

## **Creating dual career opportunities for adolescent female football players from disadvantaged communities in South Africa**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of adolescent female football players transitioning from disadvantaged communities to the South African Football Association's Female Football Academy at the TuksSport High School. This was done through collage-based (i.e., visual story) storytelling (i.e., verbal story). The participants were asked to create three collages; one depicting life before, one depicting life at and one depicting life after the TuksSport High School. Thereafter, individual interviews were conducted with the participants based on their collages. The interviews were transcribed by the researchers and analysed using thematic analysis. It was found that the participants experienced challenges and opportunities in the transitioning process from disadvantaged communities to the TuksSport High School. The participants experienced the food, missing their families and friends, as well as the school and accommodation, as challenges. Opportunities presented in the notion of having dual careers, being able to access professional services at the High Performance Centre while envisaging a different future with reference to sport, work and family. The TuksSport High School and the High Performance Centre have a moral obligation to respond to the challenges of the participants through professional services, as well as an academic support and mentoring programme. It is also imperative that the opportunities that came to the fore are kept alive. This will prevent participant drop out from the TuksSport High School and ensure that the opportunity of having a dual career is kept alive; the opportunity to a better life.

**Keywords:** Collages, dual careers, learner-athletes, narrative, transitions.

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### **Introduction**

In 2002 the TuksSport High School (TSHS) was established and formed part of the High Performance Centre (hpc)<sup>a</sup> at the University of Pretoria (UP) in South Africa (TuksSport High School, 2016a). The purpose of the school is to create opportunities for adolescents from disadvantaged communities in South Africa to

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<sup>a</sup> The official brand abbreviation for the High Performance Centre is the "hpc" and not the "HPC".

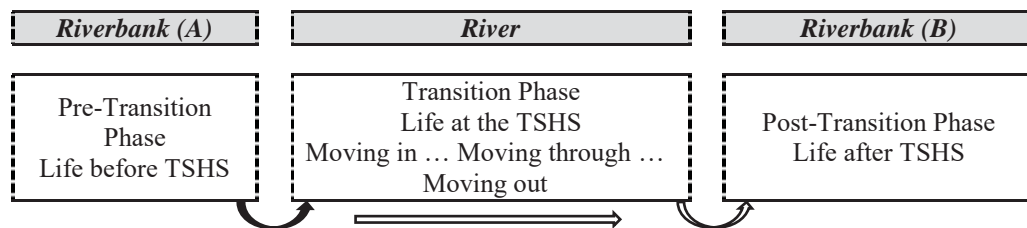
pursue dual careers (TuksSport High School, 2016b). According to the principal the TSHS defines a disadvantaged community as a community experiencing financial difficulties with limited access to quality education, sports coaching and training facilities. These shortcomings are addressed through scholarships allowing the adolescents from disadvantaged communities the opportunity to pursue dual careers (H. E. de Villiers, personal communication, July 18, 2016). A dual career entails pursuing one career in the domain of education and the other in the sphere of sport (e.g., learner-athlete, student-athlete) (De Swart, 2015). The European Union (EU) describes a dual career as the process to “successfully initiate, develop and finalise an elite sporting career as part of a lifelong career, in combination with the pursuit of education” (European Union [EU], 2012: 6).

Since its establishment the TSHS has grown from 27 to 200 learner-athletes and caters for female and male learner-athletes in secondary education (TuksSport High School, 2006a, 2016b). Since its inception the TSHS has had a 100% pass rate for Grade 12 learner-athletes with the exception of one year. The learner-athletes have also excelled in various sporting codes on provincial, national and international levels (De Swart, 2015). The TSHS has one principal, 16 teaching staff and four administrative staff members (TuksSport High School, 2016b), while the TSHS Academies has one academy director and four administrative staff members focussing on athletics, football, cricket, golf, swimming and tennis. The TSHS Residence is part of the school and has two house parents and a mentoring team (TuksSport High School, 2016c, 2016d). A school day at the TSHS runs from 09:15 to 15:15 and focuses on academic development. Training sessions are scheduled before and after the school day allowing for adequate recovery time between training sessions (Human & Human, 2016). Balancing these two careers is often a complex endeavour, as both careers require time, effort and commitment (Baron-Thiene & Alfermann, 2015).

Balancing dual careers can be done through a foreground-background perspective. This means that the education timetable and sporting programme of learner-athletes need to determine which role of the dual career is in the foreground and which role is in the background at specific times during the academic and sport calendars (Stambulova, Engström, Franck, & Linnér, 2015). Career engulfment is a problem experienced by those pursuing dual careers as one of the careers is emphasized at the expense of the other (Gayles & Baker, 2015). Usually the athlete’s career is given prominence, as it can bring instant stardom and immediate financial relief, while education is often seen as a long-term goal; a post athlete career project (Haslerig & Navarro, 2015). Another problem is drop out, which refers to the premature termination of a sport career before athletes reach their peak performance (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). A study conducted in a German sport school found that drop out tended to be

higher amongst learner-athletes with many physical complaints, low goal motivation and low self-optimisation (Baron-Thiene & Alfermann, 2015).

Every year adolescents from disadvantaged communities are recruited to join the TSHS to pursue dual careers. Due to the researchers' prolonged involvement (2004 - present) as counselling psychologists at the school, they have identified the first six weeks of joining the school as the high risk period for learner-athletes to drop out of the school. This means losing an opportunity to create a better life through education and sport. To conceptualize the transitioning of the learner-athletes from disadvantaged communities to the TSHS, the researchers employed the transition theories of Schlossberg (1981), Chickering and Schlossberg (1995), Schlossberg (2011) and Stambulova and Wylleman (2014). The transitioning of the adolescents from disadvantaged communities to the TSHS can be explained by using the metaphor of "crossing-a-river" as depicted in Figure 1. A metaphor can be described as "understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p.5) and is based on an "imaginative rationality" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p.193).



**Figure 1:** Transitioning from life before, to life during, to life after the TuksSport High School

A transition is characterized by the pre-transition setting (i.e., Riverbank A), the post-transition settings (i.e., Riverbank B), the characteristics of the person (i.e., talented adolescents) going through the transition and the nature of the transition (i.e., adolescents transitioning between two vastly different communities in one country)(Schlossberg, 1981).When adolescents from disadvantaged communities (i.e., Riverbank A) are identified through a sport scouting programme to join the TSHS (i.e., River), it can be seen as an anticipated transition (Schlossberg, 2011). The transitioning itself entails moving into the transition (i.e., leaving Riverbank A and moving into the River), moving through the transition (i.e., moving through the River) and moving out of the transition (i.e., moving out of the River and onto Riverbank B)(Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995). It is the moving into the transition indicated by the black arrow in Figure 1 that was the focus of this study. Dealing with transitions (i.e., leaving Riverbank A, moving through the River and on to Riverbank B), implies dealing with transition demands that are influenced by a dynamic balance between resources and barriers (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2014). These resources and demands, for example, can relate to the learner-athletes' academics, sporting activities, accommodation setting and professional support.

The researchers could not find any research on transitioning between disadvantaged communities and a unique learning and sporting environment (i.e., TSHS) in South Africa. However, research on transnational transitioning indicates that when athletes transition between two countries, they (1) miss their families, (2) struggle with the foreign language, (3) struggle to make new friends and (4) find building a relationship with new coaches and support staff challenging (Agergaard & Ryba, 2014; Richardson, Littlewood, Nesti & Benstead, 2012; Ryba, Stambulova, Ronkainen & Bundgaard, 2015).

Therefore, based on the lack of research on learner-athletes transitioning from disadvantaged communities to the unique learning and sporting environment (i.e., TSHS), the aim of this study was to allow female learner-athletes, who had been selected to join the South African Football Association's (SAFA) National Female Football Academy at the TSHS, an opportunity to share their transitioning experiences from disadvantages communities to the TSHS. This was done through collage-based (i.e., visual story) storytelling (i.e., verbal story) with the purpose of proposing transitional support measures.

## **Methodology**

This research is situated within a qualitative research paradigm with a relativist ontology, an emic epistemology and a narrative methodology (James, 2015; Killam, 2013). A narrative can be described as "someone [learner-athletes] telling something [narrative] to someone [researchers] about something [transitioning experiences]" (Kearney, 2006: 150) in some context (i.e., TSHS) (Lindsay, 2006), with the purpose of "bringing a sense of order to the seeming disorder in our world" (Murray, 2008: 111). The research methods employed in this study are discussed below.

## ***Participants***

### ***Sampling method***

Annually, the SAFA scouts and identifies adolescent females from disadvantaged communities to become part of the TSHS and the SAFA National Female Football Academy at the TSHS with the purpose of pursuing dual careers (TuksSport High School, 2016d). In this study two sampling methods were employed, namely convenience and purposive sampling. Convenience sampling is used by researchers to collect data from people in society who are conveniently available to the researchers (Gratton & Jones, 2010). The learner-athletes were selected by SAFA to join the SAFA National Female Football Academy situated at the TSHS and were therefore conveniently available to the researchers. Purposive sampling is a sampling method employed by researchers who want to achieve a specific research goal with specific research participants

(Bryman, 2012). The purpose of the study was to give female football learner-athletes from disadvantaged communities a voice through collage-based storytelling during their transitioning from disadvantaged communities to the TSHS.

### *Participant group*

The learner-athletes that participated in this research study all left their disadvantaged communities and entered the TSHS. Table 1 depicts the demographics of the participant group.

**Table 1:** Sample distribution

Nr	Age (years)	Gender	Race	Residential Province	School Grade	Sport Level
P1	17	Female	Black	Gauteng	Grade 11	u17 National Team
P2	17	Female	Black	Gauteng	Grade 10	u17 National Team
P3	17	Female	Black	Gauteng	Grade 10	u17 National Team
P4	14	Female	Coloured	Eastern Cape	Grade 09	Provincial Team
P5	16	Female	Black	Gauteng	Grade 10	u17 National Team
P6	16	Female	Black	Western Cape	Grade 09	u17 National Team
P7	15	Female	Black	Eastern Cape	Grade 10	u17 National Team
P8	16	Female	Black	Western Cape	Grade 09	u17 National Team

All the participants were female adolescents with their ages ranging from 14 years to 17 years. Seven of the participants were Black South Africans while one participant was a Coloured South African. Four participants came from Gauteng, two participants from the Eastern Cape and two participants from the Western Cape. One participant was in Grade 11, four participants in Grade 10 and the remaining three participants were in Grade 9. Seven of the participants had participated in football on a national level while one participant had participated on a provincial level.

### *Research ethics*

Organisational permission to conduct the research project was obtained from the hpc, which included the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), the principal of the TSHS and manager of the SAFA National Female Football Academy. As all the research participants were minors written informed consent and assent was obtained from the parents/guardians and participants respectively. Participation in the research was voluntary and the participants had the right to withdraw from the research at any time. Upholding confidentiality was part of the research agreement with the participants. The research data will be stored at the hpc for a period of 15 years. Permission was obtained from the parents/guardians and participants to publish the research in the form of a scholarly article.

### ***Data collection***

In this study the researchers employed collage-based storytelling to explore the experiences of adolescents transitioning from disadvantaged communities to the TSHS.

### ***Collages***

A collage can be described as “a poster or visual representation in which the participant makes use of photos, pictures and cuttings (also text) from magazines and other media, and any other print material that tells something about her or him as a person” (Van Schalkwyk, 2010, p.678). The participants were asked by the second researcher (female researcher) to create three collages based on the transitional theory of Schlosberg (1981), as well as Chickering and Schlossberg (1995). The first depicted the time before the TSHS (i.e., the pre-transition), the second portrayed moving into the TSHS (i.e., entering the transition) and the third represented the time after the TSHS (i.e., the post-transition). The choice of the researchers to make use of collages was based on language proficiency and cultural differences.

Firstly, although the participants had been exposed to English as a school subject before coming to the TSHS, it was not their mother tongue. Van Schalkwyk (2010) states that a collage is a representational technique that does not solely rely on conversational practices and language proficiency to assist people in expressing their experiences. It is for this reason that the researchers opted to employ collages in this study. Secondly, the researchers were cognisant of the cultural differences between the researchers and the participants. The researchers were White South Africans while the participants consisted of seven Black South Africans and one Coloured South African. Therefore, the researchers reasoned that using collages would be a safe way to allow the researchers and participants to engage with one another (Meier & Hartell, 2009).

### ***Storytelling***

After the collages were created by the participants, the second researcher (female researcher) conducted one individual interview with each of the participants based on their collages. These individual interviews were conducted in the hpc office of this researcher, who is a senior counselling psychologist and has been registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) for 15 years. The individual interviews were audiotaped for transcription purposes, and each lasted for +/- 60 minutes. The following question was posed to each of the participants’ three collages with the purpose of giving their experiences a voice while transitioning from disadvantaged communities to the TSHS: “Can you please tell me about the meaning of each picture in the three collages?” Based on the participants’ collage-based storytelling, follow-up questions were asked to the participants. The participants were allowed to interpret their own collages,

and this was not done by the interviewer, as this would rob the participants from voicing their own transitioning experiences. The individual interviews were transcribed by the second researcher and checked by the first researcher. This allowed the researchers to become acquainted with the data before the data analysis commenced (Davidson, 2009).

### ***Analysis***

The data analysis was done by means of a thematic analysis which is “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within the data” (Braun & Clark, 2006, p.79). Thematic analysis can be done from a deductive position (i.e., top-down; from theory to data) and/or from an inductive stance (i.e., bottom-up; from data to themes)(Braun & Clark, 2006). In this study an inductive thematic analysis was done on the data from the collage-based storytelling of the participants based on the three collages made by the participants.

### ***Trustworthiness***

To enhance the trustworthiness of the study the researchers employed the model of Krefling (1990). According to this model trustworthiness consists of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. In this study credibility was addressed through the strategies of prolonged engagement and the triangulation of the researchers. Transferability was addressed through the strategy of giving a dense description of the research context and participants. Dependability was addressed through the process of peer examination by having the research reviewed by a colleague from another university and confirmability was addressed through the strategy of reflexivity.

### **Results**

The learner-athletes’ transitioning experiences from disadvantaged communities to the TSHS, which were characterized by (i) challenges and (ii) opportunities will now be discussed.

### ***Challenges***

During their transitioning the participants experienced challenges with specific reference to (i) food, (ii) family, (iii) friends and (iv) school.

#### ***Food***

Pertaining to food, there were challenges in terms of (i) the taste of the food, (ii) making food for family as a caring act, (iii) the types of food and (iv) the eating ritual with family. P1 said that she missed the taste of fast foods and home-made

foods by stating that the “food didn’t taste that nice. I like fast foods like fish and chips or pizza. I like the samp and stew that my mom cooks. The food here doesn’t have any taste.” P2 stated that she lost the opportunity to care for her family through making food because “when she [I] came home from training, she [I] cooked and would eat with my little sister. I would also then cook for my older sister. She is at varsity. Then when she comes back [home], she has food.” P6 shared that she missed the types of food she ate at home, as her family cooked “spaghetti, rice and pap. We also eat noodles, but they don’t have that here. They don’t have Parmalat yogurt. Eating the food here is a big adjustment for me.” P8 expressed that she lost the experience of togetherness during the eating ritual stating that “when we eat at home, we all eat together. We enjoy our time together and speak to one another. In Cape Town we also sat together. My family and I sat together to eat.”

### *Family*

The participants experienced missing the togetherness with their families while being at the TSHS. P6 portrayed her family as “sitting together watching TV, especially when it is cold outside, then we sit together and we eat chips. My mom, dad, grandma, grandpa, aunt, uncle, three brothers, two sisters and the cousins live together in one house.” P7 communicated that she missed her “two nephews, one niece, one brother and three sisters and [her] mom. If something is boring on TV, and it is load shedding [power outages], we used to light candles and play music on my phone and then danced and had fun together.”

### *Friends*

While living at the TSHS, the participants experienced missing the connectedness of being with their friends at home. P1 described that “I connected with my friends because I like walking around with my friends, going to the mall, watching movies with them.” P4 mentioned that she missed her friends, as they always talked “about things that I am comfortable with. We will laugh and play together. The meaning of friends refers to people that support you when you are sad, and then they will give you advice. It is not only about playing.”

### *School*

Leaving the school where the participants came from and joining the TSHS also entailed various challenges. P1 said it was “very difficult to leave my old school.” One of the things that made it difficult was that “I had to choose other subjects.” For example, at “the TSHS I no longer have Sepedi. I am now doing Zulu. I had to change from Economics to Geography.” Based on the principal’s instruction, “she also moved me one grade down from Grade 12 to Grade 11”. The principal said “I must go back to Grade 11. I saw this as a better choice because now I can learn Zulu and adapt to it by the time I reach Grade 12.” P6 stated that she lost the freedom to play at the TSHS with specific reference to the



residence. She stated that “the locker [residence] is a prison” and when they “come back from school, you have to study.” The mentor has “lots of rules ... the rules are too strict.” It is a “big adjustment that I just have to work and I can’t play anymore.” My present collage “is sometimes happy and sometimes not. I feel happy when we have [football] camp because we have more freedom and less work.” P7 shared that being at the TSHS “is a new life and I am not used to it. At home we used to play and here we don’t play. If X [manager] says it is NO, it is NO! Here we don’t play street games.” Besides experiencing the TSHS as a place where playing is limited, or even forbidden, she gives her understanding of this by stating that “X [manager] is also very protective over us. If we play, and we get injured, then we can’t play for the national team.” She also mentioned that language was a dilemma at the TSHS as the learner-athletes did not all speak the same language. Therefore, they “don’t always understand one another. My language is Xhosa, and they speak Tshwane and Sepedi.” At school “I am now learning Zulu.” She mentioned that the language barrier was not limited to the school setting, but also impacted on her football, as the “girls speak Zulu on the field, and then I don’t understand them.” Not being able to understand one another can also delay the adjustment process to the TSHS.

### ***Opportunities***

During their transitioning the participants experienced opportunities with specific reference to (i) careers, (ii) professional services and (iii) an envisaged future.

#### *Careers*

Being awarded the opportunity to work towards dual careers in education and sport is something the participants gained. P2 gained insight into the importance of having balance between education and sport. She stated that she wanted to “motivate children to play soccer and study hard. I want to motivate them to balance soccer and academics.” She also gained insight into the danger that football can be a “short career where you can get injured anytime,” while with education “you can study hard, and no one can take that knowledge away from you. You can even get a job, even if you are injured.” P3 changed since she became part of the TSHS, as she is “focusing on my soccer and my school work. It is different now in comparison to when I was still living at home. I was not as focused at home.” P5 has “begun a new life here which is more serious around my school and my soccer ... when I summarise all three collages I see hard work, determination and commitment to football and school.”

#### *Services*

The participants gained the opportunity to have access to professional services (e.g., physician, psychologist and physiotherapist) at the hpc to assist them while being at the TSHS. P3 mentioned that “the physiotherapists help us. At home

there were no people to help us. Now it is better because we have people that support us.” P8 expressed that “the psychologist makes me better when I feel homesick. Then you can feel better although still homesick” and depicted the nutritionists as informing her of what “I must eat when I train, drink water and eat vegetables. I don’t like them, but I eat them because they are good for me.”

### *Future*

Being awarded the opportunity to join the TSHS allowed the participants to envisage a future that would possibly be different from envisaging a future from within disadvantaged communities. Their envisaged futures focused on (i) sport, (ii) work and (iii) family.

The participants envisaged a future with sport being an integral part of that future. P4 dreamt of a future “playing for Banyana-Banyana [female national football team]” as her community would be proud of her saying “there is the child who was once small and now she is keeping our name high.” P5 imagined becoming “a Banyana-Banyana [female national football team] player” in the future “to fulfil my dream ... to be in the national team is not easy, as it takes a lot of effort and hard work.” P8 mentioned playing football in future “because I want to have money”, as this will enable her to “do things on my own, and I don’t want to depend on anyone anymore.”

Besides sport, work was also an integral part of the participants’ envisaged future. P2 stated that she wanted to be “an agent one day after playing soccer. Then I can motivate children ... I can also travel overseas to motivate others” and hoped to be “a legend. A legend is a person who did the right things when she was young and people want to follow her and what she was doing.” P5 described that she wanted to be “a sports advancement officer. They promote sport especially for ladies.” P7 imagined a life outside of football, as she wanted “to have my own business working and servicing cars. I want to be a mechanic working and repairing cars. I want to own taxis in my business.”

The participants also envisaged having a family of their own in the future. P3 shared that she wanted “a good family and have two children, a boy and a girl. Having my own family is a good thing because when you are struggling with things your family can help you. Living alone is not good. You need people to give each other love.” P4 mentioned that “I will do everything in my power to be happy in the future and to be a good wife and a good mother. I want to teach them everything that my mom and grandma taught me.”

## **Discussion**

This study focused on learner-athletes' transitioning experience from disadvantaged communities to the TSHS; transitioning between two vastly different worlds in one country.

Firstly, the learner-athletes experienced that their transitioning from disadvantaged communities to the TSHS were characterized by challenges (i.e., food, family, friends, school) and opportunities (i.e., careers, services, future). This coincides with the stance of Stambulova and Wylleman (2014) that indicates that transitioning experiences are characterized by resources (i.e., opportunities) and demands (i.e., challenges).

Secondly, this study identified possible "red lights" that could lead to the learner-athletes dropping out of the TSHS. These related to (1) the difference in food at home and at the TSHS (i.e., the taste of the food, making food as a caring act, the types of food, the eating ritual with the family), (2) the learner-athletes missing their families, (3) the learner-athletes missing their friends and (4) the difference in school and accommodation at home and at the TSHS. This differs from a study done in a German sport school that found that learner-athletes with many physical complaints, low goal motivation and low self-optimisation, were prone to drop out (Baron-Thiene & Alfermann, 2015). Research on transnational transitions has revealed that athletes who transition from one country to another experience (1) missing their families, (2) struggling with the foreign language, (3) making new friends and (4) building a relationship with new coaches and support staff as challenging (Agergaard & Ryba, 2014; Richardson et al., 2012; Ryba et al., 2015).

Thirdly, a successful transition is depended on support according to Schlossberg (1981), Chickering and Schlossberg (1995), Schlossberg (2011) and Stambulova and Wylleman (2014). The TSHS has a moral obligation to support learner-athletes who transition from disadvantaged communities to the TSHS. This is already done through professional services (e.g., medicine, nutrition, psychology, physiotherapy), academic support (e.g., study methods, vocational counselling) at the TSHS and a mentoring programme at the TSHS Residence. A limitation that can be addressed by the TSHS is to implement a recreational programme for the learner-athletes which can address their need to play.

Finally, although this study focused on the transition experiences of learner-athletes transitioning from disadvantaged communities to the TSHS, the learner-athletes also commented favourably on the use of collage-based storytelling during the research.

The collages were perceived as assisting the learner-athletes in creating continuity between their life in disadvantaged communities, to being at the TSHS and their life after the TSHS. P2 stated that “it is good to understand where I came from, how it is now and where I am going to” and P8 mentioned that the “collages were good because we were discussing the past, and what is happening now, and then how I can use that in future.” The collages were also perceived as assisting the learner-athletes in expressing their transitioning experiences. P1 expressed that the “collages helped me because it helped me to open up what is inside and tell you what I am struggling with at the moment” and P7 mentioned that the “collages helped me talk about coming to TSHS. It was good to talk to you, and I enjoyed it because I was telling you about what I am feeling.”

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