



Sport • Psych news



Saying Goodbye: Transitioning Away from Your Collegiate Athletic Career

Volume 08

Hi Wildcats,

As we come to an end of the semester, many of you will be graduating. Therefore, the final edition of the “Mental Training” email series will discuss how to manage the end of your athletic career. Research has shown that many athletes react to the end of their athletic career in similar ways to dealing with the loss of a loved one or the end of a serious romantic relationship. Some common symptoms are trouble sleeping, difficulty concentrating, making silly mistakes, as well as feeling lost and possibly depressed. It makes sense that it is difficult adjusting to life after sport if you consider how many years you have made your sport a part of your life. For many athletes, there are few activities they have done more. You may be surprised to see how many minutes of your life you have spent performing your sport.

Calculate how many years you have been performing (X) and estimate how many hours per week you spend doing your sport (Y). Now enter these numbers into the formula below:

$$\text{Years} \times \text{Hours} \times 60 \text{ (minutes per hour)} \times 52 \text{ (weeks in a year)} = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$$

Seeing this amount of time spent in one activity may result in an athlete confusing their **whole** identity as just their sport. For example, how often have you said to someone proudly “I am a gymnast/soccer player/basketball

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player/swimmer”? Though this statement is common, it neglects the many other aspects of who you are. For example, you are also sons and daughters, friends, students, perhaps brothers and sisters, etc. I often laugh to myself when at a social gathering the most common question overheard is “what do you do?” Only to hear the most common answers consist of someone identifying themselves as their job. For example, “I am an accountant,” “I am a psychologist,” and “I am a fireman.” Though these are all honorable professions, none of them completely define the individual. What happens to the accountant if they lose their job? Do they cease to exist? No, they just go on to do other things. In other words, the professions are activities that these people **do**, **not who they are**. Similarly, your sport is merely an activity that you **do**, **not who you are** even if you spent the majority of your life performing it.

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ARIZONA



When people erroneously define themselves as what they do, it can be both a blessing and a curse. When you succeed, it is perceived as a blessing because people will compliment you and even sing your praise. However, this praise leads many to think incorrectly that by performing well in your sport you have somehow escalated your value as a human being. This line of thinking becomes particularly painful when you fail. It can even



lead some think they are “losers” because they base their whole existence just on the one failed event. For some athletes this leads to an emotional rollercoaster – on top of the world when they win and in complete misery when they lose. Additionally, when their career ends it becomes almost unbearable. For some

athletes, they don’t get to choose when their career ends because of an unexpected injury or the team releasing them. How does an individual define themselves when this

happens? Do they go from being a soccer player to an ACL injury? Clearly not. It is essential for emotional stability and good health for all of us to separate the ACTOR from the ACTION. We can celebrate each others’ successful behaviors while always accepting

who we are as humans. And when you struggle, you can pursue ways to improve your performance while still accepting who you are. Similarly, when you stop participating in your sport, you can continue to accept yourself in your entirety – someone who has many different aspects, traits, and characteristics.

If you would like to talk further about transitioning away from your sport; if you would like to feel more confident; if you would like to discuss other techniques for anxiety; if you would like to meet and discuss other benefits of sport and clinical psychology; or if you are feeling overwhelmed, exhausted, stressed out, frustrated, worried, sad, or lacking confidence, please contact Angie at 621-8805 or ask your athletic trainer to schedule an appointment. I look forward to working with you.

To schedule an appointment, call 621-8805, 621-3334, or ask your athletic trainer for assistance.

**Best Wishes,
Scott Goldman, Ph.D.**

*Sport and Clinical Psychologist
for Student-Athletes*

BEAR DOWN