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# The Transition: From College Athletics To A Post-Athletic Life

Erica Smith  
smithe22@siu.edu

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THE TRANSITION:  
FROM COLLEGE ATHLETICS TO A POST-ATHLETIC LIFE

by

Erica Smith

B.S., Southern Illinois University, 2009

A Research Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Master of Arts Degree.

Department of Sociology  
in the Graduate School  
Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
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RESEARCH PAPER APPROVAL

THE TRANSITION:  
FROM COLLEGE ATHLETICS TO A POST-ATHLETIC LIFE

By

Erica Smith

A Master's Research Paper Submitted in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the field of Sociology

Approved by:

Dr. Jennifer Dunn, Chair

Dr. Derek Martin

Graduate School  
Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
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AN ABSTRACT OF THE RESEARCH PAPER OF

Erica Smith, for the Master of Art degree in Sociology, presented on March 30, 2011, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: THE TRANSITION: FROM COLLEGE ATHLETICS TO POST-ATHLETIC LIFE

MAJOR PROFESSOR: DR. JENNIFER DUNN

The purpose of this study is to examine the transition out of college sports for student-athletes who have graduated within the last 10 years from Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC). Through understanding the competitive, academic and social aspects of each these former athlete's lives, there is a hope to understand how one's social life experiences prepare them for their transition out of sport. Participants were selected for in-depth interviews through referrals from the SIUC athletic department (coaches, administration and staff) and from my own connections with former student-athletes. I found that all of the participants did experience some level of difficulty transitioning; however, the reasons why they experience difficulty vary. Also, the participants in this study were found to have transitioned at different times; not all began their transition following their last competition as a competitive athlete. Other themes appear that add value to this study as well.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this research project to all athletes that have come before me and those who will follow me. May you find purpose and peace in your experience.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my God for keeping me through this process and equipping me with everything I needed to do this work.

To my late Grandmother, thank you for always encouraging me to follow my dreams; no matter how unrealistic they seemed to the rest of the world. There is not a day that goes by that I am not appreciative of your selfless sacrifice for your family and the foundation you built. I promise to continue to make you proud.

To my mother, God used you to get me to this point. Thank you for being a vessel, I love you dearly.

To Shonell, without your selflessness to take me to tournaments and practices when I was younger, I may have never had the opportunity to be a college athlete. I am forever indebted to you. Thank you.

To my family, friends and many supporters thank you for your words of encouragement, mental breaks, endless laughter and love. Without you all, this thesis would have never been completed.

To my colleagues, thank you for challenging me to get better every day. Thank you for your words of encouragement and your sincere interest in my research and life.

To Dr. Benford, thank you for starting me on this project and providing wonderful insight.

To Dr. Dunn, thank you for picking up where Dr. Benford left off. You had no idea about this project when I came knocking on your door, but you saw it through until its completion. Thank you.

To my coaches, especially my head coach. We did not always see eye to eye, but I would not trade in the years we shared. The life lessons learned far outweigh the wins and losses on the basketball court. Thank you for being you. P.S. I always understood.

To my teammates, I love and miss you all. We shared so much and I wish you all the best in life.

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## PRE-GAME: INTRODUCTION

The world of Athletics acts as its own subculture typically separated in part from the rest of society. There is an interest to discover how athletes are affected when their collegiate playing careers come to an end. This study will look at those NCAA athletes who competed at Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC) and did not partake in a professional career following graduation. Being that athletes are members of their own subculture and if they do not continue a playing career, when they are finished competing in college, they are forced to re-enter mainstream culture. Mainstream culture simply means an everyday existence void of them being competitive athletes and members of that subculture. This study examines what is the transition of college athletes back into the mainstream culture once the game clock has expired on their athletic careers.

I chose to embark on this study, because hundreds of thousands of athletes participate in NCAA sports and at some point their careers have to come to an end. Based on the NCAA numbers the probability of going on to compete professionally lingers around 1% in most sports (NCAA.com). This study examines the outcomes of some of the other 99% of student-athletes. This is a large amount of the U.S. population that has to assimilate back into society after they are done participating in sports. Before any research was conducted, I assumed that it is not very easy for a person to give up the lifestyle that comes with being a college athlete. It may be difficult for athletes to move on with life after their careers are over, because the sports arena may be all that they have known for most of their life. I predicted that this study would reveal that a large number of athletes struggle to make peace with their new identity; because it is a drastic change from the life they have known.

In conducting this study I had my own biases in regards to college athletes. One of the biggest biases I had to address was the fact I was a college athlete myself. I was a three year starter at SIUC for the women's basketball team. Therefore, I have been able to experience and relate to what transpires in the athletic subculture; both administratively as well as from a player standpoint. I have been participating in the high profile sport<sup>1</sup> of basketball for the majority of my life and I was embedded in this athletic subculture, existing in it with many others whose playing careers would ultimately come to an abrupt end. My involvement has allowed me to identify with the experiences of the athletes in this study. The days as a college athlete eventually expired for me, as well as for the athletes in this study. As a former collegiate athlete, I have my own experiences in both competition as a college athlete and making the transition out of an athletic career. I will give a brief account of my own experience and why I am drawn to this research.

I first started playing basketball when I was seven years old. I had a brother who was seven years my senior who was trying out for his high school basketball team. He often came home and talked about his games or practices. His passion and love for the game inspired me to play. I would play outside in the neighborhood almost daily.

However, I did not get a chance to play organized basketball until I was in the eighth

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<sup>1</sup> In this study, high profile sports are men's and women's basketball, softball and football. They are labeled as such due to their visibility on campus as well as in the media. The low profile sports are track and field, swimming and diving, baseball, men's and women's tennis, men's and women's golf, volleyball and cross country. High profile athletes are considered to be the stars of their respective teams, those who are very visible in the media, as well as in competition. Low profile athletes are those athletes who play the supporting roles on the teams. I do not intend to take away from anyone's value as a member of a team, but to distinguish a difference in how the "stars" and other members of a team are treated, there has to be a definition for high and low profile athletes. This definition has been borrowed and altered from Shulman and Bowen (2001). Prior research indicates that the visibility and praise that one receives as a student-athlete has an effect on how well he or she makes the transition from college athlete to life post-athletic career.

grade as a member of the all boys' team, in an all boys' league. Later on that year, I joined a girl's team. I played basketball all throughout high school, year round, and was able to get a full scholarship to compete at SIUC, where I had a pretty successful career.

My transition out of athletics is probably not typical of most athletes. I was blessed with the opportunity to be able to continue my athletic career at the professional level. I had multiple contract offers to compete overseas in basketball. However, while I was training the summer following my senior year, my mother was diagnosed with cancer. The cancer was at a stage four, which is the most severe level. I made the decision to forego my playing career and stay close to home to take care of my mother. This made my transition out of athletics and back into mainstream culture very difficult, because I was experiencing other life changes as well.

After making the decision to forego my playing career, I had to figure out what was next for me. I decided to pursue my master's degree at SIUC and was hired as a graduate assistant in Student Services for the athletics department. In taking that position, I was still immersed in the world of athletics, but no longer as a player. Some of my job responsibilities include: community outreach liaison, student advisor of Student Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC), student advisor of Athletes Helping Athletes (AHA) and helping with educational and career development.

After roughly a month into my post-athletic career, I saw and heard some things that made me really critical of the institution of athletics and wonder if it actually prepares athletes for life after college. It was at the final football game at McAndrew Stadium where I heard former football alumni share stories of their former teammates who became homeless after graduating from college. I could not fathom how someone

could go to college, receive a degree, debt free and then end up homeless or longing for a sense of identity. There has to be an explanation as to how something like this could be possible. I decided that I wanted to conduct a study on the transitional period from college athletics to a post athletic life and see what I could find out about that transition.

Going into this study I had a number of assumptions about what the transition is like for athletes, having witnessed it so many times, as well as experiencing it for myself. As I conducted this research those ideas still remained, and were instrumental in thought process behind some of the questions I asked my participants. However, the research actually took on an identity of its own. I learned a lot about what athletes experience throughout their time competing in college (as well as some experiences prior to college); all of which played a role in how they transitioned out of their respective sports. Below you will find my assumptions and reflections on why I feel a particular way. In conducting this research, I am being very mindful of these assumptions, however; I can not ignore the fact that they do in fact exist.

One assumption I have is that it is more difficult for African American Athletes to assimilate back into mainstream culture than it is for white athletes. This assumption stems from a few different concepts. One reason being, there is a contrast between the type of treatment African Americans receive as athletes versus the type of treatment they receive in mainstream society. Athletics may provide a sense of fantasy land for athletes. In 1904, William Funce said that “we are living in a time when college athletics are honeycombed with falsehood...” and I believe that falsehood has grown since 1904 (Meggyesy, 2000). Today athletics is a bigger business and more commercialized than ever before, given athletes the false reality that the rest of the world will continue to be

their playing field, once they exit the subculture. Another issue is that African Americans are the face of the high profile sports; they make up a majority of those teams' athletes (Meggyesy, 2000). With that being said, they are also expected to carry the burden of producing and bringing that team and institution to a point of success (Meggyesy, 2000). According to Igbaria & Wormely (1995), less than 8% of African Americans were in upper management positions. Therefore, those expectations and experiences do not translate into everyday occurrences outside of the playing field. Even with the implementation of the Rooney Rule<sup>2</sup> in NFL hiring practices, African Americans still only make up about 37% of head coaches. Therefore, African American athletes are being exposed to a false reality and it may be more difficult for them to adjust once their playing days are finished.

Going into this study, I was very narrow-minded and one-dimensional in how I thought about the transition process. I never considered the fact some athletes begin having cognitive dissonance and transition in their minds way before their last days as a collegiate athlete. Every athlete, when they finish their college career, loves the game and does not want to walk away, right? Wrong, but that is the mindset I went into this study with, believing that at that moment, after their last competition their worlds could possibly be distraught because something that had been there for them as long as they could remember was no longer available to them in the same capacity. In addition, I did not take into account that even as this life change is unfolding, one may be experiencing other life changes as well; all of which play a role in how a person experiences the transition. Even though I had other life changes occurring while I made my transition, it

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<sup>2</sup> NFL teams are required to interview at least one minority candidate when hiring a head coach or they will be fined. - [Espn.go.com](http://Espn.go.com)

did not occur to me that this could be common for other people, and in fact, is very common. While everyone may not be dealing with a life and death situation, ex-athletes are still faced with other obstacles such as: trying to find a job, going back to school, finding a new place to live, and maybe even relationship challenges. Now that I am no longer an athlete and I have heard others' experiences, I understand the varying degrees of difficulty in transitioning from being a college athlete.

This study looked at how athletes develop in college to help them prepare for this inevitable transition from the subculture of athletics back into mainstream culture. It is estimated that a majority of athletes, especially those competing in Division 1 institutions, have been playing sports competitively for the majority of their lives. Those who participate in sports spend a great deal of time focusing on and developing physical skills (Cross, 2009; Grove & Stoll, 1999), but what about other skill sets? This study is an in-depth look at how athletes at SIUC have made the transition from college athletes, to a post-athletic life. The transition varied for the participants in this study. Some transitioned before the end of their playing career; due to let downs in expectations or not being as good as they use to be earlier in their career. Some came in with the mindset that being a collegiate athlete has a definite end. Others faced injuries that ended their career. While others came to the point where their playing days were finished and they had to transition into new roles. Even with different transitions, these athletes shared a lot of similar experiences such as missing team camaraderie, withdrawal, and finding value outside of their respective sports. While the athletic identity is something that can always be a part of these athletes' collective identity, they will never be collegiate athletes again.

The following section will examine the literature that became the foundation for this study.

## SCOUTING REPORT: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Sociologists who have examined the process of role exit out of athletics have done so in numerous ways. Early studies interested in athletes and the transitioning out of athletics, used gerontology and thanatology theories (Cumming & Henry, 1961; Rosenberg, 1981; Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985). Gerontology focuses on old age and aging people, while thanatology is the study of death. The reason retirement for athletes has been studied in this fashion is because researchers have likened the experience to that of retiring from a job when you are old and the ending of the career is seen as a type of death (Blinde & Greendorf, 1985; Drahotka & Eitzen 1998). Both of these ideologies are problematic, because they assume that the athlete already has a certain reaction to leaving their sport. One of the biggest problems with using these theories to explain retirement for athletes is that it makes the assumption that the role exit is terminal. However, this study, along with others demonstrates that it is actually a transition, not a finale.

Helen Ebaugh (1988) performed a study that examined transitioning and role exit for a variety of different positions (physicians, religious members, divorced persons, mothers without custody of their children, etc). From her findings, Ebaugh developed a four-step model that describes what the role exit process is like for most people. Those four-steps are: 1) first doubts 2) seeking alternatives 3) the turning point and 4) creating the ex-role. First doubts occur when people begin to question their role. Seeking alternatives consists of the person who has first doubts searching for other roles that may interest them. The turning point is when a person has made up a definitive mind to leave their current role for another. In the final stage, the creating the ex-role, this stage is extremely important because the value of the new role is determined by expectations,

social obligations and what the person considers as norms. In this study the research referred to those that left one identity for another as exes. Ebaugh said all exes have one thing in common and defines it as:

The process of disengagement from a role that is central to one's self-identity and the reestablishment of an identity in a new role that takes into account one's ex-role constitutes the process I call exit.

Her results laid the foundation for many transition researchers to build upon, two of those being Drahotka & Eitzen (1998) with their study on the role exit of professional athletes.

Adler & Adler (1991) spent ten years engulfed in the subculture of athletics at a particular university. During the time there, they gained the loyalty, trust and admiration of those affiliated with the basketball program, be it coaches, players, fans, or administrators; people wanted them around. Due to this great deal of trust the researchers were able to do an in-depth study that examined athletes and role engulfment; the participants define themselves by the role they assume, in this case, athlete. They conducted this study during the rise of commercialized sport, a time when college sports, specifically, experienced a complete shift in priorities. The 1980s saw an era of scandal in regards to recruiting, the treatment of athletes and inconsistent administrative practices. This study was specifically interesting because of the structure of the research. Similar to my own study, these researchers examined the social life, academic life, competition and transition out of the athletic role to create a full experience. The Adlers found that the transition out of sport varied between three patterns and there was no exclusive pattern to transitioning. Athletes either were still involved with sport, had vestigial involvement, or no involvement at all. The researchers also examine the engulfed self and concluded the

specialization of a role that is guaranteed to end for most people immediately following the exhaustion of their college eligibility has an adverse affect on numerous athletes.

A study examining the role exit of professional athletes was conducted by Drahota & Eitzen (1998). These researchers found great value in the work previously performed on role exiting by Ebaugh (1988). While it is evident that Ebaugh's research model works well for numerous types of role exit, these researchers found additional consideration needed to be taken when discussing the transitional process for athletes. Drahota & Eitzen found that there should be an initial stage before first doubts, initial doubts. These are the thoughts one had before becoming a professional athlete. Also, in the creating the ex-role stage, the researchers said Ebaugh's model left out the withdrawal stage. In addition to societal impact, impact on others and role residue, athletes also experience "withdrawal"<sup>3</sup> as they transition into new roles, according to Drahota & Eitzen. Withdrawal is a big part of role transitioning because it can affect athletes in so many areas of their lives, be it physically, mentally, and emotionally, etc.

The three above mentioned studies had the greatest impact on the structuring and conceptualization of this study of transitioning out of college sports. However, other works provided a great deal of insight as well; including but not limited to studies by DellaCava & Lehman (1975), George (1993) and Fink (2010). Each of these studies examined role identity and making the transition into new roles. DellaCava & Lehman (1975) conducted a study that examined those that leave high commitment positions and the effect such a transition has on their lives. Fink (2010) specifically examined what happens to the college athlete when they are forced to relinquish their athletic identity.

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<sup>3</sup> Withdrawal can be: physical (conditioning, running, playing, lifting, etc), emotional and social (camaraderie, crowd, fans and heroism), financial (getting paid to play a sport), chemical (adrenaline rush) or mental (intensity of focus or commitment required as an athlete). –Drahota & Eitzen, 1998

George (1993) conducted a sociological review examining the research that has been conducted on life transitions during that year.

In addition to those studies, some others dealing with the issue of race and socioeconomic status and athletics were instrumental in this study. The works by James (1994), King (2001), Eitle & Eitle (2002), Cooky et al (2010) and Carrington (2010) all address the issues of race, socioeconomics and American culture, in an attempt to explain what is going on with the subculture of athletics. James (1994) filmed a documentary that followed the lives of two, young inner city boys from Chicago as they made their journey through high school and the treatment they received because they were gifted athletes. More interesting than the talent of these young men, were the politics, psychological, socioeconomic and family issues these young men battled daily to play the game of basketball.

King (2001), Eitle & Eitle (2002) Carrington (2010), and Cooky et al (2010) all address race and media perceptions of athletes. Each of these studies paint a picture that the black athletes is still that, the black athlete, separated from the identity of simply just being an athlete like their white counterpart. All of these studies concluded that the perceptions portrayed by the media constantly reinforce very limited views of the black athlete, keeping them in the same marginalized identity.

One of the most in-depth studies that has been conducted on college athletes was by Shulman and Bowen (2001). The study examined intercollegiate athletics at 30 colleges and universities. Shulman and Bowen looked at how college level sports affected their respective schools as well as competing universities. Additionally it measured the effects college athletics had on others. They developed a study that

examined the messages the athletic subculture portrays to their prospective athletes and their families, secondary schools and society at large (Shulman & Bowen, 2001). There appears to be the assumption intercollegiate athletics is more than just a bunch of 18-23 year olds putting on a uniform and competing in athletic competition. These athletes are going through life experiences that will have an effect on them far beyond their college playing experience.

These researchers added a lot to the field through this study. However, the themes specific to this study are those which focus on race issues, post-college life and the athletic culture. Shulman and Bowen found evidence to suggest that an “athletic” culture does in fact exist (2001). They found differences in athletes and others students entering college. Both males and females were more competitive than the general student body. Male athletes were set on pursuing business careers and having financial success more often than the general student body. As time has elapsed, women have become more like the men in the above mentioned aspects. However, overall the study indicates that men and women continue to differ in careers and financial importance. Male athletes consistently earned more money than their classmates, but are less likely to earn advanced degrees. Women on the other hand showed no difference in earning advanced degrees. Male athletes were more likely to be in business and finance careers, while women athletes were more likely than their peers to be doctors or academics. Women athletes also saw an advantage in earnings over their classmates. Shulman and Bowen took a very in-depth look into the world of college athletics. This study however, focuses on the post- athletic career life transition. Their study brought forth a great deal of insight

that can be used to examine the subculture of athletics and how athletes transition out of that subculture.

Michael Messner predominately investigated the roles masculinity played in sports (1992). However, his work focusing on athlete's disengagement from sport and life after sport is what is most relevant to this study. In Messner's analysis of disengaging from sport, two themes became apparent to me: the loss of family and the loss of the athletic identity. From this body of work, two passages sum up these two themes; first on the topic of losing family when you disengage from your sport. In Messner (1992) an athlete said:

When you put so many years of your life into something-and I put sixteen year of my life into sports-you eat, you sleep, you fight, you cry and you live together, and they become part of your family. These guys become like family. So when you're released or cut from there, it's like you're a bastard child, you know... (1992, p. 127)

When examining the loss of the athletic identity Messner used an idea developed by Charles Horton Cooley of "the looking glass self." Messner defines this idea as:

If we view the athletic activity and the crowd as a sort of mirror into which the athlete gazes, we can begin to understand how devastating it can be when that looking glass is suddenly and permanently shattered, leaving the man alone, isolated, and disconnected. (1992, p.120)

These were both common themes amongst the men interviewed. Neither is surprising, which increases my desire to expand on the research that looks at life after sports.

In the chapter about life after sport, success was connected with the socioeconomic background one came from. For those who came from low/working class families, the process was more difficult because sport was typically seen as their way out of that socioeconomic class. For the middle class, mainly white athletes, their families conditioned them to believe that sport was not that important and they needed to get serious about their lives; need to focus their energy on other more important things. As a

result, when those from lower socioeconomic classes were removed from sport, they faced a more difficult transition than those middle class athletes who were already focused on other things. Messener concludes that:

The majority of athletes from lower-class backgrounds, however, end up with difficult, sometimes traumatic period of disengagement, which is commonly characterized by identity crises, interpersonal problems, and financial instability. (1992, p. 132)

For those who manage to survive the exit from sport, they eventually settle into working a job that allows them some stability.

In an attempt to explain what I learned from this study, I will build on the role exit work of Ebaugh (1988), Adler & Adler (1991) and Drahotka & Eitzen (1998). The Game Time section of this paper is broke down into five sections: Starting line-up, Tip-off, First Half, Half-time, and the Second Half. The starting line up, tip off, first half and half time are all based in the framework laid by Adler & Adler to include social, academic and competition factors into understanding the entire experience of an athlete. When addressing the transition or during the second half, it is the work of Ebaugh, Drahotka & Eitzen that becomes the most valuable; Ebaugh's step four, creating an ex-role and Drahotka & Eitzen's inclusion of role withdrawal provide a working model to explain these athletes' transition experience.

## GAME PLAN: RESEARCH PROCESS

### **Offensive Strategy: Methods and Data**

The data in this study were collected through a few different methods. The majority of the data in this study is the product of in-depth interviews. Ten former SIUC athletes were interviewed, all of whom have competed within the last ten years. The participants included five females and five males; four African American athletes and six white American athletes. Of the participants, all but one grew up in a two parent household. All of them were very close with their families and received a lot of support from them. There were seven high profile sport athletes and three low profile sport athletes. Eight of the interviews were conducted in person in the SIUC athletic department, while the other two were conducted via the internet (Skype and AOL instant messenger).<sup>4</sup> My participants were chosen by referrals from the athletic department (coaches, administrators and staff), as well as from my own connection with former SIUC athletes. Field notes were also collected from conversations and experiences I had while conducting this research. Finally, there was an article in the Daily Egyptian, the student newspaper at SIUC, during March Madness that added insight into my study.

### **Defensive Strategy: Research Design**

Each interview was structured in the same fashion in regards to specific topics to be discussed by the student-athlete. Reference questions were based around background information, competition, social life and academics while in college, as well as the transitional experience. However, from those areas, I allowed the conversations to develop and take on the identity of the participant. The transitional period was broken

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix B for chart.

into two parts. I asked each participant about their individual experience transitioning and further inquired about what can be done to enhance the transitional experience for college athletes, if anything. Athletic, social and academic experiences all played a role in how these ten athletes transitioned out of college sports to a post-athletic life. For the most part, I would say that the former athletes interviewed were prepared for the transition from college athletics to a post-athletic life. In spite of being prepared, they still experienced both good and bad days, which is probably similar to athletes anywhere.

## GAME TIME: THEIR STORY

### **Starting Line-up: Participants**

As mentioned in the Game plan above, ten former Saluki athletes participated in this study. There was one baseball player, three basketball players (two female and one male), two football players, two softball players, one tennis athlete and one track and field athlete. All of the participants competed at SIUC within the last ten years. Of those participants, four identify as African-American and six as Caucasian or white. When asked about family background all of the participants seemed to have come from pretty close knit and supportive families, where they were not the only child. All of their parents played an active role in their sport participation, some more so than others. There were some parents who acted as coaches while their kids were growing up as well as providing emotional and financial support. Participants were asked about their socioeconomic class growing up and the responses ranged from lower-middle class to upper-wealthy class. Of the ten participants in this study, nine were raised in a two parent home. Currently, all of their primary caregivers are married. An interesting fact which may have influenced how these former athletes transitioned into mainstream culture is, each participant has a master's degree, is working toward a masters, or are in the process of trying to enroll in graduate school. For the sake of protecting those former athletes who participated in this study, names have been altered.

### **Tip-off: Roles of Participants**

The participants in this study had varied roles and responsibilities to their teams while they competed. Participants were asked to define their roles on their athletic teams. Some of them defined their role simply as their position, while others went more in-depth with what their roles really required of them. One interesting thing about the roles these

athletes played is that most of their roles changed from year to year or even from setting to setting. Often these athletes went from just learning the system to being relied upon to enforce the rules or lead their teams. Many of the participants addressed how at times they were not always the most talented person on their team, but they were the most depended upon, the one everyone looked to for guidance of what was right and wrong.

One of the participants, Lynn, had this to say about what her role was on their team:

I was the captain of the [sports team] and my role was to be a leader for my team both on and off the court. On the court I was to lead by example as well as verbally. On the court it was my job to score and board. Off the court and in the classroom {my role} equals excel academically. Off the court with the team {my role was} to encourage, motivate and build confidence as well as help with others decision making.

When I commented that Lynn had a pretty big role on the team, the response I received was:

I believe some of those things came natural for me. So my role was tied in with my passion for the game and people.

[Interviewer] Oh, ok, well that's great, that you weren't really put in a position to be something that you're not.

I was challenged to be a leader verbally. I can't say that I came in with the talent of speech. I more so liked leading by example, but I was definitely made to grow outside my comfort zone.

It is interesting the numerous roles this athlete had for her team, but more significantly is how these roles were defined. Roles were broken down as on and off the court, but in those two categories there were individual requirements, as well as what was required to lead teammates. Those are a lot of hats to wear, especially during a point in life where you are trying to discover who you are. One of the things that contrast sports and most other career jobs is that unless you are in a leadership position such as a manager or supervisor, you are not really responsible for how your co-workers perform. This may or may not be a welcomed transition for athletes once they enter the post-athletic world.

Not everyone saw their role and value to the team in the same way as the above mentioned athlete. When I asked Michelle what her role was on the team the response I received was:

“To shoot the ball, be a good teammate and help {lead} as I got older.”

This athlete was simple and to the point. One of the differences in their roles may have been that one of these athletes was considered a star player (high profile athlete) while the other one was not.

What is interesting about these descriptions of the roles athletes face is how they may affect them once they are no longer involved with competing in athletics. Being given so many different roles so early in life may have an adverse affect on these athletes. Once you have been given a lot of responsibilities and enjoy it, it is hard to transition back to just being defined by one thing. Athletes are familiar with multi-tasking (having dual identities), so once they make the transition out of athletics, if they don not find multiple things to keep their attention; it may cause some uneasiness in their lives. It may actually cause some athletes to go into a place of uncertainty or being lost. Michelle had interesting input on what happens when there are no longer all the demands on their life since they are no longer an athlete:

Umm, it wasn't really a problem. I was bored more but wasn't a problem. I found other things to keep me busy. Some people fall off the face of the earth when they are done with college and sports but I didn't let that happen.

In addition to what Michelle said about leaving the role of college athlete, Mary reiterated that athletes must find something else to occupy their time, something to fill that space that competitive athletics once dominated. Here is what Mary had to say:

Just to find something that inspires you now that you're done with what use to inspire you. That you just really, obviously being an athlete at the collegiate level

you are a competitive person. And athletics is what has driven your whole life and so you need to find something that you can devote your time to outside of what you're required to and something that is going to inspire you to be that competitive person, be the person that you want to be. So not to lose that drive, because it's going to help you in the long run. And then you won't get as depressed about life too. So that would be a good thing.

These athletes make a great point that in the process of transitioning a person will probably have the most success if they are able to put their time and energy into something else. This not only keeps them from becoming depressed but it also helps them begin to develop a new identity. The next section will examine how these athletes not only succeed on the playing field but also experienced success in other areas of their lives, which may have played a role in how they transitioned out of sport.

#### **First Half: Varied Success (academic and athletic)**

One of the reasons why it is so hard for athletes to transition out of their sport at all levels is because they have probably had a lot of success in that sport; maybe more success in their sport than in any other area of their life. Therefore, they are defined by their sport success. What's interesting and possibly even unique about these ex-athletes, is that during their college playing career they were able to see success both on and off the court. All of these athletes except for one had above a 3.0 GPA and received team recognition for their performance in the classroom as well as on the playing field. The participants in this study won conference championships, received national rankings both athletically and academically on their teams, as well as individual academic recognition and individual athletic awards. Julia was on a team that received national rankings in academics and athletics as well as receiving individual awards in both.

When asked about how the team performed and if they made it to any post-season tournaments:

Um, freshman and sophomore year we made it to regionals. Uh, then I want to say freshman, sophomore, junior maybe senior year I'm not 100% sure. We uh received votes to be in the top 25 all four years, but I think it was those three freshmen, sophomore, junior year that we cracked the top 25. I think our highest was when we were ranked 18<sup>th</sup>. So, yeah we were a pretty good team.

When asked if she received any individual athletic awards she responded:

Uh, I oh God, I remember being on an um all-tournament team when we were down in Mississippi...my, I want to say, my junior year, fresh, sophomore/junior year. But I think junior year.

Regarding individual academic success, she said:

Uhh, yea I got some. Like National Fast-Pitch Coaches Association Scholar-Athlete. They give those out. I got those I think every year I was here. Then the Dean's List

Julia had this to say about team academic success:

We were ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> in the nation for, as a team academically, with it was like our, it was our record plus our GPA as a team. So that was 2<sup>nd</sup>. Um, I think, that was my, our sophomore year. And then my senior year we ended up getting ranked 4<sup>th</sup> in the same thing.

This was an athlete that was not even considered to be a high profile athlete, but you still see the amount of success she experienced as an athlete. However, all the athletes interviewed received academic and athletic awards throughout their playing careers at SIUC. This is important to point out, because these athletes had success in things other than their sport, so their identity was not only tied into their sport performance. Mia, for instance, because of her exceptional success in academics, athletics and the community was recognized as valedictorian, one of the university's "25 Most Distinguished Seniors", as well as receiving the NCAA women's scholarship to pursue a graduate degree.

The coaches were very involved in how these athletes performed academically. Some ways in which coaches were involved was through class checks, periodic meetings, and checking progress reports. Matthew gave an account of some very impressive

statistics that reflect what a coach's involvement and focus on academics was able to do for a struggling program.

Um hmm, yea my coaches, like I said they were very, very serious about the, you know, academics, you know, that was obviously their top priority. And you know, as I tell all athletes, as you become better in the classroom, you're going to become a better athlete, you know. That's just the way it works. You can't work hard you know on the basketball court and then you give no effort in the classroom and think you're going to succeed.

[Interviewer] And you all won some academic awards while you were competing, right?

Ahh yes. We were able to win, we led the conference in GPA for 2 years in a row.

[Interviewer] Was that your Junior and Senior year?

Junior and Senior year we led the conference in academic GPA, overall team GPA.

[Interviewer] And by chance do you know what your [team GPA] came from, before you got here? I know you said they were struggling in the classroom.

Yea I know our APR<sup>5</sup> was in the negative, because obviously a lot of guys you know were not graduating and that's really the major thing you know. We went from, you know, pssh who knows probably half the guys coming thru not graduating to you know my class, we have 24 seniors, and out of those 24, 22 graduated and the other two were you know, were in [professional league] camps.<sup>6</sup> So that's you know that's pretty good numbers, so like I said coming from 2001 where very few guys finished their degrees here 'til [Coach] came in, and obviously academics went to the head of the table and you know guys were graduating on time.

Those are very impressive numbers. This coach took a program that had a negative Academic Progress Rate (APR) to a program that is graduating all of its athletes, including the ones who are going on to play professionally. Hearing that account of what a coach was able to do, by instilling a complete focus of excellence in his athletes, is very

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<sup>5</sup> APR is the Academic Progress Rate. The APR is calculated by measuring the academic eligibility and retention of student-athletes by team each term. Based on current data, an APR of 925 calculates to an approximate Graduation Success Rate of 50 percent. - *Espn.com*

<sup>6</sup> One of those two eventually came back to finish his degree. So 23/24 athletes on that team received their college degree. Both are still competing professionally.

valuable. If a coach takes an interest in helping athletes transition out of sport better, then there could be an increase in positive results.

Matthew's experience with coaches being very involved and in tune with how their student-athletes were performing in the classroom is very typical of the responses I received from all of my participants, except one. When asked about her coach's involvement with her academics, Mary gave this account:

No, not really. Um, (laughs) my coach is [Coach]. He's all about not the student athlete but the athlete before student. I know it's not suppose to be that way, but if you would talk to any athlete they're going to tell you their coaches typically...I mean they worry about your academics because they have to and they worry about your athletics because they want to. That's a good way to sum it up, you know. They're there to coach you, they're not necessarily there to...their main thing is not to worry about your academics. I guess they assume there are other people to do that... [Coach], I mean, he would worry about it to a certain extent, mainly if a problem arose, but...

Not only did Mary see it as her coach not particularly caring about academics because he felt that was someone else's job, but she also said that's how it is for most coaches. They care because they have to, not because they want to. This is interesting because if you look at graduation rates across the board, especially in men's basketball and football, they reflect an "athletics first and whatever is left over goes toward academics" mindset.<sup>7</sup>

Aside from athletics and academics, the social life experiences of these participants played a role in how they experienced the transition process.

### **Halftime: Social Life**

There were two important themes that arose when these athletes talked about their social life as a collegiate athlete: the issue of time management and the role athletics

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<sup>7</sup> Graduation rates for Men's basketball at SIUC for the 2000-2003 cohort was 100%, while the federal rate was 80%. SIUC's graduation rate for football for the 2000-2003 cohort was 64% and the federal rate was 55%. -ncaa.org

plays in the social adaptation of athletes. All the athletes interviewed had a pretty enjoyable social life as a student-athlete. Only two of them however, talked about a social life that involved people and activities outside of athletics as the norm and something they really enjoyed and looked forward to when they were not competing. Lynn informed me of how enjoyable it was, at times, to get away from the world of athletics.

Numerous of hours were spent w/my teammates, the court and the classroom but believe it or not I had a decent social setting. When I could I tried to hang with those that weren't athletes...something about hanging with "normal" folk was refreshing. I also had a good number of friends from other sports. Overall you could say I had a good outside base of friends... yes...sometimes I needed a break from my world...

Matthew addressed the connection he had with his college and how he enjoyed spending time with the people in his major.

I really think, you know, the social life was obviously was another great experience you know. Going back to athletics and trying to stay away from it and answer your question. I think athletics really provided an outlet that really you know boost our social life and one thing about [it], I always tell everyone you know. Dealing with [Coach] he made us really get, you know, real involved and serious with the community. So that really was a major factor of, you know my life here at SIU. Because, you know, I really built a family outside of athletics, with my classmates, professors and people in the community, because, you know, that's something our coaches really expected from us so, you know, the social life it was very, you know, very good because, you know, not only did we go out and enjoy ourselves with our teammates, you know, I enjoyed people in my major (chuckles). We would go out, hangout, have a good time and you know and mingle with my professors or whatever it may be. So, I really thought my social life here was, it was great. That's just, I think the whole nature of Southern Illinois is you know the southern hospitality it's a real welcoming environment. So, you know, the social life was, you know, we had some great, great times down here.

Though athletics was their main focus, these athletes made it a point to spend time with others outside of the athletic subculture. However, there were some athletes that did not see the need to connect with others outside of athletics. Some of my participants would

rather just hang out with athletes because that was their comfort zone. Take what Luke had to say about hanging out with people outside of athletics as an example.

[Interviewer] You said that take your time, like explore different options, but when you were talking about your social life you really kind of just stayed, like with your sport. Why do you think that is?

You know I think a lot of it was...um...it was comfortable to me and when it comes to...you know I'm not a very adventurous person. You know I'm not going to go ride rollercoasters, you know I'm not going to go rock climb or anything like that. Um I like being comfortable. I like being in a position where I am in control and you know honestly I hate doing things that I'm not very good at.

That's why I really don't like to try new things...So um I would definitely have to say just me wanting to be comfortable was the big reason why I didn't adventure out and hang out with different crowds or different groups or anything like that.

When I asked a lot of the participants if there were any organizations or groups

outside of their sport that they were interested in being involved in most of them said no,

I am not the fraternity/sorority type. That was really the only organizations or groups that

they hinted it. Athletes, or at least these athletes, were opposed to joining fraternities or

sororities because they felt like they had their own family with athletics. While some

athletes just had the mindset that they already had a family atmosphere like Mary, Mia

was discouraged by her teammates that sororities was just something athletes did not get

involved at SIUC. Mary said:

...I think that one thing that I've always said ever since I went here; you have kids, I say kids, college students, who will join sororities or fraternities because they're looking for a family, so to speak. And I think that being an athlete you have that natural family of not only your team but the whole athletic group at SIU. I came, I think we kind of all look out for each other, kind of, you know. They hang out together and that type of thing. So, I think it helps to introduce you to a lot of people. Um, kind of gives you your clique, your family as far, and especially when those people are interested in the same things as you are and they have the same time demands as you. I think that gives you a good place for your social life to be...

Mia gave this account of what happened when she and another teammate told the other

girls on the team they wanted to join a sorority.

When we first got here, my freshmen year, I remember me and another girl on my team said we were going to go be in sorority. And we got made fun of so bad from the other girls on our team about even mentioning going to be in a sorority, that we never said it again. They just said sororities were not the cool thing here or you know, something like that. We just got made fun of so we never brought it up again, because we were those freshmen that brought the sorority thing up. But I mean I thought it would be cool just to see what it was like to do that, but I knew after I got into it, we wouldn't have time.

For whatever reason, sororities and fraternities were not the cool thing to be apart of if you were already a student-athlete.

Time management was something all the participants talked about being a big part of the life as a student-athlete. All of them felt as if they had a good handle on managing their time. Giving that the term student-athletes combines two distinct and separate identities, finding a balance is key to successfully navigating their world. One of the participants I spoke with had transferred from another university to SIUC and talked about how that transition was key in helping him learn to balance the multiple facets of being a student-athlete. Jason addressed how time management worked to his benefit.

I went to [other university] for my first year. That was, uh big change for me, you know. I'm at D1 school and I was, uh actually playing as a true freshman.<sup>8</sup> Uh everything was going pretty good, I wouldn't say I was, at that time I was kind of more focused on [sport]. I didn't know how to balance school and [sport] at the same time. So, I had some what low GPA my first semester at [other university] and then on top of that got into a little trouble, which forced me to leave [other university] and I ended up down here. But uh, that actually, I would say, helped me out. Because it gave me time to think.

This student-athlete could have chosen to partake in all kinds of activities after the transfer, but instead the focus was on getting the GPA up and learning how to balance the life of a student-athlete.

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<sup>8</sup> D1 stands for Division 1. Division 1 athletics is the highest level an athlete can compete on in college. Division 1 schools are considered the top tier of college sports, where the best athletes compete.

Although, athletics may not have allowed some of the athletes interviewed a lot of time to interact with the general student body, athletics provided athletes with many other important social encounters. As a student-athlete, you are in the forefront, usually always noticeable by people anywhere you go, especially if you are a member of a high profile sport. This visibility may be a good or bad thing for athletes, but it also has a lot of benefits. Michelle had this to say about the role athletics played in social life:

I was known in the community. Everywhere I went someone more than likely would recognize me. And being an athlete did limit my social life but that's what I chose. My priorities were [sport].

[Interviewer] So, you're saying college athletics helped you be more visible and enhanced your social life?

In a way it did. It made be visible in the public eye. It also gave me a lot of opportunities to do things a normal student didn't have the chance to do...I was able to travel to Canada, San Francisco, Washington, D.C. and the Bahamas.

Stop for a minute and think about how many college students get the chance to experience that many different cultures. Athletics may have hindered some aspects of these athletes' lives, but they were able to experience things most non-college athletes never get the chance to experience. These athletes were well known, so they were given the chance to meet a lot of prominent and influential individuals, people that may be of value to them in their future endeavors. They were also afforded the opportunity to interact with different cultures and gain knowledge and insight to take with them the rest of their lives.

Mike, being a member of a low profile sport, experienced some of the notoriety but not to the same extent as Michelle addresses:

I'm going to say in some yes [to being known as an athlete] because you know some people that you meet or some people that you know think it's cool. And it's

great that you are an athlete and you play your sport for a university. I you know I think that's the good thing about it. And no on the other hand because tennis is not a favorite, you know its not a big sport so not that many people pay attention to it. So, I never really got that many comments you know. It's just people I meet or friends that you know who just know "hey you play tennis? That's great." But it never go beyond, you know [like people] asking deep question about what I do or whatever, it just depends I guess.

So as you can see, the experience varied for high and low profile sports which can be expected given the inequality between media coverage of the two sport types.

Some of these athletes struggled with being shy. Through constant interactions, the athletic culture was of benefit to them by allowing the athletes to interact with people from all walks of life. These interactions helped increase the interpersonal communication abilities of these athletes. When Julia was asked about how athletics played a role in her social life, she talked about how it helped her get over being shy in college.

I would say it's pretty cool. I'm a sociable person, you know get along with a variety of different crowds, different people you know. I like meeting new people uh sometimes I can be shy, and others times... Let me see, I think, you know, you're an athlete so people see you all the time and you have your saluki gear on so it kind of puts you in somewhat of a limelight. So, enough people know you. I figure it kinds of helps out; I've meet more people than I can think of, just by having this gear on or being an athlete. You know, people I see, maybe in the Rec or the student center, just passing or saying what's up. If I was normal student I wouldn't probably get that acknowledgement you know. Even going on to the adults and staff or whatever, I'm meeting new people and people I can be in contact with in the future maybe to help me out or I can help them out just by being an athlete. So I feel like that helped my social life out a whole lot, just by simply being an athlete

While conducting this research, it became apparent collegiate athletics helped increase the socialization skills of the participants. Athletes are always in the public eye and will engage various people from different walks of life. As an athlete, you are trained to interact with people. Be it a fan, teammate, media or someone who comes to a camp, part of your job as an athlete is to engage them in conversation and positively represent

the university and athletic program in a positive light. Athletes may miss out on some interactions with their peers, but I think they gain some valuable interactions that can be of greater benefit to them once they transition out of athletics and into a post-college athletic career.

### **Second Half: Transitions**

There were a lot of themes that arose while talking to athletes about their transition. Some of those themes were previously addressed earlier when discussing the participants' lives as collegiate athletes while others themes will be addressed in this section. As mentioned earlier, while doing this study, the Creating the Ex-Role in Ebaugh (1988) and Drahota & Eitzen (1998) should be considered as a prototype of what the transitional period may look like for college athletes who are no longer competing in athletics. Although there was great variation in how these athletes described their transition, they experienced similar steps as those defined by the aforementioned researchers. Darhota and Eitzen's (1998) study on the role exit of professional athletes built on Ebaugh's role exit model of: 1) Original doubts 2) 1<sup>st</sup> Doubts 3) Seeking Alternatives 4) Creating the Ex-Role by adding withdrawal to her model. In role exiting, or transitioning, it is important to look at what's left over from the previous role of athlete ("role residual", "societal reaction", "impact on others" and withdrawal)<sup>9</sup>. However it is just as relevant to focus on when the athlete transitioned in their own mind and how that played a role in their experience.

This research discovered, as expected, that all of these athletes found some difficulty transitioning away from being a competitive college athlete. However, what

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<sup>9</sup> Role residual is what is remaining or leftover from the athletic identity. Societal reaction is how an athlete's social groups respond to him/her no longer being an athlete. Impact on others is how does the athlete no longer being in a role affect the people around them.

was not anticipated was variations in the timeframe of the transitional period or the reason why they experienced difficulties. In building on the work of Ebaugh (1988) and Drahota and Eitzen (1998), this research further examines the transitional experience, beginning with their athletic identity. This is probably one of the main reasons athletes struggle to transition out of sport.

In order for an athlete to transition from one role (or identity) to another, he/she must have an initial identity. In this case, it is the identity of athlete. Each of the participants either talked about the athletic identity or hinted at it being a factor in the transitional process. Not only do athletes develop their own athletic identity, but society also has an expectation of athletes as well. Athletes experience what Drahota and Eitzen terms as role residue, societal reaction, impact on others and withdrawal. In conducting this study evidence was found for each of these experiences, which indicates the validity of Drahota and Eitzen's previous work. However, what is different about this study is, while role exit is still either voluntary or involuntary, the point when someone chooses to transition and the point when they can no longer occupy their identity as an active college athlete is definitive. NCAA eligibility rules allow college athletes four years of competition in one sport, but you may take a fifth year in a different sport. Therefore, after you have exhausted your eligibility, you are no longer able to act in the role of a college athlete. This is interesting because like Mike stated during his interview, you entered this role knowing that one day (within 4 or 5 years) it would end and you would have to take on a new identity.

And you know, I mean you know when you come to college you know you're going to be done. So in some way you can't be mad or you can not be or have a depression or something because you can not play sports anymore. You know that

when you come that you're going to be done at that point. You know you see the end coming soon. At least for me, I saw the end coming. As logical as that may sound, college athletes still struggle with the transition away from their athletic identity.

Role residue is something that is expected for anyone that has ever occupied a role, for the simple fact that it was once a part of who you are. There will be things throughout your life that will trigger your former athletic role, behavior, responsibilities and identity amongst other things. During an interview with Mia, she talked about how, after she had exhausted her athletic eligibility she really hated her sport. However, when anyone asked her husband, a coach of her former sport, it offended her, because that sport was "hers." She was the expert on the sport and people should come to her with questions even though she wanted absolutely nothing to do with the game. For a lot of athletes, whether they had a positive transition or not, they experienced role conflict between still wanting to be a part of everything and being free from that responsibility or burden. Julia, being one of those athletes, had this to say about her transitional experience:

(Talking about the summer following graduation)... It kind of just felt like normal. It wasn't until they started having team meetings and dinners and practices that it was weird, that I wasn't included in that, because I'm not on the team anymore. Larry, although he still had a lot of residue left over from his role as an athlete was ready for people to get to know him in a different light.

And what I hate also, I try to separate. I feel like I'm more than just [sport]. That's why, really like when go home, I aint really... my mother she bowl, she likes me to come up to the bowling alley to watch her bowl sometimes. But I never really wanted to go, because people in there, what they gone do? Talk to you about [sport]. Which is fine, but man every time I see you, is that what we have to talk about? Man, I know a lot more. Let's talk about this economy out here. Let's talk about religion or something. Let's talk about another sport, lets talk about football, hockey, something else at least. Everything is just targeted at [sport], is that all I am? Just [sport]? I'm more than that. Let's Politic or something.

While Julia felt the sting of no longer being a part of the team and losing out on that identity, Larry felt as if he was ready to show the world what else he could do. As humans we define people by the roles they perform and often times do not get to know them beyond the role in which we most often have contact. Even though role residue is inevitable, because that is a part of who we are or once were, society plays a role in how we adapt to role transitions.

According to Mead, we gain meaning from life through our interactions with others. These interactions in turn create the society that we live and operate in daily (Cahill, 2004). While athletics is its own subculture, it is still subject to the scrutiny and judgment as all institutions in America society. Not only when athletes transition out of their role as college athletes are those immediately connected to them affected by this change in role and status, but also the public may become involved. Take for instance the football players from Ohio State, who used poor judgment in their choice of what to do with gifts received from the Big Ten and Ohio State and sold the gifts. These young men were forced to promise that they would return back to Ohio State next year, just to be allowed to compete in the bowl game this season. This alone shows that media has a hand in the perception of athletes and what is deemed appropriate or not.

As far as the athletes in this study who were experiencing the transition, they received a lot of feedback from people within the community, whether it was family, friends, fans, etc. How people in your social world view your role as an athlete has an impact on how you transition. Mary, who was a pretty phenomenal athlete during her playing career, made the choice not to continue to compete after she graduated, mainly because of health reasons and desire to live a normal life with full mobility as she got

older. However, she talked about encountering fans and their disbelief she is no longer competing on the big stage anymore.

Yea I think one of the main reasons I decided not to go on professional was because of the health. It's a lot like when you go into the weight room and lifting enormous amounts of weight, it's a lot on your body especially being a female. I remember, I think it was like my sophomore year, um back problems started and I was going in getting cortisone injections and um, the doctor told me I need to quit right then and there or I wouldn't be able to pick up my kids when I got older and that was kind of a shocker, ya know. Like a life shattering type of thing and so that and just the fact that I could tell time by time that my body was just getting worse is probably the main reason why I decided not to go on. And I just wanted to concentrate on school too and start my career. I mean I look at it now and there's a lot of people that will ask and say are you still training and I say no and they're utterly shocked, because they're like you were a stud, why are you not still doing this? I'm like it was my time to be done. That's kind of how I feel about it so...

People only see what takes place in the arena; they never see what goes on behind closed doors. So, they would have never known that this athlete continued to compete for two years after being told that she should quit right away. They were only able to see that she did not continue on with her career. It is almost like they felt she was wasting her talent, but for Mary, she had benefitted all she could from competitive sport and it was time to move on with her life.

Another societal impact on athletics is in the institution itself. Multiple athletes talked about the structure of athletics and how it was vital to success. Even though, in transitioning from one identity to another, you enter a new institution and the structure is not always the same. For a lot of these athletes, athletics has provided the discipline that they now either long for or use in their everyday lives. Participants repeatedly mentioned that some things they learned as college athletes are being applied to their everyday lives, whether it is as coaches, mentors, and teachers or even just as people within society. The

way that they conduct themselves is a reflection of what they learned as student-athletes. Some, however, talked about how they missed the structure, which will be later addressed in the withdrawal section.

Even though these athletes were impacted by society as college athletes, and later as they transitioned away from the athletic subculture, their status in mainstream society has affected others as well. While interviewing Matthew, he said something that left a lasting impression. Matthew talked about how he had a teammate who was presented with an amazing opportunity to prepare for his career after college athletics and his teammates felt as if he quit on them. Matthew had this to say:

My roommate in college, he was, he came down here also from Michigan and he you know, he walked away from you know from the football program a year early just to do that, to go start his internships. You know, it was really, its really an amazing story and its funny now when I think about it. Because I think about how bad all the guys treated him on the team, when he said I'm going to hang up my cleats you know a year early, because I just got accepted to this wonderful internship up in Springfield, you know, Illinois. And you know, all the guys were, you're quitting, you're walking from the team, this that and the other. But he knew that I need to prepare for life after sports. Should I play another year of football and sit on the bench or should I go do this internship and prepare for my career. And he walked away a year early. He went and did his internship... The teammate that Matthew is talking about is extremely successful right now, but his teammates, at the time, could not see the value in his decision. For them, he was turning his back on the team. Just like his teammates, it is often times hard for people to look beyond how a decision that they make can affect others. While it may appear that Matthew's teammate made the right decision for himself, his family, and even his teammates, because now he's in a position to provide job opportunities to them, it can be difficult to see the benefit of that decision in the midst of being a college athlete.

Often times, as athletes, you have family and friends who become just as invested, if not more so, in your athletic identity than you. When you make a change, they

experience similar, if not increased effects of role transition than you will. Each participant had parents who were extremely invested in their athletic identity. Their parents were their biggest fans, and rightfully so. However, when talking to Mia, she expressed to me, that at one point, that she thought her dad cared more about her identity as an athlete than he did her other identities. It was not until one day that Mia was extremely frustrated with the game and her father told her to quit, that nothing was worth it if it made her that upset. For Mia, that moment signified her value as a person outside of the sport that she had played all her life. Even though her parents valued her as a person outside of an athlete that did not stop them from making comments about how much they missed watching her play when she had finished competing. When asked how her transition affected her family and friends Mia said:

My mom still takes it hard. She'll still make comments about, "Aw you remember how fun that was to travel, to go around and watch you." You know, I think it was really hard for my parents. Um, because they, that's what they lived for at that time. Not that they would put pressure on me so much, cuz they were, they were who I went to whenever I was feeling awful. You know cuz they were in the hotel with me. So I would just go down to their room and vent and cry on their shoulder and then I would be fine the next day. But uh, I think it really did, it brought us a lot closer, me and my family, me and my parents...But with my parents, I mean they'll still make comments now about wanting to do that again and that was so much fun. And they're ready for my nieces to get into college so they can follow them around you know stuff like that.

As hard as it is for people to leave roles on their own, or to transition into other roles, the response that one will receive from those closest to them, or society, has a hand in how a person experiences that transition.

Many of the people who were interviewed let on that sport was not the most important thing in their lives when they transitioned; however, many experienced withdrawal. For some, the withdrawal was minimal because they were already at a point

of burnout, but for others it was a little more extreme. Withdrawal came in many different forms for these athletes as well. Some of them missed the structure of athletics, some missed competing on the big stage, but what all of these athletes talked about missing the most was their teammates and the team camaraderie.

Do you remember that feeling that you got when you first went away to college or moved out of your parent's house? It was a sense of freedom, becoming independent and doing what you want. As time went by however, you realized that you missed the structure that being with your parents provided. You missed them telling you what to do and when. Although you hated it at times, it kept you on track. Well, that is exactly what Lynn felt when it was time for her to leave the comfort of athletics.

Stepping out into a world where you make your own routine, receive a pay check not because you play ball but because of the work you presented and into a world where your decisions are truly yours can be a bit scary but more nerve wrecking for me. The thoughts of the "what if" moments and thoughts of what is really going to happen with life after ball is challenging. One interviewee said that it is like walking into the wilderness after being done with college sports. You go from an environment where you have a tremendous amount of support and structure to the real world and the workforce where things are not always so clear cut and you have to make decisions for yourself. Lynn said that it was nerve wrecking during the transition period because of wanting things set in stone. Even with options there was the feeling of "what direction do I go, what's the best move". In athletics, those things are usually defined for you, or there is someone to help you figure out what the best move is. Athletes go from hiking a predestined trail, to being lost in the woods and trying to figure out the best way to get to their destination. Lynn said that she now feels as if she has a grasp on things, but for a while it was really a challenge for her

to develop her own routine because she has never had so much freedom before leaving her sport.

Mia explained her withdrawal experience from college athletics by indicating she misses the recognition and the awards that come along with being on the big stage.

I thought, you know, as soon as I get done I'm going to have all these wonderful things because you know honestly I got use to, I got use to good stuff. You know I got awards in college, and by no means am I trying to brag but you know I'm just saying I did experience that kind of stuff. So I figured, hey this is the way that its always going to go. And so once I got done with [sport] its like, wait what?.. You talk about identity and I think that's where a lot of that identity laid in those awards. You know, and so [you] lose track of who you are and you put your identity in, "ok, what can I do next, what can I do next to get an award or what can I do next to be recognized," and it was almost like I would be almost half way looking over my shoulder for my parents to be like, good job, you know. Like "I made you proud, Awesome!" You know it wasn't even about me anymore it was about how would I look to them, or how would I look to the community who knew me.

What Mia said made a lot of sense to me, and I had never really thought about the athletic identity in that way. It is almost like the sport became obsolete and it was all about being the one with the most awards, the one who received the most praise. To go from an athletic culture where positive results get you recognition, to mainstream society where you may not always be acknowledged for your hard work, definitely places an individual at risk of withdrawal because they no longer feel that sense of accomplishment, reward or praise.

Larry, on the other hand, was ready to be done. When asked if there were any feelings of withdrawal, he excitedly reported, no, he was glad it was over.

Aww nah man! When it was over with, I was like yes! Didn't work out for a long time (laughs). Man, partied hard too that last semester. Was over here just partying too hard! (laughs) Nah, it just felt like a weight was off your shoulders, cuz you didn't have to answer to nobody. You know, the guys that was still here, you know we was hanging out and stuff. "aww we gotta go lift weights, we gotta go practice." And you're still sitting there like man I ain't got to go. It felt weird that you didn't get that text out of nowhere, "Meeting at 12:00." You know what I

mean you didn't have to show up. But it was like a good feeling too. I think everybody feel like that, no matter what, period. You know league or no league, I think everybody feels like that.

Even though Larry was glad his days of having to answer to anyone were over, he

admitted that he missed being on the big stage.

Yeah, that's the thing, that's the thing you miss right there. Being on that court, that limelight, [those] lights shining and [those] fans in the stands. That's what you miss right there. That's what I do miss, lacing them up, in that locker room. I miss actually, putting on an actual jersey. You know I mean, that feeling, putting on the actual jersey... That's what you miss right there.

Aside from team camaraderie, participant's responses indicate that their biggest

withdrawal from the athletic identity is the absence of that adrenaline rush that stems

from competing at a high level.

Team camaraderie was the most talked about thing that athletes missed when they were no longer competing. Their teammates had become like family to them. Messener found in his research that most athletes almost instantly described their teammates as family (1992). Lynn's account of her teammates indicates this as being common among SIUC athletes as well.

[I was] blessed to have teammates who enjoyed the game of [sport] and who had the same goal as I - winning. [The] girls were a great group on and off the court. We had great chemistry with each other which allowed us to gel on the court. A group of young ladies who outworked their opponents and played hard for each other! I felt like our team was a group of sisters... You spend a lot of time with your teammates; they are truly your extended family. There are a wealth of things you learn about your teammates over the years as well as endure a tremendous amount of pain. And through it all you grow together.

Shared experiences and memories are hard to walk away from. College athletes have invested, at times, four or five years of being with these people almost every day, to non-existent encounters. That can be a very traumatic experience. The experience of forming these relationships is no different than a relationship with a natural brother or sister and when they move away and you may only get a chance to talk to them on the phone and see them every few years, you experience withdrawal.

In addition to examining what these athletes dealt with in terms of role residue, societal impact, impact on others and withdrawal, it must also be taken into consideration that these transitions did not happen at the same time for each of the participants. While you would think that everyone would begin transitioning after their last competition, because that ends definite period of being a collegiate athlete; some of them began transitioning long before that day. Take for instance Luke who was a high profile athlete. Everyone told him he could go pro. He had been to some of the best camps and had prepared in all the right ways. However, by junior year, he started to experience burnout because he just was not as good as he used to be as a player.

I mean I think it was one of those were I was to the point of being sick of not being as good as I was. I knew how good I use to be and I think part of me, I don't want to say shut it down. But I was just ready for it to be over. You know I was ready, to be done with a sport that you know that I was so good at for once and then all of a sudden I'm just not very good.

All of the athletes in this study exhausted their eligibility, however, some transitioned in their minds before the last game ever came. For some, they always knew that at the end of their college career their playing days would be over, but Luke was one of the few who had a future playing the sport he loved beyond college. When it seemed that playing professionally was no longer possible, he shut down that part of himself. That is not to

say that he did not go out and compete every day, but what he had invested in the athletic identity was no longer the same.

One of the most unexpected findings in this study was that some participants used their transition out of athletics as a means for them to transition back into loving the game again. One particular athlete had come to a point where she were extremely burned out and just needed to get away from the sport for a while. After a few years of completely avoiding the sport and ignoring those outside influences who repeatedly encouraged her to re-engage with the sport, she finally began to love their sport again. You go from loving something so deeply for so many years, and then you hit a point where you experience complete chaos and end up hating the game. This account suggests that because your love was true, after time, you may be able to love again. This type of transition may occur more often than reported. There is such a deep rooted love for sports, investing so much time and effort in something you care for deeply may always bring you back.

### **Press Conference & Write-Ups: Conclusion, Limitations & Discussion**

Even though the athletes in this study had an understanding that life goes on after sport, they still developed an athletic identity because of the years they invested in their sport. Regardless of how prepared each of these participants were, they still went through a period of withdrawal and reconstructing their identities. Emotionally, it seemed at times during the transition these athletes were as Ebuagh (1988) calls it “in a vacuum,” just kind of existing. Just like Charles Horton Cooley’s idea of the “looking glass self” that was presented earlier in this research, the identity of an athlete is shattered when they exit their athletic careers (Messener, 1992). Carol Gilligan formulated an interesting

theory about how, in crisis, people are similar to a crystal thrown to the ground. It does not shatter into a million pieces, but it breaks crisply along its pre-determined lines (Messner, 1992; Gilligan, 1982). If the athletic identity is the major identity of a person, when the crystal breaks, that identity is a large void that has to be filled by other things. Therefore, feelings of being lost and confused are not hard to accept as part of the experience when transitioning out of athletic careers.

It is astonishing to see how well prepared each of these athletes look on paper. By that I mean, they were all exceptional students, carrying above a 3.0 GPA, and seemingly had an understanding that life goes on after you are finished playing sports.<sup>10</sup> However, that did not stop them for having a difficult time transitioning. Most of the struggles these athletes had were the result of investment in their sport and their sport identity.

Throughout these interviews each participant spoke about their family, or outside support system being very valuable in their experiences as an athlete and while they were transitioning out of sports. A few of my participants had a parent that actually played college sports. Julia's dad experienced a similar transition, so he was able to provide her with a valuable blueprint of what to expect and how to keep moving forward. Here's how Julia described that experience:

My dad played college sports and he did the exact same thing I did. When he was done he stayed at the school. He graduated, he became a GA for the basketball team, took classes. So I mean, he actually helped me out, because I'm going, honestly the exact same way he [went]. So, he's been giving me a lot of advice. But for the most part, it's nothing that I can really do. It's just time for me.

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<sup>10</sup> In the 2008-2009 school year of the 350 athletes competing at SIUC, 172 maintained above a 3.0 GPA for the entire school year. That is almost 50% of the athletes. This may not be typical of most athletes at other schools and it also doesn't account for those athletes who have above a 3.0 accumulative but may have dropped below a 3.0 GPA throughout one of the semesters during the 2008-2009 academic year.

Given that Julia had help navigating the experience and could see a parent that had successfully navigated the experience, it was easier to understand that the process will become less strenuous after time. Nonetheless, having a dad who experienced the same thing helps a person, because they are able to share that bond. When Julia is unclear about a feeling or an emotion she can talk it over with their dad, because he's been there and he can give her some helpful advice. Having people in your corner, at a time when you are recreating your identity, is valuable because they allow you to see your own reflection in them and that helps one to move forward into new things.

In the beginning of this paper it was mentioned that there is a difference in how high and low profile sports' athletes and high and low profile athletes transitioned. Also, that there is a difference between how African American and white student athletes transition. In conducting this study there is little evidence to support these claims. Each of these athletes experienced difficulty transitioning for one reason or another, but rarely was this because of their status as an athlete or their race. None of the athletes interviewed described themselves as high profile athletes, even though they fit the definition. What was in fact found is that by the end of their athletic careers, whether they loved sports or hated sports, what was learned as a college athlete seems to be of value in developing the person they aim to be in the future. The things that they took away from their experiences will continue to benefit them for the rest of their lives. Regardless if they struggled for a while when transitioning out of sport, the lessons they learned during that process, and as athletes, will continue to enhance the people that they aim to be in the future.

There were ten participants involved in this study. To get a more in-depth look at what goes on in the transitional period, a greater number of interviews should be conducted with former college athletes from SIUC that are different than this group. This group had a unique and maybe uncommon attributes in that they were all very good students, which allowed them to consciously or not, invest their identity in something outside of athletics. Secondly, they are all in some way still connected with athletics. This is not typical of most former athletes. A majority move away from sports into other careers (Messner, 1992). Lastly, these athletes are all teachers in some form. Some are actual teachers, some are coaches, and others are mentors. From my experience, those who teach, often time learn the value in what could be considered a bad situation a lot quicker, because they see everything as a teaching point. These athletes found value in being able to transfer their experience and what they learned to other people that they feel could see the benefit. As mentioned before, all of these athletes have obtained, are obtaining or interested in enrolling in school to receive their master's degree. This may have affected how these athletes transitioned for a couple of reasons; 1) those who moved into graduate school following their undergrad coursework were able to refocus some of their energy and 2) those who seek higher education probably did not put everything into the athletic identity, according to the research by Shulman & Bowen. I believe that there are student-athletes who graduated from SIUC that do not share these same characteristics and their story may be very interesting.

Given that this study is retrospective, athletes may sometimes not remember their experiences as exact. However, given that this is considered such a major change in their lives, I believe that their accounts were highly accurate.

Even with the limitations and preliminary nature of this study, valuable information was obtained. Besides the common themes that were found among the transition of these athletes, there were also some suggestions on what can be done to help athletes transition out of college sports. One of the biggest suggestions from the participants was for athletic departments to offer athletes some kind of counseling to help them make the transition. It was recommended that universities start working with their juniors and seniors preparing them for the transition out of college sport. This can be done by asking them to generate a five year plan for what they are going to do after college. Even if you have athletes that plan to play professionally, if something happens where that does not work out, they have some type of blueprint for what is next in their lives. Another suggestion is to have a mentoring program in place for athletes. Mentors can be people from the community who are in fields that the athletes are interested in pursuing or they can be former student-athletes who come back and help by sharing their experiences with current student-athletes. All of these ideas can be beneficial to both the athlete and the athletic department. Lynn said it best with a quote about the transitional period from college athletics to a post-athletic life: "I think that it's...just easier to transition when you have options and have thought things out." Each of the above mentioned ideas to help athletes transition provides them different options and one of those options is that athletes have actually taken the time to think about the next chapter in their lives.

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix A

Below is each of the participants' response when asked to describe what the transition experience was like for them.

**Lynn:** Stepping out into a world where you make your own routine, receive a pay check not because you play [sport] but because of the work you presented. And into a world where your decisions are truly yours can be a bit scary but more nerve wrecking for me. The thoughts of the "what if" moments and thoughts of "what is really going to happen with life after ball is challenging"... The help of family and coaches and those that made moves before me were very helpful... [It was] nerve wrecking because I wanted things to be set in stone as to what's next for me...I didn't know exactly what I was going to do, even though I had options. The in between stage was a struggle sometimes.

**Luke:** You know I kind of had an unusual transition as well. Um you know my sophomore year I had people telling me hey I can play at the next level. Um you know I played at Cape Cod which is the best summer league you can play in. um I made the all-star team out there so I was thinking, coming into my junior year that, "hey, if you have a good year, you got the chance to make some money." And I uh, I got, I had this big slump, this big big huge mental block that it lasted almost the entire year and really just effected me in all aspects of the game. Came back my senior year thinking I'm just going to flush that. And in the Fall I get hurt and have to have surgery and try to come back early, try to come back in five months from an injury that usually takes 6-8months to rehab from and you know it didn't work out. Looking back I probably should have redshirted, um but that wasn't an option at the time. So, you know I went from being a really good player, to being just an average player in a year and that was really difficult that was really hard to kind of grasp at first, um but you know transition wise it's been easier. Um you know, to be honest God has really taken care of me. Um, you know I look at all the things that he's kind of put in place since then and you know, he, he knows what he's doing. (chuckle)

**Julia:** Uh, it kind of, it kind of felt like, I don't know. Like a void, [something] was missing, because I knew that sport was done and I would never get a chance to really compete like I did in softball ever again and get back what I use to have. But since softball is a spring sport, summer and fall it really, we didn't have to do, we didn't have like team workouts. We didn't have to be around the team. So, it wasn't kind of awkward at all. So, it just felt like I was doing my own thing. I knew in the back of my mind that it was going to be weird, but just because we didn't have, we didn't have to play summer ball. It kind of just felt like normal. It wasn't until they started having team meetings and dinners and practices that it was weird, that I wasn't included in that, because I'm not on the team anymore... Like I'm a competitive person and I miss those, I miss going out there just getting down and dirty and going after a sport and just competing with people.

And at the same time, I miss seeing those girls, like even if I had class all day I knew I would get a chance to see them at practice and when, I knew no matter how bad of a mood I was in, I would be fine because I would get to be around them so. That's probably the, that's what I miss the most.

**Matthew:** Right, Well emotions obviously its tough for anybody, because you're going through that stage where you know, I've been playing [sport] for you know every year of my life, for you know 12, 18 years or whatever. If you started in little league or if you started in high school or whatever it may be. So you're going through that stage where you know, where you may doubt yourself you know. Should I start my internship and try to start my career? Or should I put my education and my career on the backburner to try to chase you know a dream. So, it's a real emotional part of your life, because you're a young adult and you've been on this set schedule every single year of your life. You know, practice, [sport], class, meetings, coaches and now you're just instantly (snaps) you know you're instantly done and now everything is on your own as far as will I try to train for the WNBA, professional softball, football, whatever it may be. Or should I finish my semester and graduate? Should I start an internship, or should I start a career or are you going to move back home with mom and dad? (chuckles) So it's pretty emotional and then you're going from an environment where you know obviously with me, I went from an environment where you have 100 brothers, teammates around you every single day, every minute on the hours. So, its pretty you know, it can be very frustrating if you're not prepared. And then you're also going from an environment where you have you know 10-12 coaches you know guiding you at all times. You know professors support and you know it's very, very serious and that's why I really try to make sure you know I try my best to help you know upcoming athletes, because you're going from that type of environment where you have such a mass support group, to now as I say you're walking out into the wilderness. Where you're on your own, you need to find out what I'm going to do with the rest of my life, because you know you're 22, 23 years old. You know if you go professionally, you know great, but it's a one in a million chance that you do that. Or I'm going to go out here in a jobless market right now and try to hunt for a job and things of that nature. So, its, you know, it's pretty emotional, you know. I was dealing with a few gentlemen the other day that's going thru that right now, that you know it's so confusing that they really do not what to do and that's because you just lost your support group. You know have to make all those decisions on your own without any help. But like I said the one great thing that I was able to, that I was blessed with, is that I was prepared for it. You know its very important that while you're playing athletics, you need to also prepared yourself for when that day comes, when you're going to have to you know hang up your cleats. Like I tell everyone you know, obviously my teammate and brother [professional athlete], he's playing for the [pro team] and everyone looks at he just signed a [multi-million] dollar contract. But even he says well I you know only have a couple more years to play and that day is going to come where okay, what am I

going to do with the rest of my, you know it's a lot more living to do you know what am I going to do with the rest of my you know 40-60 years of living or whatever it may be. You know football and track and field, basketball, sports in general are just one chapter in your life, you know its not a whole book. So, you know, what are you going to do with the rest of your life after that chapter is closed? So, you know, I was, like I said I was prepared for it and that's one thing that I'm grateful for, that my coaches and my professors prepared to be able to handle obviously the emotion strain you go thru, because it is emotional. But I was able to deal with it, you know a lot of people are not able to deal with it, and they really hurt themselves.

**Mary:** Yea, um I got done in the summer with athletics and I remember as soon as was done the very next day like I went and got my nails done. Ahhh I'm a girl again. I can have nails and they're not going to break when I go to practice. So I think right after I was done I was almost kind of relieved, you know, not to have that, I wouldn't say burden, but all those responsibilities anymore. You know it was kind of like its time to relax, time to rejuvenate myself and not worry about throwing anymore. But umm it kind of carried on a little bit through the summer and then I got really super bored because there was nothing to do, besides work and it was horrible and I mean I really did though I just wanted to take a break. I've been doing some sort of sport year round since I was in tee-ball. You know what I mean, so I've never not been in a sport or not been on a team. So I just kind of, I enjoyed it for a while and chilled out and didn't really do anything, then you kind of realized you can't be a bum forever. And so now I've started like working out every once in awhile running, trying to get out of the thrower lifestyle, because I can't be a big thrower anymore. So, um I think that like, I mean one of the things that's really it's different like for us being thrower, we're taking out of the...I'm basically turning into a man when I'm throwing because I lift all the time and I got all these huge muscles and its not typical for a woman to be like..I mean like basketball players, you guys are still little because you run all the time and that kind of stuff. And I just turn just turn into this beast, what did you guys use to call me?.... I don't even remember (M: I don't remember either) I think it might have been beast or something stupid like that. Yea so now its just kind of like you look back on it, for me like, I don't want to be that way anymore. I'm trying to change, I trying to get away from that so that I guess that would be something that I've invested in too. Like That's giving me something to do and I've got my boyfriend there along the way. Cuz he was a thrower too and he's doing the same thing and so he's is kind of there pushing me too and I think that helps out a lot. And so, You got to have something to do and I guess that's the next best thing.

**Larry:** Um... I don't know. It just kind of sorta happened for me...uh...I don't know honestly, it just kind of happened. Just out there looking, still here, and you opportunities came and I just took em. So, iono. When it was over with, I was like yes! Didn't work out for a long time (laugh). Man, partied hard too that last semester. Was over here just partying too hard! (laughs) Nah, it just felt like a weight was off your shoulders, cuz you didn't have to answer to nobody. You know, the guys that was still here, you know we was hanging out and stuff. "aww we gotta go lift weights, we gotta go practice." And

you're still sitting there like man I ain't got to go. It felt weird that you didn't get that text out of nowhere, "Meeting at 12:00." You know what I mean you didn't have to show up. But it was like a good feeling too. I think everybody feel like that, no matter what, period. You know league or no league, I think everybody feels like that.

**Michelle:** At first it was great. I had so much free time. I went out of town a lot visiting friends. I had my weekends free again. When summer came around it was weird because prior to that summer I was in Carbondale working out with my team for June and July. It hit me that I wasn't playing college [sport] anymore. So, that part was sad. I missed my friends and teammates... just focused on the next step in my life which was finding a GA position. I stay in close contact with most of my past teammates which helps. And I like to go back to Carbondale and visit people.

**Jason:** Uh, man it was a tough transition. I wouldn't say it lasted overly long, but it was a tough transition. I mean I've been active in sports, pretty much my whole life. Starting from when I was in maybe 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, doing some modern African dance. I was doing gymnastics 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade, playing basketball in the backyard. I got in to organized football and basketball in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade and continued that all the way thru high school, organized basketball w/ my church, football with my school and track with my school. Got to college I was playing [sport], so this is just years upon years you're part of something, you're part of a team. You know, you're quote unquote you're somebody, you know. I'm playing sports so after my eligibility was up, remind this a little bit, that senior season came, it came fast basically and it went way faster then it came like those games just flew by your senior year, like man it's coming to an end. Like it didn't really hit me until after that last game, you know. We're in the locker room it's the last time we're going to suit up and be in the locker room with these guys. You know the team camaraderie, that team atmosphere it's just something about it. After that game, I shed a tear a little bit, you know 'cuz I'm thinking like man what am going to do now, this is like my life, I've been playing [sport] for so, so long and its just like going to come to a abrupt stop. So, I had some hard feelings, I shed a few tears, ah, man I thought about it for a few days, but afterwards, hmph, it actually, it hurt then, but at the same after those few days felt good having a rest. And coming back off break, those guys had to get up and go to winter conditioning and stuff. I didn't miss any of that stuff. But I do miss the competition, and the team camaraderie, and being with the team, traveling and competition, shooting the shit whatever you want to call it, talking stuff, and all that stuff I do miss. Practicing and winter conditioning, and workouts 4 degree weather, I really don't mind missing that... Uh, December was our last game, uh I would have to say it lasted about a month or two, til after our banquet, which was in February I think, February [date], so about just, a couple months. It kind of died down in between that time, it wasn't just straight, strong intense but I thought about it...a lot.

**Mia:** Honestly, I was ok with it. I was so ready to be done. Uh, ask me a couple years before that, that it would probably been really hard. But I was so burned that, that last game I was just. Honestly we had graduation, and this sounds bad, but we had graduation that Friday night, if we would have won our game Thursday, we would had to play Friday night and I wouldn't have been able to go to graduation. So when we lost

Thursday. Not that I intentionally did that, I really did try to play hard. But we loss that game and I was like, I can go to graduation now. You know and it was just, its sad because you put so much time and effort and everything in there but I was just so burned out. I was tired and I hated the game.

**Mike:** Uh I just think its hard from being a player to moving on, I want say outside because I'm still in the athletic department by being a coach but uh yeah I think it was hard at first to just realize that you're not a player anymore and you know sometimes you can't compete at that level and you just have basically its just a transition where you move to another job and something else. Um I though I was going to be more not upset, but more sad about stopping. And you know I think my last year by winning the conference. I think that was you know a great achievement for me and I think I just, it just made me happy and didn't want to play anymore and having a bad year afterwards or something. So I just, the transition is good, you just, its, you, its just different work. I mean in your life you probably get a couple different jobs so each time its different steps and trying to move up every time so we'll see how it goes later on.

Appendix B  
Demographics of Participants

Name	Sex	Race	Household	Family Support	Sport Profile
Lynn	Female	African American	2 parent	Yes	High
Michelle	Female	White American	2 parent	Yes	High
Mary	Female	White American	2 parent	Yes	Low
Julia	Female	White American	2 parent	Yes	High
Matthew	Male	African American	2 parent	Yes	High
Luke	Male	White American	2 parent	Yes	Low
Mia	Female	White American	2 parent	Yes	High
Jason	Male	African American	2 parent	Yes	High
Mike	Male	White American	2 parent	Yes	Low
Larry	Male	African American	1 parent (parents remarried while he was in college)	Yes	High

## VITA

Graduate School  
Southern Illinois University

Erica Smith

Date of Birth: February 6, 1987

205 N. Wall St. Apt 11B Carbondale, IL 62901

205 N. Wall St. Apt 11B Carbondale, IL 62901

Erricasmith22@gmail.com

Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
Bachelor of Science, Business Management-Entrepreneurship, May 2009

Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
Bachelor of Science, Business Marketing, May 2009

The Transition: From College Athletics to a Post-Athletic Life

Major Professor: Dr. Jennifer Dunn