pilot testing; (b) bias exploration and bracketing; (c) identification of participants; (d) interviewing of participants; and (e) analysis of data. What follows is a more detailed explanation of the steps specified above.

Pilot Testing

Over the course of the last few years, several pilot studies were conducted looking at various qualitative methodologies which might be appropriate for investigating the athlete in transition, i.e., interviewing, case studies, and participant observation (Parker, 1990; Parker, 1991a;

Parker, 1991b; Parker, 1992). These pilot studies also acted as preparation for the experience of conducting interviews, establishing rapport with participants, overcoming technical problems with tape recording, transcriptions, etc. Pilot testing was used to learn to refrain from directing interviews, to ask questions that would invite conversation rather than hinder it, and to put participants at ease. Finally, these pilot studies contributed to the compilation of the ethnographic interview questions (Appendix A) based on certain emerging themes noted in these studies, e.g., power relationships, paternal influences, and changes in social support networks.

These pilot interviews, case studies, and observations, along with the literature review, led to a methodology which consisted of examining the experience from both a phenomenological and an ethnographic perspective utilizing the dialogic interview. These two interview perspectives will be outlined in greater detail in the following paragraphs.

Bias exploration and bracketing

In actuality, bias exploration should be a continual process throughout the data gathering and data analysis procedure. Beginning with researcher assumptions and theoretical world view, this bias exploration was initiated. However, it is helpful and recommended that the researcher submit to a bracketing interview (Seidman, 1991) to further

clarify pre-existing assumptions. Therefore, prior to the interviewing of participants, skilled qualitative interviewers conducted two separate interview sessions with me about my biases and assumptions. I was interviewed on the first occasion by members of a qualitative research group, and on the second occasion by a member of my doctoral committee. In essence, I became the first participant in this study. Based on enlightenment from these bracketing interviews, I believe that I was better able to refrain from influencing interpretation of the findings.

In addition to my interpretist world view, the bracketing interviews confirmed that I expected to see a control relationship between the athletic department and the players, in which the athletic administration held the power. I also expected to find ethnic differences in the perception of that power. I acknowledged that I am a supporter of athletes' rights, and that I believed many parents, schools, organizations, and fans abuse those rights on occasion. I also noted that I am quite familiar with the game of football and the sport-specific language that those intimately involved with football use.

Allowing for the findings of the bracketing interview, I believe that I was very careful not to lead the phenomenological portions of the interviews in any direction, particularly directions toward athletic administrations and personnel and issues of race. I was

careful throughout the interviews not to start any question with, "Don't you think," and I also tried to use the language of the participant, in order to frame the probe questions. Finally, I believe that I was careful in allowing myself to make the familiar strange in dealing with sport and football terminology. For example, if a participant discussed "lifting," I would ask him to explain.

There is no way to rid a study of researcher bias. However, I feel comfortable in reporting that all reasonable precautions were taken to minimize misinterpretation based on researcher bias.

Identification and Selection of Participants

Participants were volunteers, and were selected from major college football programs in the South. All participants met the following criteria: (a) were Division I intercollegiate football players; (b) had completed their collegiate eligibility within the last three years and were at least eight months removed from collegiate football competition at the time they were interviewed; and (c) were not under contract with any professional football team at the time they were interviewed.

Seven participants were interviewed for the study, and they were selected with as much attention to diversity as possible within the original parameters listed above, e.g., diversity in race, playing position, talent level, and current career situation. Such diversity allowed for a wide

range of backgrounds and experiences. Participants were chosen from lists of candidates meeting the above criteria which were obtained from the men's athletic departments or from such publicly available documents as media guides and student telephone directories. To ascertain their willingness to participate in the study, each athlete was contacted via telephone or personally, sometimes with assistance and facilitation from academic counseling offices.

Once participants had been chosen, the research process was explained to them both verbally and via Informed Consent Statements (Appendix B). If participants wished to go forward with the project, they were scheduled for interview sessions.

Interviewing Participants

There are many qualitative techniques available to the researcher, but one technique particularly suited to obtaining an understanding of human experience and perception is the interview. Kvale (1983) states that the interview may be the most effective and powerful technique for gaining insight into another person's experience.

The interviews were tape recorded for accuracy purposes. They were too lengthy for reliance on memory and written notes. In view of the nature of the study and the importance of the athlete's perspective, accuracy was considered absolutely essential, and was not feasible

without use of tape recordings. Tapes and related information were kept under lock and key.

Participants were advised that the interviews were to be taped, and they were given the opportunity to refuse the interview if they did not agree. All agreed to the procedures. They were identified on the tapes by pseudonym only. The only written identification of the participants was their signatures on the Informed Consent Statements (see Appendix B), and these were kept in a separate file. Access to all raw data was limited to myself and my advisor, although portions of transcripts in which all identifying characteristics had been altered were shared with a qualitative research group, which assisted in data analysis. I transcribed all interview tapes myself. It is felt that these precautions assured a minimal risk to confidentiality.

There are different types of interviewing methods, and some are more applicable than others depending on what type of knowledge is to be obtained. In this study, two types of interview techniques were employed, each of which provided for obtaining different forms of information.

Phenomenological Interviewing

The phenomenological interview is an open-ended dialogic interview that is basically centered around one guiding question. The goal of the phenomenological interview is to obtain a first-person description of some aspect of human experience (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio,

1989). To this end, the participant is viewed as the expert and is given control of the course of the interview. The intent is to ascertain what is figural to the interviewee about the experience in question. Once the guiding question is asked at the beginning of the interview, the interviewer has no agenda and no interview protocol. No a priori questions guide the direction of the interview. The phenomenological interview more closely resembles a conversation than a stimulus-response session. The interviewer's role in the process is to facilitate conversation and to provide an atmosphere conducive to trust and acceptance (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989).

The objective in using the phenomenological interview as a technique in this study was to gain an understanding of what each participant deemed figural in the experience of exiting his college football career. The phenomenological question for this study was: "Tell me what your life has been like since you played your last collegiate football game" (Appendix A, 1). This approach leaves the ball completely in the participant's court, so to speak. He provided his own figural experiences rather than responding to those of the researcher.

While there is no a priori protocol in phenomenological interviewing, there are certain prompting questions that become almost second nature to the practiced researcher; these prompts were used as needed in this study. Such

questions as "Can you tell me about another time when you felt this way?"; "What was X like?"; "Can you describe this for me; I'm not clear on what you mean"; "Tell me more about this", etc., were frequently a part of the phenomenological dialogue.

Ethnographic interviewing

The second interview technique, the ethnographic technique (Appendix A, 2), was more structured than the phenomenological technique, but was still dialogic, and very open-ended (Spradley, 1979). The major distinction between ethnographic and phenomenological interviewing is that there is more researcher input in the ethnographic style. The researcher has questions about specific topics that (s)he wishes to ask. These questions are usually generated by existing knowledge or literature. The participant is still considered to be the expert, and the dialogue is still conversational in nature, however, this conversation is directed toward specific topics of interest. It is acceptable for the researcher to "guide" the participant back to the topic of interest if the conversation drifts too far off the topic.

In this project, there were certain questions suggested by previous research and by pilot studies. There were other questions which arose out of the interviews with other participants and different interview sessions with the same participant. Because qualitative data analysis is on-going,

interviews are analyzed as they are conducted in a spiral fashion. If some participants spoke of a particular aspect of their experience as figural and others did not, the ethnographic protocol might include a question about that aspect not addressed by all participants.

Interview sessions were conducted in a professional and private setting to protect confidentiality. Approximately five to ten minutes were initially devoted to answering questions about the nature of the study, attending to the Informed Consent Statement, and putting the participant at ease with informal conversation (see Appendix A). Then, the phenomenological question indicated above was discussed. The participants were allowed free rein and all the time they needed to deal with the phenomenological question. For some, this meant all of one session and part of another. For others, conversation began to lag after about 45 minutes, and it was at this point that we moved on to the more structured, ethnographic questions that had not already been answered in their free-flowing discussion. However, what was figural to the participant was considered of paramount importance in this study, so priority was given to the phenomenological question.

The original plan was to interview each participant on three separate occasions, with each session lasting approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour. The first session was to be devoted to the phenomenological question, the second

session would target ethnographic questions, and the third session would serve as a debriefing interview in which clarification and mutual reflection on the previous interviews would be the focus. However, two considerations necessitated a change in this strategy. First, my dissertation committee suggested that some participants might be willing to expand their discussions for more than the 2 1/4 hour aggregate minimum, and that these individuals might be interviewed in more depth than others. Secondly, there were two participants who, for various reasons, were not available for second and third interviews. In both of these cases, however, their first sessions lasted approximately 1 1/2 hours. For this reason, the actual interview times ranged from six hours total to 1 1/2 hours total, per person, with a mean interview time of approximately three hours. Also, due to extremely busy schedules, some participants preferred to "squeeze" three sessions into two, etc. Anything that could be done to accommodate the busy agendas of these participants was done, within reasonable and appropriate limits. There were several interviews which took place on weekends and holidays, as requested by the participants.

Although the specific time frame of each of the participants' interviews is not identical, I feel that the data saturation point was reached, and, as the reader will

be able to see from the findings, major themes emerged clearly and repetitively from the transcripts.

Analysis of Information

The data analysis of qualitative research is an on-going process throughout the study, and is not done as a unit after all data are collected. As information is gathered, it is read as many times as necessary to analyze data. Qualitative data analysis might best be thought of as a spiral process which precedes and follows data collection, rather than as a linear progression associated with quantitative method. In most qualitative studies, the spiral stops only when the data become repetitive. Pollick and Vierra (1988) state, "data collection and analysis are interactive in the sense that they inform and guide one another" (p. 211).

Data analysis for this study was conducted according to standard qualitative procedures. Major sources for such procedures included Taylor and Bogdan (1984), Spradley (1979), Pollick and Vierra (1988), and Glesne and Peshkin (1992). Sources of information in the analysis included transcripts, post-interview field notes, the research journal (in which personal impressions were noted), and triangulation sources (such as media guides, newspaper articles, etc.), when available.

Interview transcripts were read first for errors and for an overview, and then re-read numerous times for deeper

content. Additional readings were accompanied by noting in the transcript margins possible emerging themes. A tentative list of themes was made and was modified as more data were collected. Data were coded in the transcripts to refine preliminary themes in a systematic manner. Typologies, or classification schemes, were constructed based on these coding systems. Finally, themes emerged from the data, some of which confirmed or rejected existing theory, and some represented new possibilities. Bogdan and Taylor (1984) specifically instruct:

You should be careful not to force your data into someone else's framework. If concepts fit your data, do not be afraid to borrow them. If they do not, forget about them. (p. 135)

This is indicative of the grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which is prevalent in the qualitative research literature. Theory is grounded in, and generated from, the data, rather than hypothesized prior to data collection.

CHAPTER 4

SETTING THE STAGE

Introduction

The chapter begins with a brief overview of the structure of college football. This discussion is followed by a description of the seven participants as a group and individually. The chapter concludes with typical day vignettes of the football season and of post-eligibility agendas. It should be noted that all personal names utilized from this point forward are pseudonyms, not only the names of the participants, but also of any coaches or other athletic department personnel referred to by the participants. The generic university name of State U. is substituted for whichever university the participants attended. For example, two participants may have attended different universities, but both universities will be referred to as State U. to designate their "home" university. Other liberties have been taken with certain identifying information to help preserve anonymity.

The College Football Structure

As a rule, the formal structure of the college football system is presided over by the head coach, who answers to the athletic director of all intercollegiate sports. Just

below the head coach's position are usually two coordinators--an offensive coordinator and a defensive coordinator. Under these coordinators are a variety of position coaches. These position coaches supervise players who perform similar functions on a football team, e.g., defensive backs coach, linebacker coach, etc. In some instances, coordinators also perform position coach functions.

In NCAA Division I-A, coaches supervise anywhere from 85 to 95 scholarship football players. Since 1989, there has been a gradual reduction in the number of scholarships allowed by the NCAA. A target date of 1995 has been selected as the date of mandatory reduction to 85 scholarships per team, although voluntary reduction has begun at some schools. There is no formal limit to the number of walk-ons (non-scholarship players) who can compete for a position on the team. However, individual conferences often mandate a specific number of players who can dress out for conference games.

The Participants: Portraits

The Participants as a Group

The seven participants in this study were selected with as much attention to diversity as possible within the parameters of the study. Four whites and three African-Americans were interviewed. Three offensive team players,

three defensive team players, and one special teams (a special group of players who take the field for kick-offs and punts) player were selected. Playing status ranged from one that seldom played to one that started and starred most of his career. All began their college football careers in either 1986, 1987, or 1988. Of the seven, five were "red-shirted," or withheld from competition in their freshman years, while two played as "true" freshmen. All but one were still pursuing bachelor's degrees when the interview process was begun, but three graduated during the process. One was already a graduate student at the time of his interviews. Three participants pursued sport-related majors, two studied political science, and two majored in sociology-related fields.

Socioeconomic profiles did not provide as much diversity as anticipated, although they proved to divide along racial lines. The four white players were children of middle-class to upper middle-class households. African-Americans' social class was perceived to be in the lower socioeconomic range. In some cases, the participants characterized their own socioeconomic status, and in others, assumptions were drawn from such comments as, "We didn't have much money, and the only way I could get a college degree was with a football scholarship." All but one participant, an African-American, were raised in southern states, and were products of rural, or small town culture.

The one exception was born and raised in a large east coast metropolitan area.

In all but one case, the parents of the white athletes were still married and living together, and in all cases, the families were described as "close." The fathers and/or brothers were perceived as instrumental in participants' early motivations to play sports. The mothers were seldom knowledgeable about sports originally, although some began to follow the game closely in order to follow their sons' careers.

Two of the three African-American athletes were raised in single-parent homes in which the mothers performed most of the child-rearing duties. In the third case, both parents were technically available to him, but he was abused, and he described his childhood as a time when he raised himself. This participant left home at the age of fourteen.

Of the seven participants, two are recently married and have no children. One lives with his fiancée and has one child. One lives with a girlfriend and has no children, and the other three are single and live alone or with a male roommate.

Table 1 represents a summary of demographic data on this group of participants. Note that some information which was available was omitted to protect confidentiality. What follows are brief descriptions of the individuals.

Table 1. DEMOGRAPHICS-AT-A-GLANCE

RACE	PLAYING TIME/STATUS	CAREER STATUS	1ST YR. IN COLLEGE	TOTAL YRS IN COLLEGE	MARITAL STATUS	FUTURE FOOTBALL DREAMS
White	seldom played	graduate student	1987; red-shirted	4 yrs. + 1 semester	single	retired
African-American	started early but played backup last 2 yrs.	graduated 12/92; looking for work	1986; red-shirted	6 yrs. + 1 semester	single	still pursuing
White	started last year	student; works part-time	1987; red-shirted	6 yrs. + ? (still student)	married/no children	retired
African-American	fluctuated between 2nd string and starter	graduated 12/92; working part-time while in school	1987; red-shirted	5 yrs. + 1 semester	lives with fiancée/ one child	still pursuing
White	started last 2 yrs.	student; works part-time	1987; red-shirted	6 yrs. + ? (still student)	married/no children	retired
African-American	started most of his career	student; works 2 part-time jobs	1988; played as true freshman	5 yrs. + ? (still student)	lives with girlfriend / no children	still pursuing
White	started last 2 yrs.	graduated 12/92; now works full-time in security	1986; played as true freshman	6 yrs. + 1 semester	single	retired

Quincy

Quincy was an African-American quarterback who made his first trip to the South on his recruiting visit to State U. He was born and raised by his mother in a large metropolitan area on the East coast. Between his mother and his sister, and five female cousins who lived upstairs, Quincy joked, "I have been beat up by women all my life!"

Quincy was an outgoing, self-assured man with a striking smile and a deep--from the diaphragm--laugh that could rattle windows. His physical carriage might be characterized as aristocratic. He had the physique of an elite athlete, excellent posture, and an easy, long stride. In high school, he played and excelled in several different sports, and played the leadership position in both football and basketball (quarterback and point guard, respectively). His honors and awards as an athlete were numerous, and he was recruited by many major universities.

Quincy wore his heart on his sleeve, so to speak, frequently dressing in Malcolm X apparel or donning a bandanna around the head. However, an employee of the athletic department at State U. stated once that Quincy had learned that it was better if he acted white if he wanted playing time at a leadership position. There were those in the athletic department who characterized Quincy as flashy and flamboyant, both off the field and on. According to one source, Quincy and his buddies were loud and fast talkers in

the dining hall and around the dorm, and they talked in an ethnic slang that bordered on a foreign language. On the field, coaches wanted someone to execute the playbook to perfection and without deviation, not run around in the pocket letting creative juices flow and making up plays as he went along. "Flash" just didn't "cut it," particularly at the quarterback position.

Quincy lost his starting job after his second season. Although injuries played some part in this, Quincy was not been satisfied with any explanation given to him for this demotion, stating, "They didn't have any answers for me, to be honest with you."

Quincy characterized himself as a "clown" on the outside--always the center of attention; always getting along with everyone. He clarified that this was only on the outside, ". . . 'cause that's what I show 'em." He didn't like conflict and didn't want to "cause no static" with anybody. He described himself as "a Bounce sheet, so to speak, when static gathers."

At the time of his interviews, Quincy had not been able to solidify a professional football career. He was still trying to get his diploma, but he was basically just marking time. Try-out camps, professional scout "combines," free agent pre-season camps, and brief "cups of coffee" with renegade football leagues that often "folded" before cutting their first payroll checks, had become almost a full-time

job for Quincy. He was still trying to "catch on" with an NFL team, because he felt the talent is still there. "I'm pretty well-dressed as a quarterback," he said. "I like my arm. . . . I can throw that rock!"

Eric

Eric was a gentle giant. Well over six feet tall and weighing close to 300 lbs., he could have inflicted a great deal of damage on another human being, if he so desired. The "trouble" was, Eric was a nice guy. He was sensitive to others, and he placated instead of irritated. Some coaches felt that he was too mild-mannered to play football at such an elite level, particularly on the defensive side of the ball. They kept after him to be more aggressive, according to a friend of his. Eric agreed, and he tried. He really did. He thought that if he had talked more "trash," had more "late hits" and "cheap shots," and had gotten in more fights in practice, he would have been better off as far as his collegiate football career was concerned. "When you do that, . . . seems like you're gonna get a little more respect from the players and the coaches, I guess," Eric explained. In spite of his self-characterized lack of aggressiveness, Eric finished his collegiate career as a starter.

Eric grew up in the South in what would probably be characterized as a middle-class family. His parents married shortly after high school and have been together ever since.

His father "walked-on" to a local university football team, but had to quit in his second year because he could not get a scholarship, and he had to support his new family. Eric was the "middle kid" of three children. He idolized his older brother, who also played college football, and this relationship was one of the catalysts in Eric's initial involvement in football. The family was very close. His father was the "big athletic supporter," and he described his mother as follows:

. . . kinda one of those mothers who, if I ever got left out in anything, or was treated badly by a teacher. . . , she would go and argue to the Board, or whatever. She's always wanting the best for me. That's one thing--I've got good parents.

Family was a "big deal" with Eric. He talked about family reunions, cousins, and holidays at home. He also described the biggest thing that stood out for him since last year--not leaving football, but proposing to his then-girlfriend, Lisa. Lisa and Eric both played collegiate sports, and, as husband and wife, they commiserated together over what they considered painful sport careers.

Eric was an average student for whom academics didn't come easy, even without football. He had to study a lot to make it, and he regularly consulted with a tutor. Trying to manage football and academics was just about impossible for him, and he talked about disastrous grades during the football season that would have to be raised during the summer school.

Like Quincy, Eric was plagued by injuries during his collegiate career. His knees are now held together with "mirrors and chicken-wire," and his precarious long-term health outlook played heavily in his decision not to continue trying to play professional football. "It scared me that I might not be able to do regular things anymore," he said. He spoke of one of his old football buddies that he saw on a recent rainy day. "He was just totally on his tiptoes walking, and I asked him what was wrong. He said, 'Nothing.' It was just the rain."

Rex

It took me a while to recover from my interview time with Rex. He was a whirlwind that swirled all around me. He spoke in a stream of consciousness, bouncing from one topic to another, while I struggled to hang on. We talked about everything from Malcolm X, to God, to child abuse, to the FBI. Every once in a while, we talked about football.

Like most of the athletes in this study, Rex was busier during the time of our interviews than he was as an offensive lineman. After wrestling with both our busy schedules to arrange an interview time, Rex suggested the Saturday of a holiday weekend. This was the only time he could arrange between going to class, working out, working two jobs, and training for a career as a wrestler. I said, "Let me give you my home number, Rex, in case something comes up and you can't keep the interview appointment." His

reply was, "I don't need it. Nothing will come up. I'll be there." This was Rex in a nutshell.

After hearing Rex's story, I was surprised that he was alive at all. He was "born drunk," the child of an alcoholic mother. He said that he spent the first four years of his life alone. "Nobody around. Nobody to talk to. Nobody to love me. Nobody to hug me." Rex related an experience with his parents when he was six which pretty much characterized their relationship.

My mother asked me did I love her. I said, "No." Are you kidding? What is love? You know what I'm saying? Nobody ever taught me love. And my momma cries about it, so my father comes and beats me for it. I said, "I don't love you either. So what if you beat me. No big deal." I didn't cry.

At fourteen, Rex left home by mutual consent. He "lived wherever," usually in automobiles. He took daily showers in the high school gym and "a guy snuck me a job in a McDonald's" to make ends meet. Still afraid of the dark, Rex spent his nights sleeping in his car with his old hunting shotgun cradled in his hands.

Football was one of the few things that came easy in Rex' life. It allowed him an acceptable release for his anger. He still loves to hit people and to fight, but he has been pretty successful at confining this to the football field and the wrestling arena. Rex also mellowed over the years into something of a philosopher and a poet. Among his "Rex-isms" that I was privy to, my favorite was:

You've got your dream in one hand and you've got God in the other one, and you don't ever open them hands. Regardless, don't ever let nobody steal that from you.

Rex was a proud man. As much as he missed his brothers and sisters, he severed relations with his small, rural, southern birthplace, his siblings, and his parents. He explained:

I'm gonna go out of here with dignity and pride. I just feel like you should never strip a man of that; and I feel like, if I went back, that's what would be happening. So, I do well on my own. I make it on my own. I'll be fine.

Joe

The first thing one noticed about Joe was that he was smaller than the other participants. His playing position was a specialist position in which strength and bulk were not necessarily as critical as skill. The second thing that drew attention was his long eyelashes. These lashes acted as a mask sometimes, when he half-closed his lids. One might have jumped to the conclusion that this was somewhat of a lazy look, but I believe it was actually meant to veil emotions. Joe spoke often of not wanting others to know his business. By his own admission, he held emotions inside almost totally, and sometimes, he exploded. When he talked during our interviews about some emotions he felt at certain times, his voice stayed at a virtual monotone, yet I did not doubt that he truly experienced the emotions that he described. Sometimes in expressing anger, his jaws clenched

to the point that the words came out in a hiss, but the pitch never changed.

Joe sprawled in his chair throughout the interviews, and his head rested on the back of his chair so that those eyes were half-closed most of the time. He didn't smile much--but then, he never does. Between his posture and his mask, the power of his words surprised me at times.

Talking about his collegiate football career still made Joe very angry. He spoke of the need to "wind down" after our first interview because ". . . it CAN [emphasis on "can"] get me angry." The interview was extended to allow some "debriefing" time, and Joe continued:

I always hold stuff in. That's my problem sometimes. It explodes sometimes. I wish I had exploded while I was over there [in athletics], now. I still need to explode over that.

As an only child, Joe was motivated to begin playing sports by his father. When he was 4 or 5, his father entered him in a soccer league. His mother, on the other hand, "doesn't know anything about sports." His parents were still together, and they resided in a nearby southern state. While they had a good relationship as a family, Joe did not share many details of his life with them. Joe described it this way: "That's me and my business. I don't tell my parents much."

Joe was intelligent. He completed his undergraduate degree on time and was pursuing a Master's degree at the time of his interviews. Joe would have come to State U.

regardless of football, and his priorities were education first, football second. That did not lessen his desire to play, however, and much of his bitterness stemmed from a lack of playing time. Joe was a "walk-on," (a non-scholarship player) though, and, because of that, "I wasn't an important factor."

The only thing that infuriated Joe, more than not getting recognized for his football talent, was not getting recognized for his academic talent. He explained:

Three out of four years that I was there, I had the highest GPA in the whole athletic department. They pubbed that up, but then, when I graduated, I didn't get the award for highest [overall] GPA. It made me so mad. . . They still haven't given me a reason as to why I didn't get it. . . They'll publicize me when it makes the football team look good. . .but, then, they won't give you the award.

Joe played four different sports in high school and was a star in all of them. He succeeded in everything he did, and he always started. Joe said, "Never sat the bench before in my life. In any sport." For Joe, it's been downhill ever since.

When asked at the end of the interview sessions if the questions that were asked of him actually got at the essence of his experience, he replied:

I'm trying to think if there was stuff I didn't say that needed to be said, but I think you got pretty much everything. We talked about how I got screwed. That's the biggest thing that sticks out in my mind.

Rick

Rick was the All-American kid, the boy-next-door that all moms dream about for their daughters, and the star high school football player from a small southern town. His life could have been the inspiration for Leave it to Beaver--until he went off to play major college football. All of a sudden, "it's not just a game, anymore." Looking back, Rick talked about being "burned out" and "getting ready to snap." Finally, "I felt like I had to do something to--just to help bring me back to who I wanted to be," he said. With one year of eligibility remaining, a starter with a major college football power who was destined for an NFL career--just walked out. He left the pressure of major college football to play for "fun" again at a small private school, assuming that he had forgone any chance of playing professionally.

Rick was a product of a football family. His father played collegiately until he "messed up his knee." All four of the children, of whom Rick is the oldest, play or played football. One still plays professionally, one starts his collegiate career with another major college football power next year, and one plays high school ball. His mother, the only female member of the family, gave up on having a daughter for company and has pretty much "become a guy."

Rick said:

She's into football. She loves to sit and watch games. I guess we kinda forced her to learn, because she never

really knew what was going on. She just sat long enough and watched TV, and heard us explain it, so she finally pretty much figured it out.

His father was the big fan. Rick thought that because his knee cut short his playing days, ". . . he's experienced a lot through us--through his sons. . . He's into video and he does all the video scrapbooks." While he characterized his father as supportive and positive, Rick sometimes felt his shadow looming and second-guessing some of his decisions.

This was a religious family for whom God is the cornerstone for all decisions. Rick credited his relationship with God as what forced him to re-evaluate where his collegiate football career was taking him. He had gone from a high schooler, who didn't smoke and didn't drink (and didn't care to, either), to someone that he didn't know, and didn't want to know. He said, "It's a pretty big contrast from the way I was brought up at home and everything, and so that was the battle mentally that I always had--really who I wanted to be and stuff." The God that had faded from his life was called on anew to "bring me new perspectives on life and not just big-time fame of football and glory and all that stuff."

Although Rick was hidden away in the small private school for his last year, luck (or Divine intervention) brought him the opportunity to play in a post-season All-Star game. To his surprise, he was drafted by the NFL. Of

all the participants, he spent the most time under contract with professional teams, although he never played a down in regular season. As in the case of Eric and several other participants, injuries and the timing of these injuries, played a role in the end of his professional aspirations. Unlike Eric and the others, Rick made the decision himself while at least one team was still interested in his services. He was ready. Once he made his decision, he experienced an overwhelming sense of relief. He commented, "The biggest weight ever was off my shoulders."

Rick returned to that small private school last fall and received his undergraduate degree in December. He was still temporarily living at home with his parents and was employed in the security business. While Rick was comfortable with his decision to retire and had no plans to go back next year, he reported that his agent still seemed to be in shock. Rick said of the agent:

He still thinks that with a year off, I might change my mind and want to go try it again after I've got myself a little more in control--better perspective, a little cooler-headed. But, I have no desire to go back and play again just because of that--because the way I think, I can't play football.

Keith

Keith came to State U. with one goal in mind--to play professional football. When he first arrived on campus, the academic advisor asked him to write down on a sheet of paper his top three goals. Keith wrote that he intended to:

(1) play pro football; (2) be a first-round draft choice;

and (3) make \$100,000 to \$200,000 a year. He never changed or added to those goals.

While his goals didn't change, his circumstances have. Keith lived with his fiancée and his young son at the time of the interviews. He was struggling to cope with reality and to provide for his family. Keith got his shot to play for a free agent contract with a professional team, but he was cut a week before the season started. It was "brutal." Keith commented:

When I got on that plane, it was like, "Well, what am I gonna do now?" It'd be different if it was just me, but I got my fiancée, and I got a little boy. . . I had so many plans. My free agent contract. . . you know, \$80,000 sets us up for a basic start in life. Now, I don't have a job. I'm living from one check to the next. I'm paying bills.

It was not as though Keith was idealistic about pro football. He knew that it is a "cold business" and a short career, at best. But Keith saw it as his best shot to make anything over minimum wage. Even training camp wages before he was cut was more than he'd seen before. After he realized "my days were numbered," he spoke of needing to "get as many checks from them as I can, 'cause I ain't planning on being here tomorrow."

Whereas academics were the last thing on Keith's mind before he was cut, they became the focal point of his life afterwards. He was full of regrets and self-blame. "It's my own fault, 'cause I coulda been finished, you know." He thought that having his degree might have assuaged his shock

over being cut. "If I had had my degree, it wouldn't have been so bad. I had to come back here. Even though I still had the opportunity to get my degree, it's just something I should've had."

Keith planned to go back to professional try-out camps in the upcoming year, in hopes of impressing professional teams with his talent. He would even settle for a position in arena football, because this was something that he was good at. Perhaps the team that he performed for as a free agent hopeful would contact him. "Maybe they'll call me back in January. Somebody might get hurt." If not, Keith had no idea what he would do with his political science major. The only thing it had been good for so far, he said, was surviving the politics of college football. He laughed, "I've got hands-on experience for 5 years."

Jack

Jack had a strikingly handsome face and an athlete's physique. His smile was warm and frequent, and it reflected no nervousness. Jack was comfortable with who he was and what he was about. He chose to make lemonade out of lemons.

Jack would tell you that he was a human being first, and his football career was only a part of who he was. This is probably why, when he received a brief try out with a professional team, he was not terribly disappointed that he did not make it. Jack said, "I wasn't really that upset or disappointed. . . It just didn't work out." The main thing

was, he just wanted an opportunity to try, so that he wouldn't look back with regret. He had his chance. He didn't make it. It was time to move on.

Jack's mother and wife were more upset about his not being signed by a pro team than he was. His mother used to like to watch football, but then, she criticized other wide receivers and said that Jack was better. Why wasn't he playing?

Jack was the baby of the family. He was close to his older brother and sister. Although his parents were divorced, they lived in close proximity and were very supportive of him. The family would probably be classified as upper middle-class. Their financial means were such that his father went to every game Jack played, no matter where.

Jack related a story which illustrates his knack of turning negatives into positives. He spoke of sitting in the stands for the first time during the season opener of his alma mater last fall. Jack told that it was the first time in 12 to 13 years that he had not been on the field. He and his father went to their first football game together in a long time. He looked at it, not as the end of a football career, but as an opportunity to renew a relationship with his father, and he described it as a wonderful, rewarding experience.

Jack wanted to be a high school or a junior high coach. Money was not something that concerned him a great deal. He

could think of nothing that would give him more pleasure than coaching and teaching physical education classes. He wanted the chance to impact young lives.

Typical Day Vignettes

The participants discussed how they spent their typical days during football season, and then compared this agenda with that of their post-eligibility schedule. A storyline of the merged accounts of all participants follows.

During Football Season

The typical day of a player during football season might start at 6:45 in the morning with a quick shower in order to get to a 7:00 a.m. meeting with his position coach and the rest of his teammates playing that position. After meeting approximately one hour (allowing a few minutes for those with 8:00 classes to have the opportunity to get there on time), the player might eat breakfast before returning to his room. Nobody in his right mind schedules an 8:00 class during the season. Upon returning to the dorm room, it is very easy to lie down on the bed before a 9:00 class. After all, ". . . you've got all these bumps and bruises, and you're sore." Practice yesterday was rough. "I'd hurt. I'd be too tired, too sleepy, or whatever." It is very possible that the player sleeps right through his 9:00, 10:00, and maybe even his 11:00 class. Even if he made it to class, he probably slept through most of it. At 12:00

there's just time enough to grab some lunch in the athletic dining hall before going to lift in the weight room. Then, it is off to the training room to get taped and to get some treatment on injuries. Immediately after the training room, there are more meetings and film to study about the last game or the next opponent. These meetings and film sessions usually last from about 2:00 p.m. to about 3:30 p.m. What follows is about two to three hours of actual physical practice. Finally, at about 6:30, practice is over, and it is back to the training room for a shower and another icing down of the knees or other injuries. Between 7:00 and 7:30 p.m., there is a pause for dinner at the athletic dining hall. Then, there is study hall to go to, if you are a freshman or if your grades are low. "Study hall is a joke, really." It is impossible to study there. If one is interested in academics at all, he meets with a tutor and tries to work on a paper. Maybe there is time for a telephone call to his girlfriend before going to bed--that is, if it is before Thursday night. Curfew is in effect on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday until game time. The phones are turned off, and no visitation is permitted.

A Typical Post-Eligibility Day

Now, it is much more important to go to class. Got to get that degree. Got to get out of here. Class schedules are packed with much more than the typical 12 hours carried during the season. Between, or after classes, there might

be time for a pick-up basketball game. Physical activity is still very important. The player doesn't feel that good if he doesn't work out. On some days, though, he skips the basketball to meet with his tutor or talk with a teacher to let her know that he is concerned about his grades now.

Then, there is at least one part-time job to go to. Some days, he might go from 6:00 p.m. to 12 midnight. Other days, he works until 1:00 a.m. Sometimes, there is a concert in town, and he picks up some extra money working security. His other job is that of night watchman. This is good, because sometimes, when it is slow, he can study on the job. It's harder to study at home because he is involved in a relationship now. That's another thing. He's actually washing dishes now, and helping with the laundry and other household chores that he never used to deal with. Every once in a while, he and his girlfriend or wife go to a movie, but, most of the time, they watch a little TV for entertainment.

CHAPTER 5

PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

Introduction

In the following chapter, the emerging themes of the participant interviews are reported. The findings center around five themes: (a) the transition from high school to elite level college football; (b) the relationships that participants had with the coaches; (c) the perception of participants that coaches expected them to behave in an aggressive, or anti-social, manner; (d) the power and control issues surrounding the football setting; (e) the participants' need to blame external sources; and (f) the ways in which the participants were experiencing post-eligibility life. Each theme is presented as a separate section in the following pages.

Transition from High School to Corporate Ball

In order to better understand the liminal experience of football players as they exit sport careers, it is helpful to learn more about the situations that they came from in high school and their experiences of entering "big-time" college ball. The following pages report the perceptions of the participants about their high school football careers

and the changes that they went through when they arrived on the scene of a major college football powerhouse.

"It Seemed Different in High School."

High school football was FUN! These athletes enjoyed their high school football careers immensely. They were usually local heroes and "stars." All but one participant were from small towns in the South. They usually played several sports, and sometimes, several positions within the football team. Joe summarized:

In high school, I was good at everything I played, and I expected to continue that here [at State U.]. I expected to be playing my first year. . . 'cause I'd always succeeded in everything I'd done. Never sat the bench before in my life--in any sport. I always started. Always one of the stars.

The relationship with the high school coach was usually a close one. These football players still refer to their high school coaches fondly, and consider them pivotal in their development, both on the field and off. Quincy stated:

My high school coach--if you had any problems, he wanted to know about it. If he could help, he would help you.

Joe had a similar perspective:

I mean, it seemed different in high school when, you know, the coach is a teacher, and you know him, and you might have had him for a class.

In high school, sometimes well before their senior year, these athletes began to be recruited by colleges. Joe, the walk-on, was the only one who did not get recruited by the university that he eventually went to. Sometimes,

the participants were invited to "blue-chipper camps" during the summer prior to their senior years in high school, so that the college coaches could have a better look at them.

Keith commented:

I got a lot of recognition and stuff, and the summer before my senior year, I got invited to [State U.'s] camp. We had a lot of blue-chip players there who they thought were real good, and, when I left, they called me in the office and told me whether I had a good year or not, they had a scholarship waiting on me here if I wanted it.

"That's the Worst Feeling in the World--to Get Booed."

Five of the seven participants were "red-shirted" their freshman year in college. In college athletics, the athlete is given five years to play four. In the case of a "red-shirt," he is held back a year to adjust to college life, and he is not eligible to compete during this first year. Only two participants played as "true freshmen," and this was because the team at their respective schools was needy at their particular position. Usually, the "red-shirt" year is not as pressure filled for the athlete, and he can gradually adjust to the changes brought on by going off to college. Keith explained:

. . . it wasn't bad, 'cause they didn't just throw us out there to the wolves. We mainly scrimmaged against freshmen, and they slowly, slowly, brought us into the scheme of things. And it wasn't bad, 'cause our freshman year, none of us were called on to play. . . It wasn't bad at all. We got to travel. We got used to the college scene.

However, perspectives changed the next year when they were no longer red-shirts. Now, it was for real. Keith spoke of the change:

Then, the next year, that's when everything hit in. That's the year they called us into duty. They started us to play. . . We started off losing. And that was a rough semester, 'cause that first semester, you know, when we got here, we was winning, and so we were doing good in school, 'so, this ain't no problem. But, then, . . . we were called into duty. We was thrown to the wolves, and we started out bad. And practice was-- oooh, practice was not easy. Life was not easy. Classes were not easy.

The participants talked quite a bit about the pressure of playing major college football, and about how the pressure continued to build over the course of their college careers (Table 2). Pressure was perceived to come mainly from the fans and the media, not only in their respective college towns, but in their home towns, as well.

Relationships with Coaches

Of all the themes found in these interviews, the strongest theme, and the theme that the participants spent the most time talking about, was their relationships with their college coaches. As previously indicated, these participants had close, positive relationships with their high school coaches. The impersonal, business nature of the major college football system and the pressure that they began to feel from fans and media seemed to catch them unprepared. They no longer had a close relationship with their coaches, particularly the head coach. The head coach

Table 2. COLLEGE BROUGHT INCREASE IN PERCEIVED PRESSURE

PARTICIPANT	COMMENTS
Eric	"And then, my senior year, I mean, it was just so hard. That fall, it was just so hard, because there was all this pressure on you to perform, I guess."
Rick	"I guess the pressure of so many people around me, especially me from a small town and things of this nature--the only conversations I would usually have with somebody else was about football--about what they hear about you doing. And, uh, so, I was somewhat pressuring myself to, I guess, please others, and then, basically trying to please myself with that never-ending desire to be number one..."
Keith	"You know, when they recruited me, they talked about how great it could be to have [60,000] people cheering for you. They didn't tell you how to handle [60,000] people booing you. They can boo pretty loud. And that's the worst feeling in the world--to get booed...They look at you as an athlete. They don't look at you as an 18-year-old or a 19-year-old fresh out of high school. They expect you to go out there and perform."
Rick	"And, uh, I tried to decide is life really worth putting this much pressure on myself just for football."
Joe	"Well, each week, it was getting more and more pressure to win."
Jack	Stated in a non-taped conversation that he would not like to be a college coach because the pressure of college football was too great.

was distant from the players, both physically and in the nature of their relationships. In fact, Joe wondered if his coach would even recognize him without the uniform. Joe stated, "He didn't even know me. . . he didn't know my name. That made me feel like I couldn't go talk to him."

"Too Many Coaches are Thinkin' Their Jobs'

Just X's and O's"

The participants consistently described two distinct types of coaches in their interviews. They named a players' coach and an X's-and-O's coach as two separate entities who were incompatible with each other. The X's-and-O's coach was a distant, unemotional figure who did not communicate directly with the players. The players' coach was an empathetic, honest, communicating individual. All but one of the participants felt that their college coaches were of the X's and O's variety. Table 3 illustrates some of the comments made about the two types of coaches.

Apparently, from the descriptions given by the participants, the players' coach encompassed the X's and O's part of the job, but did not stop there. The players' coach took the time to get to know his players and to have a communication channel with them. The players did not care so much that the coach gave them what they wanted, but they did care whether or not he was "straight up" with them, and whether he offered some type of information regarding why a decision was made.

Table 3. PLAYERS' DESCRIPTIONS OF 2 TYPES OF COACHES

X's-and-O's Coach	Players' Coach
". . .the emphasis is on winning."	"A players' coach will tell you straight up where you stand."
"Too many coaches are out there thinking their jobs' just X's and O's."	"He won't always be negative."
"I saw an interview with Bill Walsh the other day, and he said he would've liked to have been more of a players' coach, getting to know his people, but since he had to make decisions every day about whether he might be cutting this guy next week, you can't get close to a player."	"He will give you a second chance, third chances. Will give you the opportunity to show what you have."
"If the guys are not gonna win games for you, you're not gonna get close to them 'cause you might bench 'em for the next game."	"Almost be your friend. Shows that he will care about you and your feelings."
"It was maybe something he did to make him seem more of a players' coach."	"I don't know that big-time football even HAS a players' coach."
". . . he's so much above the players."	". . . almost like one of the players."
". . . it's all because of . . . not taking the time to know your people and . . . not taking the correct and direct action to your people. A lot of coaches don't realize it. The great ones do. You think of all the great coaches you know. . . always talking about his players, always with his players. I mean, the great ones are great in the job of coaching. They don't just do X's and O's."	". . .just a coach you can come and talk to."
"Players feel like he's a dictator."	"He's just wanting the players to excel, but through methods of . . . understanding and making you feel comfortable with him."

Table 3. PLAYERS' DESCRIPTIONS OF 2 TYPES OF COACHES

X's-and-O's Coach	Players' Coach
"But burned out coaches are the ones that are just solely into those X's and O's, and the ones who don't feel that they have to be a part of their jobs with their players--just caring about those X's and O's--those are the ones that indirect racist action is interpreted by their athletes."	"A coach that will be there for you and stand behind you and want you to do your best, I guess. And I guess that's what you mean by a players' coach."

"You Never Know When They're Shooting

You a Bunch of Bull Crap."

Apparently, this ingredient of honesty from coaches is a particular point of sensitivity with the participants. They feel that their college coaches were never "straight" with them. For example, Rex commented:

You never know--you never know when they're shooting you a bunch of bull crap. You know, is it the truth?

Other examples of what was perceived to be a difference between what was said and what was meant include Eric's remarks:

They SAY over there that they put academics over everything, but, that's not the case. I mean, everybody knows that.

Keith also commented, "They say you can go out there and earn a job, but it's not--it's who they want to start, who they want to pub [publicize], and it's politics." Joe was particularly angry about a perceived lack of integrity on the part of his position coach.

He's the one who fought for his scholarship person to be put in. He went behind my back and--the guy [scholarship player] is very good. He's not who I blame at all. It's the coach.

"Talk to Me Like a Grown Man."

Some participants spoke of a perceived lack of respect that coaches had for them. Quincy was particularly emotional when talking about the subject:

. . . it becomes an issue of how much respect does your coach have for you as an athlete. Some of that repetitive garbage that the coaches feed you--I mean, I tell you, it's just not necessary. He doesn't have to

talk to me that way to get me to do something. I'm a grown man. Talk to me like a grown man. I can't talk to [the coach] that way. I'll get cut from the team. I understand [the coach's] frustrations, you know. Sometimes, coaches take it to a level, to a degree, where you just--"If you don't get outa my face--." You just want to hit 'em, and you can't. You gotta control that, but, yet, they can just explode on you. There's some coaches who exploit that privilege.

Quincy also spoke of the term, "dis-ing," which he described as a shortened slang version of disrespecting. He felt as though coaches should have to earn respect in much the same way that players are expected to. Quincy commented: "Disrespect me--I'm gonna disrespect you."

Joe also discussed the perceived lack of respect that his coaches had for him. He stated:

I think as long as you're helping them, they'll treat you good, and when you can't help them, they won't.

Joe spoke of a time when his coach sent him on an errand during practice. He attributed this to his walk-on status and added:

He's got managers to do that. And he can do that. And he sends me to go do that. And that pissed me off bad. It was obvious that he didn't like me.

During another portion of the interview, when Joe was talking about what he would do differently if he had his college football career to do over, he commented:

I'd do it again, but I'd do things differently. I wouldn't let them walk all over me like they did. . . And people wonder why I hate the way I was treated.

Howard: The Go-Between

In stark contrast to the negative relationships between most participants and their coaches, one school had a

particular individual, Howard, who was not a coach, but who was on the support staff of the football team. Several participants commented on this individual and how he impacted their lives.

Joe contrasted his relationship with Howard and his relationship with the coaches.

Howard's a great man. He's the one I respect most over there. . . . At least, he would tell you the truth.

Joe spoke of his first contact with Howard during a meeting of walk-ons:

He's standing there, and he says, "Not one of you will ever play in a game at [State U.]. You will never get a scholarship." And he meant it, 'cause he knew [the head coach]. He said, "If that disenchant's you, we recommend that you go ahead and quit right now."

For Joe, this was a far cry from coaches that would keep promising that if he gave his best effort, he might get a scholarship. He perceived that his biggest problem was that he believed in the wrong people.

The most illuminating description of the importance of Howard to the team came from Eric:

It was just that Howard had so much--so much power, and so much influence with the athletic program and the head coach. Even with the university. He had a way of smoothing things over and working well with other people--within the athletic program and with other people that are not in the athletic program--just to bring them together. . . . If anybody ever got any problems with the law or the university police, or cheating on tests, or something like that--I mean, usually, it was handled by Howard. They'd go to him about it, and he would either set curfew, or--well, he'd already know about it, usually. He had a knack--I don't know what it was, but he had a knack of knowing. You could just walk into his office and tell him, "Yeah, Howard, I just got into a big fight at a

fraternity party," or something like that, and he'd already know about it somehow. I mean, it was weird. He would have all these little secret watchers--everybody used to think that he had all these little secret watchers, or FBI agents, or something, that worked for him going around campus checking on all the football players. He would know everything. Just everything, it seemed like, was handled through him. I think he was the--I don't know if I should say this or not--I was gonna say that he WAS the football program. I mean, I'd just say he handled everything over there. He just didn't coach. That's all he didn't do.

The unique thing about Howard was that EVERYONE trusted him and went to him with problems--not just the players, but the coaches, as well. Eric explained:

Even the coaches went to him. Whenever there was a problem with another player or a problem with a recruit--anything. The head coach, the assistant coaches, the players--would go to him. . . Coach [the head coach] didn't do the discipline. Howard would. . . The players would never go to the head coach. Sometimes, they might go to a position coach, if they liked him, but they would always go to Howard if Howard hadn't already gone to them.

Howard's ability to have a positive relationship with the players despite his role of disciplinarian was discussed by Eric, as well:

Howard would sit down with you one-to-one all the time, meeting in his office. He was able to find out exactly what was happening. I don't think anybody ever lied to him, you know, 'cause he was just one of those kind of people that you could just trust.

The players seemed to "attach" themselves to Howard, and to go to him for everything from major legal trouble to girlfriend problems. Howard recently left the university (after all of these participants had completed their eligibility). Eric summarized:

Everybody kinda lost the person who they would go to to talk to and smooth things out. I think everybody's like, looking for a leader, sort of.

It seems that Howard took the place of the high school coach and provided the relationship that the players craved. The college coaches, on the other hand, seemed very distant and uncaring to the players, and these athletes seemed to view them more as strategists for the game on Saturday, at best. At the worst, they were viewed as the subjects of great animosity.

Real Men vs. Wimps

A football player is an athlete's athlete, a man's man. To a football player, a golfer or a swimmer is a "wimp." This manhood/masculinity connection with football apparently started very early with some players.

"If You Talk Trash, You're Gonna Get a Little More
Respect from the Players and the Coaches."

Rick related a pivotal incident in his life:

When I was 10 or 12 years old and first started playing football, I remember putting on my pads for the first time. We had a thing we called "the blood box." That's what the coach would put us in. He'd put two of us in a 10 x 10. He threw us in there, and he'd pick you out somebody that looked like your size, and we'd go for, maybe, oh, 20 seconds in there. It was just an all out, kinda like a brawl. I mean, you fought. Just whoever could whip the other one--just kind of a toughness-type thing that you'd go through. And, I was nervous as heck for a couple of days when I knew I was gonna have to do this, 'cause I'd never been one to fight someone else, you know.

This "toughness-type thing" seemed to be, not only tolerated by football coaches, but also encouraged, as well. One player in particular spoke of what he perceived to be encouragement from coaches to act aggressively, not only in the game, but in the practice setting, as well. Eric attributed his poor relationship with his coach to his (Eric's) quiet demeanor. He felt that he, and other players who did not act out in practice, were shunned by the coaches. He also felt that this affected his playing time, as well. Eric commented:

I think that one thing that kinda really hurt me and Sam a little bit was that Sam's kinda reserved like I am. He's quiet, too. . . Pete is totally different from us. He's totally--he's a cusser and a fighter. I mean, we're like that, too, but he talks. In his own way, he gets in a lot more fights in practice. Not to say he's any better than us, but he's just--he cussed out all the coaches. He kinda--he does what he wants to do, sorta. . . . He's a little bit above the law, kinda. . . . He's got that don't care attitude. . . . And I would say that when you do that, seems like you're gonna get a little more respect from the players and the coaches. They're gonna treat you a little different.

In discussing a teammate who got a rare scholarship after starting out as a walk-on, Eric explained:

. . . one reason he was able to excel so quickly and get a scholarship was because he got noticed because he talked so much trash early on. He would get in fights with just about every--he'd get noticed by the coaches. He would talk shit. . . . I mean, if he would have just been kinda quiet, he wouldn't have got noticed by [the head coach] or some of the other coaches, and wouldn't have been liked as well by some of the other players. But, since he did this trash talking, you know, he was noticed a lot more by the coaches.

Eric equated trash talking with self-confidence several times. He spoke of one player who talked trash as ". . . how he vocally showed his confidence." Again, at another point during the interview, Eric commented that, ". . . whenever you talk trash, a lot of times, you're saying that you have a lot of confidence in yourself, I guess."

Eric tried to be more aggressive in practice and in games. He felt guilty because he did not talk trash as much as some of the other players.

It just kinda bothered me. . . but, here at State U., there's so many more people who aren't like that. They talk trash. And I think that's one thing that kind of kept me quiet more, because they talked so much. . . I can't compete with them, you know, with their mouths--talking.

Eric also expressed guilt and disappointment in himself because he was sometimes not as physically aggressive as he thought he should have been. He said that he did things to try to be more aggressive, such as ". . . give a lot of cheap shots and stuff, and hit late." However, he felt that this did not really help him out as he thought it would.

I felt I was pretty aggressive in practices and games, but, I was kinda bitter with Coach Jones over that. He was starting the guy in front of me. . . . He was getting more playing time, and I thought I deserved it, sort of.

"It Started Bleeding Over."

Over the course of the interviews, three of the participants spoke of their two personalities--the on-the-field personality and the off-the-field personality (Table 4). While two related that they were able to switch

Table 4. SPLIT PERSONALITIES

PARTICIPANT	COMMENTS
Rick	"I guess this is my biggest problem in football--of [the coach] just pushing the fact of separating how you think on the field with how you think off the field...He said, 'When you're off the field, you do whatever you want to do. You can be a good guy. You can be--you can go to church and do everything like that. But, when you come on the field, now, you have no friends. You have to become a prick... and you just go all out.' And it was just that type of programming in my mind that I believed and I did it...And, I split more and more--the guy off the field and the guy on the field. And the thing that was scaring me was that the guy that was on the field was becoming more and more the person that I was off the field, too. It started bleeding over."
Eric	"Once you get on the field, you get in a lot of fights in practice with different players--cheap shots and fights--but really, once you come off the field, you're friends again. It's different. Once you were on the field, it was kinda like dog eat dog and stuff. The survival of the fittest."
Rex	"But, you can't let Rex, the football player, interfere with Rex, the individual. It's almost like a split personality, you know. What goes on on the field stays on the field. What goes on in real life--hey, that's real life...That's Rex, the football player, talking. 'Hey, let's break some bones. Let's whup 'em up.' That's Rex, the warrior, talking. That's a whole different person. I mean, he's crazy. He's crazy for real. That guy fears no player. He fears no pain. He fears no evil. He's not afraid to die. But, Rex, the person--his uncle was Kentucky-fried... 'cause I don't like Rex, the football player... I think every athlete divides--it may not be conscious to him--but, you divide 'em up. I mean, I'd hate to see Lawrence Taylor be Lawrence Taylor out in the streets. You know what I'm saying?"

from one personality to the other in the appropriate situation, Rick found that he was unable to maintain both personalities. He spoke of the aggressive, on-the-field personality as "bleeding over" onto the other off-the-field personality. He also commented that he was taught to split himself in two by one of his coaches. Rick spoke of his relationship with females in terms of his two personalities. He stated that he had never physically abused a woman, but he wondered sometimes if there might be some women who held a grudge against him because of anything he had ever said to them. He felt that, in looking back, he might not have treated them with the same respect, during his football career, that he would have in the past.

Issues of Power and Control

The strongest theme running through the interviews with these participants was that of their relationships--or lack, thereof--with their college coaches. As this chapter will illustrate, there was also a strong finding that the coaches and athletic department personnel of these schools were perceived to have enormous power and control, not only over the athletes' collegiate careers, but over their futures, as well. As Rick stated:

Most athletes just get to college--they're looking to have a chance to play pros, and they're gonna do what they're told. . . So they're gonna do whatever they're told by the coaches and administration, and these are the ones who are really shaping that person's mind, moreso than probably even their parents or anyone else.

"The Best Man Don't Always Start."

Coaches were perceived to have total control over which players got playing time, or got to start in games. Participants did not feel that these decisions were made on the basis of merit. Instead, they felt that the decisions were made on the basis of "politics." Keith commented:

The starting lineup is made before you even go to the practice field. They say you can go out there and earn a job, but it's not--it's who they want to start, who they want to pub, and it's politics. The best man don't always start.

Quincy also used the term "politics" to describe how decisions were made by the coaches:

A lot of it is politics. . . . It could be the way you wear your hair.

The following is Eric's implementation of the word "politics":

I think there's a lot of politics in football, too, as far as who the coaches put on the field, you know. Like, uh, I was behind a player who plays for [an NFL team] now, and I think he was basically all hype. And a lot of players knew that. They didn't think he was that good. . . . It was hard for me because I thought I was every bit as good as he was. . . . It was so hard in practice, because he would make the same mistakes in practice, but Coach Jones would bitch me out and wouldn't do anything to him. So, it was just so hard for me to sit back there and watch it. I just think football is just politics and stuff, you know what I mean?

Rex spoke of "politics" in his interview, as well:

The game is definitely political. . . and it's not so much of what you know or what you're doing, it's who you know.

While not using the specific word, "politics," Joe spoke of this awarding of playing time and starting positions by means other than merit:

They make it easier for the scholarship player to succeed than they do the walk-ons. . . . I think it goes on all over the place over there. Coaches promise recruits things--that they will play--and then they have to stick to it somehow. . . . I've seen a bunch of walk-ons that deserved to play and start, that didn't, because they were walk-ons.

"They're Taking Care of Me."

Another indication of the control exerted over the lives of these athletes is their isolation from the university mainstream. It is noted that the NCAA recently voted for the abolishment of segregated athletic dorms, but these participants completed their eligibility before the passing of this law. Rick and Joe made specific comments about the role of the athletic dorms in their lives. For Rick, the scholarship athlete, the dorm was initially a haven and a status symbol. Retrospectively, he saw it as a way to avoid responsibility.

. . . the athletic dorms--I think this is just one thing that the athletes say, "Well, they're taking care of me. I'm special. I'm an athlete." And they have that feeling that they're gonna be taken care of, and don't have to make any decisions for themselves. Everything is made for them. You know, they say, "You've gotta do this, then, and this, here," and they just--you have the feeling that everything's fine, and that I can do whatever. I'm an athlete. That type of mentality. And, I think, uh, they have now ruled that you can't have athletic dorms. . . I think that will be good, because it gives you a chance to not feel--to have more responsibility for yourself.

Joe, the walk-on, was always on the outside looking in, but, in the end, wanted no part of the restrictive environment of an athletic dorm.

Well, I coulda stayed there [in the athletic dorm], but I didn't want to. After you've been there one year, if they have room, they'll let non-scholarship players stay there. You have to pay for it, though. I didn't want to do that, 'cause they've got visitation on game day, and on Thursdays up to game day, you've got curfew. . . . I mean, it was only good for the coaches. They'd have you all right there.

"The Life of a Walk-On is Not Good."

The major college football program is a subculture all its own, with its own social classes and inequalities. One major social class division is the class of walk-ons. While only one walk-on participated in this study, the other athletes were very cognizant of the difference between walk-ons and scholarship players, and their interviews gave support to the testimony of Joe, the walk-on.

Walk-ons are "meat," basically. If they serve a purpose at all on the team, it is to be the "fodder" for scholarship athletes during practice. Evidence that other players recognized the low status of walk-ons included Keith's remarks:

When I came here, I came on scholarship, and I'd see walk-ons out there in practice. When I went to [an NFL camp] as a free agent, that's what I felt like--a walk-on.

Eric also noted, ". . . see, you're looked at differently if you're a scholarship athlete." Quincy all but dismissed walk-ons in his comment about playing time:

I was the only upperclassman that didn't play [in that game]. Every other junior and senior played except me--that was on scholarship, that is.

Joe had the expert perspective of actually being a walk-on. He basically explained why, in his mind, walk-ons were given lower status than the rest of the team. Joe commented:

The life of a walk-on is not good because it makes the coaches look bad if a walk-on beats out one of the players that they recruited. It feels like they get put down for recruiting someone that wasn't good enough, that a walk-on would beat out. They make it easier for the scholarship player to succeed than they do the walk-ons.

Non-scholarship athletes, or walk-ons, as they are commonly described, are not only perceived to be discriminated against on the playing field, but in their living environment, as well. In addition to exclusion from the athletic dorm, they are not allowed to eat in the athletic dining hall, except on game day, and then only if they are dressing out for the game. Joe was bitter about this, stating, "I couldn't understand the difference. . . and still--I still don't understand why."

If there is anything that a walk-on wants, it is to fit in. It is difficult enough to gain respect from teammates. As Joe stated, "The scholarships and the walk-ons wouldn't mix too much at first, not until you gained their respect." However, when the athletic department isolates you, as well, it is almost impossible. Joe spoke of trying to be a part

of the team, and how he felt about the perceived exclusion by the athletic department:

The freshmen had academic meetings that they had to go to every--once a week, I think. . . . I went to every one of them, but a lot of walk-ons didn't, 'cause we didn't really know if we could go or not. They never really invited us, but I went anyway, 'cause I was trying to be part of the team, and I thought--I was just naive enough to think it was for me. But, it was really just for scholarship. 'Cause they didn't require the walk-ons to go to--all freshmen are required to go to study hall. Not walk-ons.

"Some People Come in and Don't Do Nothing Wrong, and Still Gets on Their Bad Side Anyway."

Other examples of different classifications of players were participants' revelations about "package deals," who were players given a scholarship because a "blue chip prospect" would not sign a promise to commit to the school without bringing his friend with him, and players who were either "little pets" or "coaches' main boys." Then, there were those who got on the coaches' bad sides and were ostracized. "Coaches' main boys" and "little pets" were favored over all the other players. "Blue chip prospects" probably were second most important to the coaches. "Package deals" got only slightly more attention than walk-ons, and depending on which participant was being interviewed, those that drew the coaches' wrath, or walk-ons were the least important level of players. Table 5 illustrates some of the athletes' comments about the teams' informal classification systems.

Table 5. SPECIAL CLASSIFICATIONS OF PLAYERS

PARTICIPANTS	COMMENTS
Keith	"And some people are here just for political reasons. Like, we've got a guy who's on the starting offensive line now who got a scholarship because they was recruiting his teammate, and his teammate would not come here unless they gave him a scholarship, because that's a package deal. A package deal."
Keith	"And the summer before my senior year, I got invited to [State U.'s] camp. And we had a lot of blue-chip players there who they thought were real good."
Eric	"I think one of the reasons why I didn't get a great chance to play [pro] football was because Coach Jones [pseudonym]--we got along, but he and I didn't have a great relationship. And, not to say that he had his little pets and stuff, but there were a few players that he really liked and you could tell that."
Eric	"I was behind a player who plays for [an NFL team] now...It was so hard in practice, because he would make the same mistakes in practice, but Coach Jones would bitch me out and wouldn't do anything to him."
Quincy	"A lot of coaches, I mean, they don't take the time to know who they're coaching--everything about them--not just their main boys."
Keith	"Some people come in and don't do nothing wrong, and still gets on their [the coaches] bad side anyway."

"BANG! ZOOM! He's in Your Face!"

Along with the examples of stratification and classification previously indicated, the coaches are perceived to distance themselves from the players and to act as somewhat of a ruling class in this power relationship (Table 6). Physical evidence of this includes the isolation of the coaches offices and the idea of the towers on the practice field from which the head coach "surveys" practice. This physical evidence supports players' comments about distancing and the perceived "looking down" on the players by the coaches. Participants felt that coaches exercised their positions of power to belittle them, in some cases.

"You Might Be the Worst Player in America, but if
They Pub You Right, You'll Go High."

These participants strongly believe that the coach or coaches, and sometimes, the athletic department personnel, control the athletes, not only during their collegiate careers, but in their potential professional football careers, as well.

In the first place, as previously discussed, the coaches control playing time, which effects the "exposure" that the athletes get. Eric commented:

I think one of the reasons why I didn't get a great chance to play pro football was because Coach Jones--we got along, but he and I didn't have a great relationship. And, not to say that he had his little pets and stuff, but there was a few players that he really liked and you could tell that. . . . And he can dictate, I believe, in a lot of things. 'Cause he can dictate how far--how high--you go in the NFL. . . .

Table 6. PERCEPTIONS OF COACHES AS A RULING CLASS	
Participant	Comments
Eric	"[The head coach] never talked to players. Whenever he was at an individual meeting that we'd have before practice, he'd just kind of go in and watch...He was just kinda there--just kinda supervising them--making sure the other coaches did the job, I guess."
Rick	"I never openly argued or disagreed, you know. I always respected their [the coaches'] position over me."
Quincy	"Now, you get talked down to as an athlete from your coach sometimes. See, you just make him so mad when he tells you what to do and you just don't do it... And just, BANG! ZOOM! He's in your face...It can register on the athlete that, well, he is just talking to me like that 'cause he's from such and such way of life and he thinks he can talk to me 'cause I'm from here and here and here."
Joe	"He [coach] didn't know my name. That made me feel like I couldn't go talk to him. I always would get nervous--even when I was playing, I'd get nervous going up to talk to him."
Eric	"...he's so much above the players."
Joe	"He [head coach] will go up on top of that tower, and he's got his bull horn up there, and he'll just yell when he sees something."

And, I really don't know what it is, but he can do a lot for you, and I just don't think he did very much for me.

Coaches can also switch a player around and make him play several positions, which is sometimes necessary for the team, but can be detrimental to the player. Rex spoke of mastering so many positions that he did not feel that he had a clear identity with professional scouts. Rex stated:

At that time and point, they began to move me. I mean, I'm playin' here, I'm playin' there, I'm playin' over here. It was difficult, you know, knowing that guys that--when I came to the university--that was babies. They weren't even playing. Other guys came along, I really felt like that they couldn't touch me, but yet, they go first, second, third round [in the NFL draft]. Yet, I'm way down the road. I'm way down the line. It's--it's, you know, hard for me to swallow.

Some participants also perceived that "pub" (their word for publicity) and "hype" over certain players are artificially created and are based on criteria other than merit. In this excerpt from his interview, Keith gave his thoughts on how some players were "groomed" for stardom:

(Keith) . . . a lot of it is hype, you know. Who they say--who they write up over there and say are real good.

(Interviewer) What do you mean?

(Keith) Most people get drafted--you get drafted on hype a lot of the time. You get drafted because, like, he plays at State U., you get off on a couple of games, you fit a mold, you--that's hype. That's what a lot of players talk about, what kind of pub you're getting, who's knowing about you, who's hearing about you. 'Cause if you get a lot of hype, the more people that know about you, the better chance you'll have of getting drafted. You might be the worst player in America, but if they pub you right, you'll go high.

(Interviewer) This hype, where does it come from? How do you get it?

(Keith) It comes from the sports information department. They--see these posters, like, for the season? If your picture's on it, that's hype. The programs they sell before the game--that's hype if your picture's on that program. That's hype when you pick up the paper reading this week who got interviewed.

(Interviewer) So how are these choices made?

(Keith) They're made over our heads. They're made in those little rooms over there. . . . It's a little soap opera over there.

Eric and Keith also spoke of the great influence that coaches are perceived to have with professional scouts, which can determine how early in the NFL draft one is selected, or if one is selected at all. Eric explained:

As a [position] coach, he is so well known and stuff, that a lot of these pro scouts will come in and, when he tells 'em something about this player, like, you know, "He's a good player but I don't think he can play in the league," and all that stuff, they're gonna listen instead of deciding on their own by watching you play or watching film, or whatever.

Keith's comments were similar to Eric's. In explaining that professional scouts could not talk directly to the player while the player still had college eligibility, Keith stated:

No, scouts can't talk to you. They talk to the coaches, 'cause, like my position coach--he came from [an NFL team], so he knew a lot of scouts, you know. People would come in, and, when we'd go out to practice, he's out there shaking their hands. He knows 'em, you know. "What's up, buddy," and this and that. And you hope he's saying good things about you.

Keith spoke of how a few words from a coach could "make or break" a professional football career:

On this last draft, we had some players go in the first round, but from my agent here talking to professional scouts, everyone of our seniors got a bad mark from the head coach. We didn't have anybody taken in the top ten 'cause, when they finally came down--they talked to our position coaches, but they like to get the final evaluation from the head coach. And, from all we've heard, he gave a bad mark on all our seniors last year. Rumor has it, 'cause we didn't win the national championship.

Keith also connected the amount of "hype" a player receives, or doesn't receive, with the amount of attention that the scouts pay to him. He stated:

If there's already pub on a guy, you're gonna look at him first. Like, uh, "Let me go see what's this guy they're talking about. Let me see what he's all about."

"Same Old, Same Old."

Some participants discussed how they coped with the perceived unfairness of the football system and the coaches. The strategies and emotions used were as varied as the athletes themselves. For example, for Keith, he coped through resignation. He stated:

I went through it for 5 years. It don't change. I can sit and talk about it now, 'cause the guys over there, they're still going through it. It was over there--we were just talking about it the other day. It's the same old, same old.

At first glance, Quincy seemed to echo Keith's resignation. However, his more personal reactions of anger and hurt seeped through. Quincy explained:

It hurts to talk about it, to think about it, but, like I said, I ain't cryin' over spilt milk. I ain't gonna sweat it, you know. . . . State U. does what's best for them, and I just wasn't best for them at the time. I guess, you know--uh, and uh, it's just amazing. It amazes me--naw, I don't want to get into it. . . . It's over. Just gotta flow.

Joe and Eric spoke of their intimidation, fear, and anger. Eric said:

I always liked to get to practice early. I was real scared of being late, getting into trouble. . . It was--there was so much pressure on me because I had to be at a certain place and do something, or you'd get in trouble over there.

Joe also commented:

Every football coach I've ever had yelled, but they still treated their players--I didn't like the way Coach Jones treated me and some other players. I didn't stand up for myself either, and say, "Give me a shot," which I thought he should've, but I didn't.

Rex and Rick sought Divine intervention as coping strategies. Rex was philosophical in this statement:

I honestly believe from the bottom of my heart that what comes around goes around. And, not only that, you just pray about it. . . . The man does you wrong--it's gonna catch up to him. That's what I honestly believe. You just stick it in there and do your best, and everything's gonna come out okay. One day, you'll be able to help him up a couple of steps, and he'll realize what he's done. And he'll be sorry for it. If it doesn't happen, what goes around comes around.

Rick called on his relationship with God to help him make his decision to leave big-time college football. He explained:

All during that period [in which he was making his decision], I was praying and making myself available. I was praying that I would become the best morally, spiritually, and feel good about myself. . . . And, when I started doing that was when I really started overcoming, as far as deprogramming from football. I

started overcoming myself. . . . You know, I'd become, I guess you could say, pretty unstable mentally. . . so, you know, as I changed through college, you know, I was putting everything I had into football--that type of mentality. It obviously changed me in the way of who I was and how I thought.

Who's Fault is it, Anyway?

Considering participants' perceptions that they had no control over their lives as college athletes, it is not surprising that they spent a good portion of interview time casting blame in some direction. After all, if they had no control over their situations, then they could not be blamed for whatever happened, could they?

"All I Wanted Was a Chance."

The words "chance," "opportunity," and "shot" were used frequently by all but one participant (Table 7). The implication seems to be that a football player might possess all the abilities and skills to play the game, but participants feel that they must also be given a "legitimate shot" to display these talents. It is obvious from the statements of Rex and Keith that few ever get that "shot" (Table 7).

"I Didn't Pull the Switch."

Several of the participants described an anger or bitterness when they did not feel that they had received their "legitimate shot," and they tended to blame others or other things, usually the coaches, for interfering with their opportunities. Quincy, in particular, commented:

Table 7. "I JUST WANT A FAIR SHOT."

Participant	Comments
Keith	"You just want your chance ." "I just wanted the opportunity . They called and offered me free agent, and it was a signing bonus. That was an opportunity . That was all I could ask for. A lot of people don't even get that."
Joe	"A players' coach will give you the opportunity to show what you have."
Jack	"All I wanted was a chance . Then I could always say, yeah, I tried but I didn't make it." "I just wanted that chance . I've had my chance ."
Rex	"One day, I'm gonna get my shot ..." "I guarantee you there's a million guys out there that can play the same position better than I can that never had a shot ."
Rick	"It gave me the shot I was looking for." "... 'cause I saw this as my chance ." "I thought that was good, as long as I have a chance now." "Well, I had that opportunity ."
Quincy	"I just wanted to give myself a legitimate shot ."

Well, it's not gonna eat at me, because I had nothin' to do with it. I didn't pull the switch.

This statement was made when he discussed his being benched and his demotion to second string.

Joe and I discussed a sequence in which he started out playing three games in a row, only to be benched. His anger and blaming of the coach is evident in the following excerpt:

(Joe) I started my first three games and I asked them about it [getting a scholarship], and they said, "We'll see," and never did. Then they got rid of me.

(Interviewer) Rid of you?

(Joe) Well, they--I stopped starting. They didn't get rid of me, but, basically, they got rid of me by doing that to me.

(Interviewer) Did they ever talk to you about it--explain?

(Joe) They didn't have to. [Long pause] When they don't put you in during blow-outs, you kind of assume you won't be playing any more.

(Interviewer) How'd that make you feel?

(Joe) Angry.

"It Starts with the Coach."

This anger and bitterness directed toward the coaches is entirely the coaches' faults, according to these participants who expressed such emotions. They particularly do not like it when coaches refuse (in the players' eyes) to accept this responsibility. Quincy offered the following viewpoint:

When you have dissension amongst your team, you got problems. And it starts--I mean, the coaches put it off to you like it starts with the players. It starts

with the coaches. . . . If your players don't play for you, you ain't a good coach.

"My Pro Stock Went Down Because I Was Hurt my Senior Year."

Four of the seven participants spoke of injuries and the timing of those injuries as affecting their abilities to get that "legitimate shot". Injuries during the collegiate career interfered with playing time and starting positions, and they seemed to happen at the worst possible times. It was particularly frustrating if the injury happened during the last season of eligibility because, as Keith pointed out, "This is the year to make your money, your senior year." The "senior" year (more correctly, the last year of eligibility) must be good, because it happens immediately before the draft. An injury here could be career-ending, even if it is not technically a major injury. The four athletes for whom injury played a major role commented on their situations (Table 8).

Now, What?

The participants reflected on their collegiate lives and tried to place them in some perspective in terms of their futures. They spoke of their goals and dreams coming into college, their goals and dreams now, and their plans, or lack of plans.

"They'll Keep You Eligible So You Can Play on Saturday."

These participants seldom believed words spoken to them by coaches and other athletic department personnel. Mere

Table 8. INJURIES AND THE TIMING OF INJURIES

PARTICIPANT	COMMENTS
Rick	"It was only those two pro teams that ever saw me work out... 'cause I pulled my groin after that... I was kind of devastated, 'cause I was like, 'Well, it's happening again.'... I guess I made it through, oh, about four weeks of training camp and pulled my hamstring. So, that's like--I can't win for losing on these things."
Quincy	"I broke it during two-a-days, and it [the season] was over with... It was all freak accidents. All freak accidents... I made a cut and POW, I heard this big old crack... This bone was broke and I was out for the year, then... I'm just tired of freak things happening to me, like, uh, am I jinxed?... My pro stock went down because I was hurt my last year in college."
Eric	"...it's my third knee surgery... I'm kinda upset that I hurt my knee... because I don't know where I would have been right now... But, since my knee was hurt, I couldn't run for the scouts... I couldn't run but about half speed, and it wasn't getting well for about four or five months. I just had to kinda quit... I think I could've played somewhere."
Keith	"I had an injury my first two years here... right before the season would start, I would pull a hamstring. Both years. And that would seem to push me back... And it seemed like a freak injury would keep me from starting. Then, by the time I worked my way back to starting, it was towards the end of the season. The season would just mess up."

words were not perceived to reflect the true emphasis of the athletic department. Regardless of what was said to these participants, most felt sure that the emphasis of the coaches and athletic departments was not on education. Keith, for example, perceived that, regardless of his classroom status, the athletic department would find a way to get him into his uniform on game day. He commented:

When you're winning and everybody's patting you on the back and sayin' you're the greatest thing since sliced bread, you take the little things for granted, like I ain't gotta worry about school. It's gonna be here. They'll keep you eligible so you can play on Saturday.

Eric commented on the emphasis of the athletic department, and how the practice was perceived to be far different from the public statements:

They SAY over there that they put academics over everything, but that's not the case. I mean, everybody knows that. . . . They're gonna tell you that over there, but, I mean, really, they're gonna want your butt in there watching film. . . . I don't say that they don't give a damn about it [the degree], but I don't think they really care as much with that as with you being a better player on Saturdays and making them look better. . . . I mean, they could care less if you got it in four years or six years.

Two participants postulated that any interest on the part of the athletic department in the academic accomplishments of its players was almost forced by the legislation of the NCAA and the courts. Joe stated:

They'll publicize me when it makes the football team look good. . . . but, then, when they're [giving out] awards and stuff, I don't get anything. . . . But, see, they'll do that to up the data. . .

Another player talked of the change in emphasis that his athletic department made which was brought on by a court case. He commented:

At that period was right after that lady sued the school for falsifying grades or whatever. . . I came right after that, so they strickened up on their academics, and everything. They made a big effort to start pushing that.

"My Whole Life Has Been Based
Off of Playing Professional Football."

The participants spoke of their hopes and expectations about professional football coming into college. While they all thought about and dreamed about professional sport careers growing up, some tempered these dreams with reality. Others did not. For some, football was a means to an end. For others, it was the end. The interesting thing is that there was so much variety in the degree of commitment to football. This variety ran the gammut from Joe, who came to State U. for the education and not for a football career, to Keith, who basically had no plans except to play professionally.

Quincy actually dreamed of playing professional basketball, his first love. However, he realistically considered his chances of being successful, and he thought playing college football was his best chance for a college scholarship. Without a scholarship, he would not have been able to go to college. He explained:

At first, I wanted to play basketball. I wanted to go to college and play basketball. I always dreamed one

day of playing point guard for the Sixers, you know, but small colleges came for basketball and big colleges came for football. In some small colleges, nothing was totally free. Big time football, everything was free. They paid everything. So, lookin' at myself, I could play basketball, but not at the high caliber I wanted to be. . . . I looked at my body, and my body said more football than basketball. I just weighed the pros and cons and said I had to play football if I wanted to get a college degree.

Interestingly, if the player came to college determined to work toward a professional football career or if he wanted just to get playing time in college, he was probably undeterred by any words of wisdom spoken by the academic counselors. Some of the players remembered the speech given to them by these counselors during freshman orientation.

Eric called it "the 3% speech." He explained:

I remember somebody telling us my first year to get your degree because only 3% of you, talking about us, would go [pro]. . . . But, uh, I think all of us were like, "Aw, bullshit, there'll be more than that here." I guess we didn't want to hear that because, you know, you just think that you'll beat the odds.

Another example of the ineffectiveness of verbal warnings of others was Joe's account of his reaction when Howard told a group of walk-ons that they would not ever play in a game at State U. Joe stated:

I was thinking, "Well, you're wrong. I'm gonna start this year." And, probably, everybody in there was thinking the same thing.

For some, these dreams of a professional sport career were mellowed and tempered, not by words from athletic personnel, but by their own observations. Joe spoke of his not being recruited by colleges as one strong clue that

". . . I wasn't good enough to be a pro football player." He also commented that, during his freshman year, he ". . . found out I wasn't the big man on the block anymore." Eric spoke of the impact of his injuries on his professional sport dreams. Rex also commented, "Something might happen, like I could be injured or something, you know."

Only one player, the walk-on, felt that he could not have a professional football career due to a lack of ability. The others all felt that, given the right set of circumstances, they had the skills and abilities to play professionally. They did not believe anyone who simply told them that they were not good enough. Whatever the reasons, an inaccessability of a professional career was not perceived to be due to the player, but due to something external--maybe luck, politics, or circumstances. If anything tempered their professional dreams, it was an awareness of these uncontrollable circumstances.

The participants expressed a variety of expectations regarding professional football careers (Table 9). Note that, of the seven participants, there are three who will try again to make a professional team this year. Of these three, the similarity is not in the strength or unidimensionality of their professional dreams. The one thing that is common among the three is their race. All three are black.

Table 9. EXPECTATIONS ABOUT PRO FOOTBALL

Participant	Comments
Jack	"Well, you know, everybody has dreams. Everybody has big expectations...but, I wasn't counting on it. I wasn't throwing all my eggs in one basket."
Rex	"All my life, you know--my whole life has been based off of playing professional football. It has always been my dream. Yet, I've always known there's a slight possibility--hey, I might not make it. Therefore, hey, school is where it's at."
Keith	"I really--in the back of my mind, I would say, yeah, I came to get my degree, but I really wanted to go to professional football."
Joe	"I realized I wasn't good enough to be a pro football player. It would've been nice to have done that, but I accepted that fact a long time ago. I got to [State U.] and found out I wasn't the big man on the block anymore."
Quincy	"I just wanted to play college ball, get my scholarship, and get my degree, and go out and do something besides play football...but, there was a change of heart then. I wanted to play...I got interested in my first All-Star game, and I said I might be able to do this, you know, on the professional level."
Rick	"Most athletes just get to college--they're looking to have a chance to play pros. They're gonna do what they're told. They're not gonna--they just look at getting into the game as a chance for them to make it in life. So, they're gonna do whatever they're told by the coaches and administration. They're the ones who are really shaping that person's mind, moreso than probably even their parents or anyone else."

"I Shoulda Been Finished in Four Years--Easy."

Only one of these participants graduated in the typical 4 to 4 1/2 years. Even in anticipating the graduating dates of all participants, only one has received, or will receive, his degree after the fifth year (Keith graduated after his fifth school year and one extra semester.) The one participant who graduated "on time" was the one who came here for the academic program in the first place and who walked-on the football team. Joe said:

I didn't come here to play football. I came here for the education.

Jack spoke of the pressures of the schedule during football season and said that he would never think of scheduling more than one or two classes requiring more than minimal effort during football season. Eric also talked of the difficulty in balancing academics with football, and, for that matter, concentrating on anything but football:

I think a lot of guys are in the same boat as me. . . I don't think any of them have a specialized degree or know exactly what they want to do either. . . 'cause I guess we're so concentrated on football. We kinda have to be. It's hard for us to get into a certain field and concentrate on that.

Many players are "given" a major, not because they are interested in it, but because it may be the least demanding curriculum offered. Eric spoke of wasting so much time because he took so many "useless" classes. He blamed himself as well as the academic counseling office for not providing the assistance he needed in getting a major and

guaranteeing that he would get his degree in a suitable amount of time.

I guess a lot of it is my fault--and a lot of other guys are in the same boat as me--but I really should be out by now. . . . I'm starting my sixth year now, and I'm not out. . . . I think they need to try to do a better job up there as far as awareness. . . 'cause when I first came here, I was taking stuff I didn't need. . . . See, I think they need to do a better job of sitting people down and explaining to them how to go about getting a major. . . . I mean, I sat down for two and a half years before I declared a major. . . I mean, a lot of it was my fault, but I wish I would've gotten psychology, sociology, anything really--geology, the natural sciences, math, you know, different stuff. But, I mean, I was taking stuff basically to stay eligible and stuff like that--trying to get my grades up. . . . If I would've known what my major was, maybe starting my first or second year there, I would've been taking courses--basic courses that would go to something. And I wasn't doing that. I was just taking crazy stuff.

Keith spoke of getting cut from his free agent try out with a professional team, and he stated that coming home would not have been as bad if he had gotten his degree first. Keith commented:

When I got cut--when I stepped on that plane coming back, it was the worst feeling in the world for me, you know, because I didn't have my degree. . . . I had a long time to look back and see--look at the classes I blew, summer schools I blew, and it's just a bad feeling 'cause it's free. . . . I shoulda been finished in four years--easy.

Rex echoed these sentiments by saying, "Should have been gone last semester, but I started goofing off."

Eric was the one who commented that when he was playing collegiate football, he was "just trying to float, stay eligible, and all that kind of stuff." Keith also revealed that, during football season, "I might show a face in a

class occasionally. . . Thursdays, you'd never see me in a class."

Everything is different now that the professional career is on hold, or is non-existent. Suddenly, the degree becomes critical to the athlete. There is a personal interest in going to class and in doing well. Eric summarized:

Now, it's not really like that, you know. I mean, I have to be at class. I mean, I don't really have to, but I need to because I want to do good. . . . Now, if I skip a class, I feel bad because I should've gone, because I didn't have anything that made me tired like I did before. . . My grades have gone up and I've done a lot better.

There may be special problems associated with the situation in which an athlete fails to "stick" with a professional team and has to return to the university to complete degree requirements. Keith spoke of a sense of embarrassment and failure because he had to return to State U. to finish his degree after being cut by an NFL team. During the interview, he spoke of his plans to try out again for the NFL in the upcoming year, and the difference having his degree would make:

Yeah, so if I get cut again, I can just go get a job. I ain't gotta come back here. Coming back here was the hardest part, you know. You feel like a failure in a sense. . . . I know it's a tough business, and everybody don't make it. . . , but I wouldn't have felt as bad if I had come back here with my degree and I was out looking for a job; but, I'm back in class.

This sense of embarrassment perpetuated the need for Keith to make excuses and enhance reality. Keith commented:

And, then, when I walked back on campus, I see all the old team--the younger fellows--and they're wondering what happened, and this and that. And then you explain--you get tired of telling them the same old story--"Oh, man, they didn't play me", and "I should be there. I'm better than the guy they kept," and this and that.

"I'm Not Much for Planning Ahead."

It seems obvious from the discussion of typical day vignettes (Chapter 4, pp. 79-82) that these participants are no less busy than they were as football players. If anything, there is less time left over at the end of the day than before. Yet, several participants spoke of all their new "free" time. Jack stated that this was something he has relished since completing his eligibility. Joe also enjoyed having more time to himself, but added that he felt the need to fill up his extra time when he left football. He commented:

. . . from one o'clock to seven, your time was always taken. . . . I see a lot of ex-football players who graduated with me--they're out there playing basketball--intramurals. Just find something that you enjoy and do that to keep your mind off it.

Eric talked extensively about the pressure he felt having to be at a certain place at a certain time and having so little control over his time as a football player. He described his regaining control over his schedule as "free" time, even though he clarified that he really did not have any more "free" time than he used to have. Eric stated:

What's interesting is I've got so much more free time now than when I had to be there and I had to do this and that, but it's almost like--sometimes I feel like I'm almost just as busy. . . . Now, I feel like I'm

pretty busy doing stuff, but, I mean, it's weird, 'cause it's not like I HAVE to do anything or be somewhere.

It is possible that regaining control of one's time after having no control for so long may make a former player resistant to rigid schedules. Rick commented that he did things on the spur of the moment now. Speaking of an appointment reminder that I left for him the day before our first interview, he said, "I'm not much for planning ahead and things, so, you're lucky to get me here."

"I Don't Miss Bustin My Butt Working Out Every Day."

Some of the players discussed what they missed the most from their collegiate football careers and what they did not miss at all. Table 10 represents their comments. As can be seen from the comments, most things they did not miss involved schedules and structure-related components, rather than the playing of the sport itself.

"I'm Kinda Glad It's Over."

The players' feelings about their collegiate football careers (Table 11) offers a grim picture of the perceptions of these participants. Most of them left with negative impressions and disillusionment. Even the one player who always made lemonade out of lemons, Jack, was glad his collegiate career was over, citing how wonderful it was to have "free time" again.

Table 10. WHAT IS MISSED--WHAT IS NOT

Participant	What They Miss	What They Don't Miss
Joe	"the competitiveness" "just playing the game on game day"	"practice" "the shafts and bureaucracy"
Eric	"senior year and starting" "being out there on Saturdays"	"all the crap thrown at you" "practice, spring practice, meetings, and lifting" "not being left alone" "nervousness before the game"
Keith	"my body misses it. It hasn't gotten used to no contact, no practice, no conditioning"	"politics"
Rick	"not much"	"I don't miss bustin' my butt working out every day."
Quincy	not stated	"You're not in control of anything."

Table 11. FEELINGS ABOUT COLLEGIATE FOOTBALL CAREERS	
Participant	Comments
Joe	"People wonder why I'm mad at them, and why I hate the way I was treated...I'd still do it again. I'd still play. But I would be more vocal and take up for myself better...I would do things differently. I wouldn't let them walk all over me like they did."
Keith	"I went through it for 5 years. It don't change. I can sit and talk about it now, but the guys over there--they're still going through it. It's the same, old same old."
Quincy	"It hurts to talk about it, to think about it, but, like I said, I ain't cryin' over spilt milk. I ain't gonna sweat it, you know...[State U.] does what's best for them, and I just wasn't best for them at the time. It's just amazin'--it amazes me--naw, I don't want to get into it. It's over. Just gotta flow. It's not gonna eat at me, because I didn't have nothing to do with it. I didn't pull the switch."
Rick	"I just felt overwhelming--I guess just basically, it felt like I was getting ready to snap at that point...I felt like I had to do something to--just to help bring me back to who I wanted to be...So, all this just sort of opened up the door to transferring to [a small private school]. And while I was there, I felt like football was a lot more fun."
Eric	"I guess I'm kinda glad it's over...There was so much pressure on me..."

Table 11. FEELINGS ABOUT COLLEGIATE FOOTBALL CAREERS

Participant	Comments
Rex	"It was difficult, you know, knowing that guys that--when I came to this university--that were babies. They weren't even playing. Other guys came along, I really felt like, that really couldn't touch me, but they go first, second, third round. Yet, I'm way down the road. It's, it's--you know, it's hard for me to swallow...You beat a guy out, then, you went back to your old position, then you go to another position, and you beat that guy out, then go back to your position, then go back to another position, then you beat that guy out. Yet, they move him to the other side, and he stays in the NFL longer than you do. You know, it's difficult. I mean, it's hard to understand. I mean, I don't know--that might be a matter of being in the right place at the right time, but, after a while, you get tired of fighting the odds. You know, you get to where you're like, "Man, forget it. I'm tired."
Jack	In an untaped conversation, said that he was glad it was over, and that he relished his new "free time."

Summary

This chapter presented the following themes from the participants' transcripts: (a) the transition from high school ball to big-time, major college football, and the problems that such transition was related to; (b) the relationship with the college coaches, or the lack, thereof; (c) the perceptions of the participants that they were expected to do anti-social, or aggressive, acts to please the coaches and to get attention; (d) the issues of power and control that were perceived to exist in the football setting; (e) the tendency of these participants to cast blame in some direction; and (f) the ways in which the participants were experiencing post-eligibility life. The following chapter discusses how these themes might be tied to the literature, and what conclusions and implications might be drawn from the findings.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the experiences of former college football players upon exiting their intercollegiate careers and to explore the liminal period in which they pass from something that is known (their college athletic career) to something that is unknown. This study utilized an interpretist framework and a qualitative methodology which consisted of dialogic interviewing. Seven former NCAA Division I collegiate football players who were at least eight months, and not more than three years, removed from the end of their collegiate eligibility, participated in the study. None of the participants were under contract with any professional team at the time of their interviews.

The emerging themes of the study were that: (a) the transition from high school to college ball was a major one in which players felt isolated from the coaches, and they felt a previously unknown pressure from media and fans; (b) the participants described negative, or non-existent relationships with the coaches; (c) the participants felt encouraged from coaches to act in an aggressive manner; (d) the participants felt that their lives as college players, and their potential pro football futures were controlled by the athletic departments and the coaches;

(e) the participants tended to blame external sources for disappointments; (f) there was a shift toward interest in academics after the end of the sport career which was not present during the sport career.

What do these themes really tell us about sport career transition? First, they tell us that socialization into sport, and the sport culture itself, are very important issues in how athletes make the transition from a sport-centered life to a non-sport centered life. It is not believed that the literature in sport career "retirement" or transition pays adequate attention to these issues. "Retirement" experience cannot be understood in terms of isolated variables and uni-dimensional theories. Secondly, the data tell us that these athletes spent a great deal of time in the past, concerned with their relationships with their coaches and the perceived injustices of the football system. Perhaps most importantly, the findings tell us that feelings of lack of control may have been pivotal in the experiences of these participants. What follows is a discussion of how the findings relate, or do not relate, to the body of literature on sport career retirement.

Discussion

Findings for Interaction and a Holistic Approach

The most obvious theme from this study is that pigeonholing sport career transition into a uni-dimensional,

non-interactive theory simply will not work across the board. The seven individuals who participated in this study all brought with them their unique histories and experiences. In essence, they all reacted in their own individual styles to their specific situations. For example, Keith seemed to follow the classic Kubler-Ross (1969) stages of death and dying: (a) shock and denial when he was cut from his professional team free agent try out; (b) anger, although, for Keith, this was not as pronounced; (c) bargaining (he is going to go to professional try outs again next year, and he will even accept playing for an arena football league); (d) depression, when he thought about having no degree yet and being responsible for his new family; and (e) acceptance, in that he is no longer as confident that he will make the pros next year, but he will have his degree then, so he can move on. For Keith, he is still in the process of vacillating between these last two stages, and the whole process is highly dependent on things out of his control.

Conversely, Rick's story seemed to be a perfect fit for Coakley's (1983) rebirth theory. He talked about the relief he felt upon retirement, and the fact that he had no regrets or wishes to return to football. Rick's case also reflected a great deal of burnout, which was lacking in Keith's story, and Rick perceived that he had personal control over his retirement decision.

Transition and process approaches such as Schlossberg's Model of Transitions (1981) and Swoboda and Vanek's (1982) systems model, seem to be more applicable to the findings, in that they allow for flexibility, interaction of situation and individual, and movement over time. Such concepts give the critical elements of appraisal and perception their due importance. Overall, this study supports the broad framework of interpretist theory, because it clearly shows (a) different socialization paths into sports, (b) different degrees of identity tied to sport, (c) different perceptions of alternatives, and (d) different degrees of difficulty in leaving sport. However, there are some similarities that transcend the differences. What follows is a discussion of those similarities. However, it is important to keep in mind that these similarities, or themes, or generalities in terms of this group, should not be interpreted as generalizations to predict future events or to stand as the one and only "truth" for all former college football players in all football programs.

Unfinished Business

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the experiences of former intercollegiate football players upon exiting their collegiate football careers. What I found over the course of the interviews is that most of these participants have a great deal of "unfinished business" that they have yet to resolve in terms of their college football

experience. This "unfinished business" was predominantly that of their relationships, or lack of relationships, with their coaches and others in the athletic systems, but it also included the perceptions that they might not have gotten their "legitimate shots" at playing professionally.

Most of the interview time was spent in dialogue about coaches, athletic systems, and the participants' feelings about them, rather than about what was currently going on in their lives. For the most part, they were past-oriented. This is a particularly strong finding in light of the fact that most of the interview sessions were spent in the phenomenological portions of the interviews in which the participants guided the course of the conversation. In all interviews except one, the interview with Jack, participants initiated discussions about the coaches and the athletic departments. There was no specific question asked up to that point about the athletic system. Also, the topic was approached from several different angles. For example, one participant spoke of injuries and the effect of these injuries on his professional aspirations. Then, he followed with a comment about whether or not he would have been able to play professionally even if he had been healthy, because he did not think he would have had the support of the coach. Another participant brought up the subject of his relationship with his coach within the first ten minutes of the interview while discussing the fact that he was a walk-

on and that he got so little playing time. A third participant approached the topic of the coaches and athletic department when he was discussing the professional scouts who came to observe him and their conversations with his coaches.

Such findings of unfinished, or unresolved, business were supported in the studies of Haerle (1975), Werthner and Orlick (1986), and Blinde and Stratta (1991). In his study of ex-professional baseball players, Haerle (1975) found that three-fourths of his sample were past-oriented.

Werthner and Orlick (1986) noted that whether or not an athlete felt satisfied with having met sport goals, was an important factor in ease of adjustment after sport. This was particularly true in cases in which injuries cut short playing careers, or in which athletes were cut from the teams. Leaving their sport without having accomplished their much sought goals left the majority of interviewees with feelings that they had unfinished business, thus impeding successful adjustment to post-sport life.

Blinde and Stratta (1991) mentioned unfinished business, as well. In their group of participants, there was a great deal of talk about "what might have been" (p. 16), and there were regrets about having slacking off in practice and not having working as hard as they could have during their careers.

The Uniqueness of the Sport Setting

When I think back to my previous pilot studies and interviews with various athletes other than football players (Parker, 1990; Parker, 1992), the thing that stands out for me in comparison with this study is how these other-sport athletes talked about their sports. A baseball player spoke of the smell of the grass before a game, and of stretching in the outfield and burying his nose in the grass. He talked of the smell of the leather glove and the sound of the bat on the ball. He described spring as "the flavor of baseball," and he ended with how much he missed all these things (Parker, 1992, p. 20). In reviewing his interview transcripts, I noticed that not once during the one-hour session did he mention his coach or the athletic department of his school.

Other athletes in different sports spoke primarily of the sport itself. A swimmer talked of his relationship with the water. Conversations with a track star, a softball player, a volleyball player, and two tennis players were dominated by things other than relationships with coaches (Parker, 1990; Parker, 1992).

These were the first interviews with a group of participants in a specific sport that seemed so singularly focused on something other than the game itself and the experience of not playing the game anymore. Support was found in this study for the suggestions of Ball (1976) and

Greendorfer and Blinde (1985) that the transition experience is probably highly related to the specific sport setting and the institutional contexts of the setting. Greendorfer and Blinde (1985) also spoke of the need to investigate the athletes' perception of the sport setting:

Unless retirement studies include methods in their design which incorporate the athlete's interpretation and reaction to the sport structure, as well as the information pertaining to the athlete's perceptions of his or her personal experience of leaving sport (e.g., biographical information), it would seem that assumed relationships between leaving sport and psychological adjustment might not be as clear as suggested by the existing literature. (p. 108)

It is felt that this study has addressed athletes' perceptions of the sport structure, and the conclusion is that the perception of the specific sport situation played an important role in the transition experiences of these seven participants.

Locus of Control

From the social-psychological micro-level perspective, this study produced three interrelated themes, all of which seem to revolve around the perceived locus of control that directed the lives of these participants. From their perspectives, coaches and athletic administrations controlled everything from their hopes and dreams for the future to their hour-by-hour schedules when they were college football players. Because of this perceived power over them, coaches were believed to distance themselves from players, therefore denying the positive relationship that

these participants craved. The anger, bitterness, and frustration, and/or resignation over this negative relationship, and the lack of power that the participants felt, triggered the need to blame external sources, as indicated in the findings.

For the most part, these participants felt "swept along with the tide" of football, absolutely at the mercy of things and people over which they had no control. It made no difference that they might be the very best at what they did, or that they might work harder than anyone else.

This theme finds support in other studies. In Werthner and Orlick's (1986) study of former Canadian Olympic athletes, 18 of the 28 interviewed indicated that they felt they had very little personal control over their lives during their competitive years. Another five rated their personal control as high, but then qualified this by adding that "it was probably a false sense of personal control--that really the coach or sport association had been in control" (p. 327, 349).

The related finding of negative, or non-existent, relationships with coaches and the reactions that these relationships produced has some support in the sport career retirement literature, but usually, almost as an afterthought. However, the Werthner and Orlick (1986) study spoke of this theme at length, as one of their seven factors influencing transition. The Olympians interviewed described

coaches and what they classified as "Politics/Sport Association Problems" as playing ". . . a predominant role . . . in determining the way in which they faced the end of their sport career" (p. 353). The authors went on to say that these perceptions of coaches and sport associations ". . . prompted the athletes to leave their sport careers with feelings of bitterness, of dissatisfaction at not having reached their potential All of this often made the actual transition quite difficult" (p. 354). On the other hand, those who felt that they had a positive relationship with their coach thought that this relationship attenuated their adjustment difficulty.

One could conclude from this study and the Werthner and Orlick (1986) study, that the relationships of these athletes with their coaches was a critical factor in their transition experience. Telander (1989), a former collegiate and professional football player, summarized succinctly by stating, "Indeed, it is remarkable how many former players I have talked to imply that forgetting about their coaches was one of the major steps they had to take to get on with their lives" (p. 90).

The negative feelings that most participants in the present study had for coaches and athletic administrations and the casting of blame in their direction was supported by Hallinan and Snyder (1988), and Blinde and Stratta (1991). However, both studies categorized this anger and striking

out as belonging to phase two of Kubler-Ross' (1969) stages of death and dying. I believe that the themes of these seven participants contradict the notion that these negative emotions are a phase of a thanatological theory. One of the most angry and bitter participants of this study, Joe, would seem inappropriately categorized as someone experiencing social death. Joe was fully aware of his lack of talent early in his college career. He was more prepared than most for his eventual "retirement" from football, and he perceived himself to have many alternatives and goals upon his exit from football. Joe never gave me the impression that he compared his transition to a social death. Yet, he was very angry and bitter over his relationship with his coach.

It could be that the player's relationship with the coach is not so much a by-product of his sport involvement. Perhaps it is much more of a cornerstone that colors the entire sport experience, as well as the transition experience.

Summary

The findings of this study provide evidence that previous literature has been insufficient in describing the transition experience of athletes. The evidence supports the need for interactional frameworks and models, and it clearly shows that uni-dimensional theories are insufficient for this area of study. This study also highlights the need

for close examination of, not only the socialization process into sport, but the nature of the specific sport setting and the perceptions of that sport setting, before a rush to judgment. In the next section, suggestions are made for future directions in research, along with practical applications for sport psychologists, counselors, and coaches.

Implications

The importance of this study is not so much in the agreement that it finds with previous sport career retirement studies, but in the doors that it opens for other research and practical applications. What follows is a discussion of possible new directions and perspectives.

Implications for Research

This study makes clear the importance of considering the sport structure and context in sport "retirement" and transition studies. Also, the field is wide open for further studies about college football, specifically, big-time major college football. The dynamics of the football systems need to be evaluated more closely to see if power relationships such as the ones perceived in this study exist in other college football settings.

Critical Theory as a Framework for Sport Career Retirement Research

Many college athletic administrations and coaches seek to control college football players. This is not "news," nor is it a big secret. Actually, it is something that they are quite proud of, if the statement of the Assistant Director of Athletics at a large southern football power is any indication. The statement, as quoted to Wolff (1991), reads as follows:

You can control the athlete's environment [with an athletic dorm], and that's what a lot of young people need. . . . I don't want to pass judgment on the discipline they've gotten before they get here. But if I'm a parent and I see that my boy eats, studies, lives, and practices right here, I'm going to say, "That's a home." (p. 66)

One might also compare such a scenario to a prison or military basic training. The interviews of these participants clearly show that they perceive themselves to have very little control over their lives in college, not only due to the physical settings of dorms and dining halls, but also because the social subculture of the football program is set up in this manner.

It is quite possible that the football culture of these participants finds applicability with more value-oriented perspectives, such as critical theory. Critical theory is fundamentally a European theory of human phenomena that was adopted by American social scientists who were dissatisfied with the lack of attention paid to social injustices by the

research community. Critical theory is related to interpretist theory approaches, and it draws from traditional functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interaction, for its assumptions. However, critical theory does not stop there. Proponents of critical theory place value judgements on social phenomena, and they basically state that human beings are oppressed by ruling elites. Those in power in society are constantly perpetuating this oppression to assure that they remain in power. The ruling elites utilize and manipulate language and communication media to perpetuate the stratification of society. (LeCompte & Priessle, 1993)

Critical theory seems very applicable to the stories told by these athletes. There is a classical imbalance of power in which coaches and athletic departments are clearly perceived to be the ruling class. This ruling class distances itself from the masses via physical separation and verbal and non-verbal interaction. Stratification is evident from the perceived social organization of the football subculture.

It is suggested that critical theory is an appropriate framework from which to study major college football culture. Critical ethnographies and interviews with those involved in football programs might be very fruitful and enlightening. However, while the themes of this study open doors for investigation of the applicability of critical

theory to college football, the system itself was not the central focus of this study. What was important, from the perspective of this study, was the social-psychological perspective of the individual athletes, not the culture of collegiate football. Therefore, one of the suggestions of this study is to encourage new studies of football culture, and the relationship between this culture and the sport career transition experience.

The Possibility of the Changing Athlete

Perhaps Messner (1985) hit on the key to the uniqueness of football in the male sport domain. He commented:

And it is likely that the rise of football as "America's number one game" is largely the result of the comforting clarity it provides between the polarities of traditional male power, strength, and violence, and the contemporary fears that society is becoming "feminized." Indeed, this research suggests that many men are still very committed to traditional sports and male values and are living their lives in such a way that they contribute to the reproduction of these traditional values in their own lives as well as the lives of their children. (p. 56)

What we may be seeing in this study about football is a clash between attempts to reproduce the traditional masculine values that Messner (1985) spoke of, and the changing nature of the athlete responding to these attempts. There is much recent evidence that young adult male athletes are no longer acquiescing to coaching behaviors that they consider aggressive and controlling. In 1992, both the University of South Carolina and the Memphis State University football teams "mutinied" because of what they

described as the head coaches' abusive behaviors. Both of these incidents were settled internally, but Colorado State University fired its head coach on November 23, 1992, because, as University President Albert Yates commented, "A subsequent inquiry revealed a high level of intimidation and fear, fostered by [the head coach], existed in the football program" ("Coach Fired. . . ", 1992). Also, in 1992-93, another revenue-producing sport, basketball, was the scene of at least two firings based on accusations of player mistreatment. The United States Military Academy and The University of California, Berkley, fired their head basketball coaches over these incidents (Blum, 1993).

This does not appear to be a change in coaching behavior. Most of the coaches discussed above were older, and had been coaches for many years. The role of the college coach as a power figure is not new, either. As journalist Mike Lupika stated recently on the ESPN television show, The Sports Reporters, "Control freaks, which college coaches are, have a hard time coping with the jump of coaching in the pros. The players make more money and are not as easily controlled" (April 26, 1992).

The alternative explanation for the coach/player discord would be that the nature of the college athlete is changing. We should keep in mind that the athletes who participated in this study were children of the 1970's, when the feminist movement gained much ground, comparatively

speaking, in American society. We could be seeing changes brought about by this "new" influence.

The athletes interviewed for this study were very sensitive individuals. Having the coach's respect and having a sense of identity on the team was critical for them. The perceived autocratic leadership style of their coaches in the traditional sense of patriarchy obviously did not lend itself toward these needs.

The findings of this study present the possibility that the male college athlete of the 1990's may be confused and caught between an athletic system and sport which teaches traditional masculinity, and a society in which the components of masculinity are changing and becoming less rigid. However, more studies are needed to explore in more detail the suggested changing value system of young male athletes and the possible confusion in relating to traditionally masculine coaches.

Ethnic studies

The literature (Anshel, 1990; Anshel & Sailes, 1990; Evans, 1978) would have us believe that African-American athletes and white athletes differ in their psychological needs from sport and their perceptions about the sport setting. Among other things, African-Americans were found to have a lack of trust in white coaches and to feel more distant in their relationships with white coaches (Anshel, 1990; Anshel & Sailes, 1990; Evans, 1978). African-American

athletes were also found by Anshel (1990) to feel more strongly than white athletes that the coach must earn respect, rather than require it. Additionally, this same study revealed that African-Americans had more ". . . heightened sensitivity to the negative tone and anger directed at them by the coach" (Anshel, 1990, p. 243) than whites had.

In contrast, analysis of the transcripts of these seven participants in this study appears to refute such findings. Indeed, the African-American athletes felt a lack of trust and a distance between themselves and the coaches. And, yes, the African-American athletes felt that the coaches should earn respect, not demand it. And, finally, African-Americans exhibited sensitivity toward the negative feedback of the coaches. However, this was the case with white athletes, as well. To conclude that such perceptions were a function of race, at least in this study, would be wrong, if these conclusions were based on the data presented. The conclusion might be that human agency, individual differences, and the specific sport context are important factors which should not be overlooked. However, the implications for future studies in this area are clear.

There were ethnic differences emanating from this study, however. All three participants who planned to try the professional football market again were black. This would appear to be a factor related to ethnic culture and

socialization, as discussed by Rudman (1986), who found that "blacks are more likely than whites to have a professional orientation toward personal competition in sport" (p. 307). However, it could also be a matter of practicality. It is possible that an African-American with a bachelor's degree might still have few options outside of sport in which he could expect to earn more than minimum wage.

The findings of DuBois (1980) and Messner (1985) were that sport careers did not affect later occupational success and earnings. Messner (1985) commented on the "rhetoric and mythology" (p. 39) that sport careers paved the way for upward mobility, stating:

. . . for the vast majority of participants, the athletic experience does more to reproduce and legitimize existing inequalities than it does challenge and overcome them. (p. 39)

There is a great deal of opportunity for future studies investigating further the ethnic differences that were found in this study, and also the lack of ethnic differences noted in perception.

Implications For Counselors and Sport Psychologists

If anything is to be learned from this study, it is that former athletes have a lot to say and perhaps no one to tell. These unresolved feelings and emotions, coupled with the lack of a safe forum of expression, is potentially harmful to the mental health of these individuals. Liminal athletes need to be afforded the opportunity to vent and

clarify their feelings about their sport careers without fear of reprisals.

It is suggested that, in addition to allowing athletes to "talk it out", they might benefit from group sessions, as U.S. Olympians did (Petitpas, Danish, McKelvain, & Murphy, 1988). These Olympians spoke of the relief they felt that other athletes had similar transition experiences, and that they were not alone.

Finally, it is suggested that reality therapy, as outlined by Glasser (1965) might be a useful technique with this population. Reality therapy stresses growth through reclaiming personal control and personal responsibility for actions. It also depends heavily on goal-setting and goal-meeting, which are concepts that athletes are very familiar with.

Implications For Coaches

Thomas and Ermler (1988) discussed the obligations of the coach in the coach-athlete relationship, and they noted that coaches often act with the athletes' best interests at heart, but get the wrong results. They stated:

The coach and other managers in the athletic establishment have traditionally remained the autocratic center of the athlete's world. Retaining the knowledge, control, and ultimate responsibility for the athlete's world is often justified in order to achieve outcome objectives. It is the sincere, often altruistic belief of the coaching establishment that a favor is being done for the athlete of whom they have charge by taking care of the details, making the decisions, and literally spoiling the athlete so that his or her full attention can be directed to the quest for athletic excellence. (p. 139)

Coaches may very well have the athletes' best interests at heart. However, they should understand that these athletes had a very different perspective. Coaches might benefit from spending more time in direct communication with their players. From the results of this study, players do not necessarily want to get their own way or to get special treatment. However, a very strong premium was placed by the athletes on honesty from their coaches and on getting information about why certain decisions were made. The literature supports the benefits of providing information to athletes, in that it helps to cultivate their personal autonomy. Thomas and Ermler (1988) explained that ". . . not giving the athlete information or not taking the time to explain what is happening or what the options are robs the individual of autonomy" (p. 147). Unfortunately, coaches are usually hired and fired based on wins and losses, and not on cultivating communication and relationships with their players and providing for their autonomy. However, the players were quick to point out that, as far as they were concerned, X's and O's and winning strategies were only a part of a coach's obligations. They expected much more than they got.

Reflections on Findings from a Biased Perspective

My world view and biases have been previously discussed, but how did these biases fit in with the findings

of this study? I expected to find power/control issues based on a participant-observation pilot study that I had done earlier. However, I was taken by surprise at the strength of the theme and at the extent of the revelations of participants. Team athletes, as a rule, do not "air their dirty laundry" to outsiders, and I expected to get more "sugar-coating" than I did. I do not know the exact reason for this, although I would assume that much of it has to do with the fact that these participants have finished their eligibility with the school. They might also have been ready to vent feelings previously held inside, and I happened to provide an outlet. Several of them expressed that they had never before been asked questions such as the ones I asked.

I also expected a stronger finding of ethnic differences. It is possible that I tried so hard not to let this bias influence my interpretation, that I became blind to the possible evidence. However, it is my belief that, while African-American participants may have felt oppressed by the coaching staff, the white athletes also felt oppressed. It is possible that oppression in this setting is class-based (classes within the football subculture), rather than race-based.

Also, as a result of this study, I have been able to bring to consciousness something that I have been subconsciously aware of for some time. As a female in sport

psychology, I have never perceived any difficulty in communicating with and establishing rapport with younger male athletes. For them, the major criteria seems to be whether or not one can understand their sport and their sport context. Once it has been established that I can relate to discussions of a "nickel package" and "run-and-shoot offenses," I do not perceive any gender barriers to communication. However, I have not found this as evident with many male coaches, particularly older male coaches. In light of the findings of this study, I have become aware that this may be a difference in male values between age groups.

Conclusions

As stressed throughout this paper, this is a study of seven individuals who had completed their collegiate eligibility and who were not under contract with any professional football team. Consistent with the guiding interpretist framework of this study, it is highly probable that interviews with seven athletes who succeeded in moving on to the next level would have yielded much different results. However, for these seven individuals in this study, their collegiate football careers did not live up to expectations.

I perceive these seven former college football players to be a jaded, tired group. Little idealism remains about

the nature of big-time college football. If love of the sport plays a role in their experience, it is overridden by the perceived "politics" of the athletic system, and the participants' reactions to it. Yes, the game on Saturday was fun, but one day apparently did not make up for the rest of the week. These players were not pushed, kicking and screaming, from a sport that they loved. In fact, most expressed a relief that it was over. If they still pursued a professional football career, it was not because of lofty dreams or love of the game, but because of a lack of perceived alternatives and/or a need for improved social and financial status. If they left football with any sense of personal control, it was in spite of, not because of, their collegiate football experience.

Bettelheim, as paraphrased by Telander (1989), once stated:

To be disciplined requires self-control. To be controlled by others and to accept living by their rules or orders makes it superfluous to control oneself. (p. 102)

Let us recall the words of the Assistant Athletic Director quoted earlier in this chapter in which he spoke of providing a "home" for the athletes, taking care of them, and relieving them of the burden of decision-making. Such a philosophy may guarantee that an athlete has a "home" while (s)he is in college, but when (s)he is turned out from that "home" and dumped on the real world upon completion of

eligibility, what has (s)he gained in terms of self-discipline and decision-making skills?

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

Interview Schedule

Prior to each formal interview session, it is anticipated that five to ten minutes will be spent making the participant feel comfortable with his surroundings and with the interviewer. He will be offered a beverage (non-alcoholic) and a comfortable chair. It is probable that a few minutes will be spent in casual conversation and trust building.

During the first session, the Informed Consent Statement will be discussed and signed. Any questions about the procedures will be addressed, particularly those pertaining to the audio-taping of the interviews. The participant will be allowed the opportunity to terminate participation at this time. Should he wish to continue, the interviews will proceed.

1. Phenomenological question

Since you finished your last collegiate game until now, what's your experience been?

--What's your life been like?

--What's been going on for you?

2. Ethnographic questions

a. Describe a typical day. How is this different from when you were playing ball?

b. Tell me about your plans.

c. Tell me about your early experiences in sport (K-12).

--Family

--Friends

--Motivations to play sport

d. Think back to when you were a Freshman. What did you expect? What did you see for yourself then? Sophomore? Junior? Senior?

e. Tell me about your relationships with the coaching staff/media/support networks (family, friends, etc.) when you were a Freshman? Sophomore? Junior? Senior?

f. How, if at all, have these relationships changed since your last game collegiate game?

g. What, if anything, would you do differently in looking back on your sport career?

3. Follow-up interview and debriefing

a. Can you think of any other thoughts or feelings that might shed some light on the things that we have talked about? If so, tell me about them.

b. How do you feel about our interviews and what we have discussed?

c. Before we talked to each other, have you thought about your transition experiences in the manner suggested by my questions?

d. What suggestions could you make to help administrative sport personnel address your needs better at this time of your life?

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of intercollegiate athletes upon leaving elite competitive sport careers.

DESCRIPTION OF STUDY

Scientific study of transitions from sport careers has been somewhat neglected until recently. What few studies that have been conducted have yielded conflicting results. One of the more frequent suggestions made by researchers is that of delving into the athletes' perceptions and personal reactions in a more in-depth manner than allowed for in objective questionnaires and social data utilized in previous studies. This study has been undertaken to address this suggestion.

Participants in this study will be volunteers and will be asked to participate in 3 interview sessions lasting approximately one hour each at a mutually agreed upon location and time. The interview sessions will center around your experience of leaving competitive sport and the effects your sport career has had on your life after sport. Sessions are to be informal and open-ended. It is your option to terminate the interview at any time.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Your participation in this study entails no physical risks or discomforts. No psychological discomfort is anticipated. As stated above, you may terminate the interview at any time. For accuracy purposes, the interview sessions will be recorded on audio tape which will be maintained in a secure location. The audio tape will be erased upon completion of the research project. Until that time, it is your prerogative to listen to your tape recording at a mutually agreed upon time and place.

I have read the statement above and understand my role in the research and the potential risks involved. In addition I am aware that:

- (1) My name, questionnaire, and interview information will remain confidential.
- (2) I am entitled to have any further inquiries answered regarding the procedures.

- (3) I may withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time without penalty or prejudice toward me.

Date: _____ Signature: _____

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VITA

Kathy Belinda Parker was born in Delhi, Louisiana, on June 4, 1952. She graduated from West Monroe High School, West Monroe, Louisiana, in May, 1969. Kathy received her undergraduate degree in Political Science from Northeast Louisiana University in December, 1973.

From 1974 to 1988, Kathy was employed by the State of Louisiana as a Child Support Enforcement Officer, and later, as a Probation and Parole Agent and Supervisor for the Baton Rouge District Probation and Parole Office. She returned to school in 1989, and she received her Master's degree in Psycho-Social Aspects of Sport from the University of North Texas in May, 1990.

Starting in August, 1990, Kathy has been employed by The University of Tennessee Department of Human Performance and Sport Studies as a Graduate Teaching Associate. She will receive the Doctor of Philosophy degree with a major emphasis in Sport Psychology in August, 1993.