Challenges of transitioning from school to senior level athletics in South Africa

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DECLARATION

I, Louis Jacobus van Zyl, student number 25303938, hereby declare that this dissertation, *Challenges of transition from school to senior level athletics in South Africa,* which is submitted in accordance with the requirements for the Magister Educationis degree at the University of Pretoria, is my own original work and has not previously been submitted to any other institution of higher learning. All sources cited or quoted in this research project are indicated and acknowledged with a comprehensive list of references.

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Louis Jacobus van Zyl

15 August 2018

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to every track and field athlete in South Africa. Most importantly, it is dedicated to those promising young athletes who will represent the country in international championships/competitions in coming years.

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ABBREVIATIONS and ACRONYMS

ASA	Athletics South Africa
DBE	Department of Basic Education
IAAF	International Association of Athletics Federation
LOC	Local Organising Committees
LTPD	Long-Term Participant Development
NCAA	National Collegiate Athletics Association
NF	National Federation
NSSCP	National School Sport Championships Programme
OPEX	Operation Excellence Programme
SA	South Africa
SASCOC	South African Sports Confederation and Olympic Committee
SRSA	Department of Sport and Recreation
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America

ABSTRACT

At present, very few South African athletes who compete at a junior level and perform well make a successful transition to senior athletics. Far too many discontinue their participation when transitioning to senior track and field athletics to the detriment of our country's athletics. This study provides insights into the transitional challenges that South African track and field athletes face and highlights the effects of various factors on transition.

The available literature suggests that there are multiple factors, which cause an unsuccessful transition. Furthermore, the effectiveness of support systems that are meant to assist athletes in overcoming these challenges is questionable.

A qualitative research design, which employed narrative interviews with 12 South African athletes who had competed internationally as junior athletes, was used in the study. The results revealed that support systems, coaches, training plans, injuries and qualification standards are the main challenges that South African athletes face during their transition to senior level athletics. Vast improvements in communication and decisive commitments need to be made in the existing support structures to help young athletes. Furthermore, there is disparity between the challenges for which structures provide support and the actual challenges athletes in South Africa encounter.

Key words:

Dropout; Elite athletes; South Africa Athletics; Track and Field; Transitional challenges

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CHAPTER ONE

OVERVIEW OF STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Winning a total of four medals, two gold and two silver, at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympic Games was not a stroke of luck for the top performing South African track and field athletes. Furthermore, it was not the last time that South African athletes delivered such performances. Yet four Olympic medals is not a true reflection of the talent in South Africa. One may ask what happened to the abundance of South African talent that did not achieve medals. When one considers the impressive performances of South African school athletes at an international level, the South African athletes should have won more medals at the 2016 Olympics. In this study, it is suggested that the medals won at the Rio de Janeiro Olympic Games were not the result of government support systems and/or government-funded development programmes.

Even though, at the time, the Minister of Sport, Fikile Mbalula, boasted that the government had invested R 600 million in the development of sport (Mohamed 2016), very little of this money was channelled to school athletes who were working directly towards competing at senior level in track and field events. Hendrick Ramaala, (2000, 2004, 2008 and 2012 marathon Olympian) compared Athletics South Africa (ASA) to travel agents as all they appeared to do was observe who qualified for the Olympic Games before they subsequently paid for their flights and accommodation (Mohamed 2016).

The 2010 and 2012 South African teams who competed at the IAAF[1] World Junior Championships included 46 athletes. Of the 2010 cohort and 2012 cohort, 14 and 11, respectively no longer compete at a senior level internationally (IAAF 2018). The South African statistics, presented in Table 1.1, may also be regarded as disturbing.

[1] *The IAAF is the international governing body for track and field athletics (IAAF 2018).*

Table 1.1: IAAF World Junior Championships

Percentage of SA Athletes who did not have a personal best time at senior level
2010, Monchon 34%
2012, Barcelona 30%
Percentage of SA junior athletes who did not represent SA at a major senior championship at senior level
2010, Monchon 58%
2012, Barcelona 72%

This loss of potential talent begs the question of what prevented those athletes from participating at a senior level. More importantly, one may ask if there were sufficient support systems in place to ensure that these athletes could successfully transition to senior level athletics.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

In this study, the challenges and opportunities facing school athletes in their transitional move to senior athletics with a view to identifying the shortcomings in the athletics system that should be addressed were investigated.

The post-school dropout rate in South African athletics is not a unique to South Africa. This phenomenon also occurs in other southern hemisphere countries (Dick 2013) where the participation schedule does not correspond with that of the European season because seasonal periodisation differs. According to the South African Athletics Annual statistics, only 29% and 3% of the 2010 and 2012 IAAF World Junior athletes, respectively participated at the 2016 Rio De Janeiro Olympic

Games. Furthermore, 54% and 38% of the 2010 and 2012 teams, respectively no longer participate in senior track and field (Alfred & Mayer 2018).

Bennie and O'Connor (2006) found that in Australia no more than 25% of national school representatives have progressed through to senior level and 47% of all Australian World Junior representatives have continued to participate internationally. New Zealand statistics also suggest a high attrition rate of elite junior athletes; 67% of all athletes who took part in the World Junior Track and Field championships did not represent New Zealand at an international senior level (Hollings & Hume 2011). Following their analysis of the results of the World Junior Track and Field Athletics Championships, Dick (2013), Foss and Chapman (2013) and Zelichenok (2005) found that "60-90% of the winners and medallists failed to demonstrate similar levels of achievement at Olympic and World Championship levels in following years" (Hollings 2013:1).

Hollings and Hume (2011) demonstrated that the peak window of performance for junior athletes occurs at the age of 19 years and between the ages of 23 and 27 years for senior athletes. While the Olympic and Youth Olympic Games[2] are held every four years, the International Association of Athletics (IAAF) World Juniors Championships are held every second year. One would expect that if athletes compete at the World Junior Track and Field Championships when 18 and 19 years of age, they would be nearing the beginning of their peak performance age and consequently, potentially qualify for their first Olympic Games (Hollings & Hume 2011).

Thus, the following questions may be asked. What challenges are preventing school athletes from achieving success in senior athletics? What do national federations (NFs) do to keep school/junior athletes in the sport for the next four years until these athletes reach their peak window?

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Given the loss of athletic potential from school to senior level, the main research question this study addressed was as follows:

[2] *The Youth Olympic Games is an international multi-sport event organised by the International Olympic Committee (IAAF 2018).*

What is the etiology of the loss of athletic potential from school to senior athletic level?

The following secondary questions were also addressed:

1) What are the challenges experienced by school track and field athletes after competing internationally?
2) Is sustainable support provided by governing bodies such as the Department of Sport and Recreation (SRSA) to junior track and field athletes after competing internationally?
3) How can support for track and field athletes be improved after they have competed internationally as juniors?

1.4 RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE

The Chinese bamboo plant takes 10 years to grow six inches (24cm). It then grows 10 feet (3m) in the next six months. One may ask if the plant grew 10 feet in six months or 10 feet and six inches in 10 years and six months. This phenomenon is central to any discussion on the nature of talent in sport (Regnier, Salmela & Russel 1993). It took me nine years before I won my first major event and many more to be recognised as a top-performing athlete.

I also understand the numerous challenges elite athletes encounter and my interest in the research topic arose from my own experience. Having represented South Africa at various prestigious events from 2001, it became increasingly apparent to me that very few of the athletes with whom I had competed at a junior level had made a successful transition to senior athletics. I was vexed by the question: Where have all my fellow athletes whom I competed against from a young age gone? Consequently, I became interested in exploring why South African athletes who perform well at a junior level in track and field athletics discontinue their participation upon reaching senior competitive levels.

The rationale for this study was to acquire reasons why promising athletes drop out, retire early or fail to qualify for national senior teams. This study is particularly significant for the relevant governing bodies in South Africa. If the necessary support systems are implemented by the SRSA, the high percentage of athletes who stop

competing in athletics after having successful junior careers may decrease significantly; this has been demonstrated by statistics in recent years (Alfred and Mayer 2018).

Nurturing young talent in the interest of sport development has proven to be beneficial for South Africa. Examples include the 1995 Rugby World Cup when South Africa defeated the All Blacks and more recently, Wayde van Niekerk's 400-meter world record victory at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympic Games. These examples demonstrate former president Nelson Mandela's advice that sport can be a strong unifying force in the transformation and reconstruction of the 'new' South Africa:

> *"Sport has the power to change the world…it has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope where once there was only despair. It is more powerful than government in breaking down racial barriers*" (Laureus 2000).

If the necessary systems are put in place by governing bodies and used as a 'catch net' for talented school track and field athletes so as to support them as they transition to senior level, the dropout rate might be much lower than that revealed by the statistics in recent years.

1.5 AIMS OF THE STUDY

The aims of this study were as follows: First, to investigate challenges faced by athletes as they advance from school track and field athletics to international senior level participation; second, to examine functional support systems in place to ensure the continued participation of school athletes who participated at junior internal competitions at senior international level; third, to provide guidelines for authorities to improve support methods in relation to the transition from school to senior track and field athletics competitions; and finally, to determine possible reasons for the high dropout rate in school track and field athletics. For the reasons outlined in in section 1.4, it is also imperative for South Africa to produce sustained success in athletics at an international level in the future. The prevention of dropouts is, therefore, a core task of athletics organisations and the South African government.

1.6 CLARIFICATION OF TERMINOLOGY

A description of terms used in this study for the sake of the reader who may have a different understanding of these terms is provided. Some of these concepts are discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

ASA: Athletics South Africa is the national governing body for the sport of athletics in South Africa, recognised by the IAAF, and a member of Confederation of African Athletics (ASA 2018).

Athlete: A person who is proficient in sports and specialises in track and field.

Athletics: Referred to as track and field athletes.

Dropout: Dropout in athletics refers to the premature discontinuation in an athlete's sport career before said athlete reaches his/her individual peak performance level.

Junior athlete: A junior athlete is an athlete in the under-20 age category (19 years of age or younger on 31 December in the year of competition).

Senior athlete: A senior athlete is 20 years of age or older.

Retired athlete: An athlete who no longer competes competitively in track and field.

The terms, **junior** and **school** are used interchangeably throughout this dissertation. A school athlete is classified as an individual under the age of 20 years, thus, participating in the junior category. The scope of this study does not include disabled track and field athletes. My participants are referred to as track and field athletes.

SASCOC: South African Sports Confederation and Olympic Committee is South Africa's multi-coded national sporting body. SASCOC assumes the responsibilities of preparation, performance and presentation of teams to all multi-coded events. SASCOC also monitors various national federations who are affiliated to them, together with the various provincial sporting bodies (SASCOC 2016).

Transition: The term, **transition** is used to refer to athletes' progression from school/junior to senior level in sport development. Wylleman, Theeboom & Lavallee (2004) described transition as one or more moves or changes that an athlete makes

at a personal, sport and social level that are beyond the on-going changes of everyday life. The transition also causes changes to the athlete's self-worth and assumptions about him/herself.

White Paper: A white paper is an authoritative guide or report with the purpose of informing readers about an intricate issue. It presents the issuing body's philosophy on a matter. (SRSA, White Paper on Sport and Recreation 2011).

World Junior Track and Field Championship: A bi-annual world championship where track and field athletes represent their countries. It is organised by the International Association of Athletics Federations and only athletes in the under-20 athletics age group category may compete. This age group category consists of athletes who are 19 years old or younger on the 31 December in the year of the competition (IAAF 2018).

1.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Model of Career Transition (Wylleman, Alfermann & Lavallee 2004) and the Sport Career Transition Model (Stambulova 2003) were utilised to develop the theoretical framework. These models were selected because they represent an athletic career as an on-going sequence of events and not just a singular event. This supports the idea that athletes should be treated and viewed holistically by considering more than just their athletic performances. According to the Model of Career Transition, research on career development in elite sport has received much attention in recent years. Whereas initial research focused mainly on stages of talent development, crisis transitions and sport career termination, recent studies have shown an increased focus on within-career transitions using a holistic lifespan perspective (Stambulova *et al.* 2009; Wylleman & Lavallee 2004).

The Model of Career Transition (Wylleman *et al.* 2004) is a developmental model, which explains what athletes face when they transition from school to senior level track and field athletics. It is illustrated in Figure 1.1.

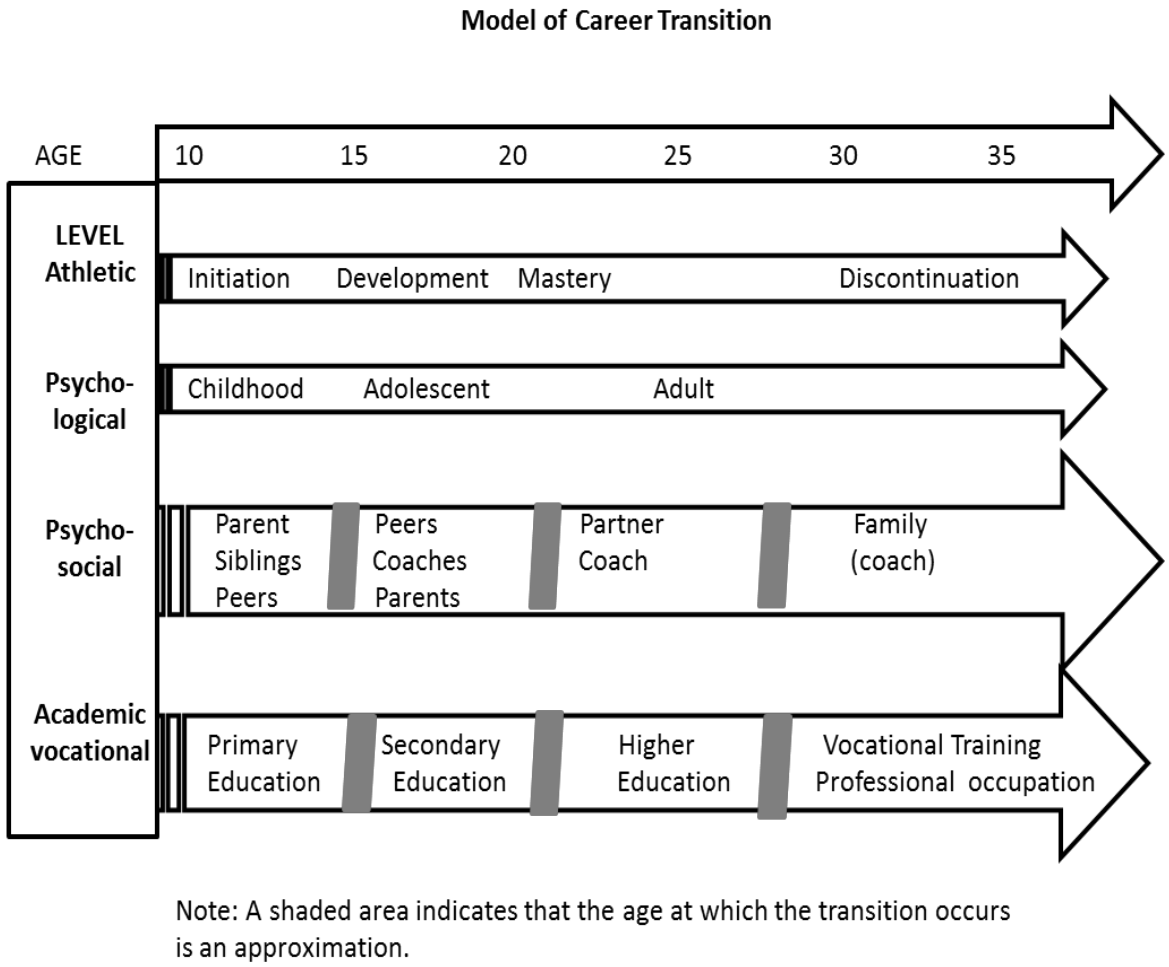

Figure 1.1: Model of Career Transition (Adapted from Wylleman *et al.* 2004).

The Model of Career Transition (Wylleman *et al.* 2004) comprises four levels and represents a whole person perspective. The model describes development, interaction and normative transitions at different levels. These include athletic or physical, psychological, psychosocial and academic levels. The model demonstrates how the transitions in the sport and other spheres of an athlete's life overlap and interact with each other. A distinction can be made between normative transitions that are predictable and anticipated such as the transition from school to senior athletics and retirement from the sport, and non-normative transitions, which are involuntary and are caused by unplanned, decisive events that occur in an individual's life including injuries and unexpected failure to participate in a major competition (Wylleman & Lavallee 2004).

Furthermore, Wylleman *et al.* (2004) found that the study of successful sport careers and post-career experiences may contribute to a better appreciation of the factors that have an influence on both sport career success, and athletic and post-sport career wellbeing. Furthermore, they revealed that athletes perceive these transitional challenges do not only occur in the development of their sport career, but in other developmental domains such as the psychological, psychosocial, academic, financial and vocational. Debois, Ledon and Wylleman, (2015) detailed specific transitional challenges during each stage of athletic development, namely, initiation, development, mastery and discontinuation, and emphasised the interactive relationship between the various domains of development (Wylleman, Reints & De Knop 2013).

The **top layer** of the model of career transition consists of the stages in athletic development. On this level, the athlete goes through four different transitions. These stages, initiation, development, mastery and discontinuation are depicted in Figure 1.1. For the purpose of this study, the most important transition was the that which occurs when athletes move from the initiation stage to the development stage. This specific transition occurs when athletes are approximately 12-13 years old and their training level increases. They become more dedicated and focused. Practices are more structured and coaches help their athletes to set sport-specific goals (Wylleman & Lavallee 2004). Parents' support increases and more funds are invested in athletes' sport involvement. Furthermore, their physical skills, as illustrated in Figure 1.1, improve, they expend more energy during practice and they start to participate more competitively. It becomes more difficult to combine this level of participation in sport with studying and other academic demands. Consequently, athletes often have to sacrifice other activities such as social events (Stambulova *et al.* 2009). This is explained in Chapter Two.

The **second layer** of the development model predicts the normative transitions at a psychological level. It consists of three different stages: Childhood (up to 12 years), adolescence (13-18 years) and adulthood (19 years and older) (Wylleman & Lavallee 2004).

In the **third layer,** the athlete's psychosocial development involves important relationships with parents, coachers, siblings and/or partner. These relationships are not static, but change over time (Wylleman & Lavallee 2004).

The **fourth layer** pertains to the development and transitions at an academic level. The first transition to primary education takes place when a child is six-seven years old. Children advance to secondary education when they are 12-13 years. . The third transition occurs at the age of 18-19, when athletes leave school and start pursuing post-school or higher education. The last stage is the transition from higher education to a profession or occupation (Wylleman & Lavallee 2004).

As indicated in Figure 1.1, discontinuation in sport normally occurs when athletes are in their early thirties and not early twenties as shown by statistics based on the 2010 and 2012 IAAF World Junior Championships (Iaaf-ebooks.s3.amazonaws.com 2015). This gives rise to the question of whether elite school track and field athletes are supported by South African sport systems, especially when advancing to elite senior track and field competitions.

Stambulova (2003) regarded the career transition with certain demands as a process rather than a single event. If athletes are to continue with a successful sporting career, they must be able to cope with a set of specific demands and challenges as suggested by Figure 1.2.

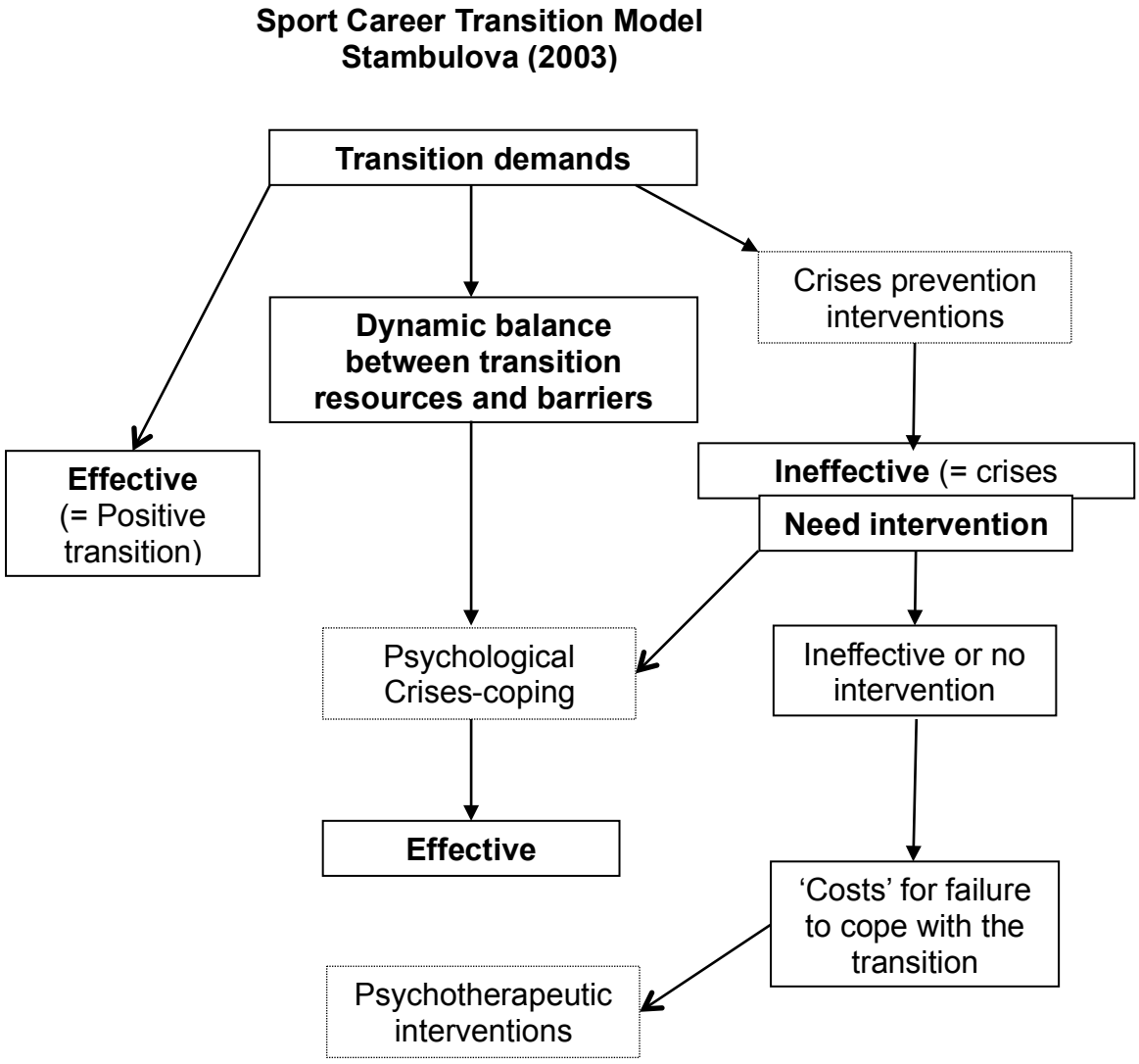

Figure 1.2: Sport Career Transition Model (Stambulova 2003).

1.8 RESEARCH DESIGN

A qualitative research design was chosen because human behaviour and events in a natural setting were studied (Creswell 2003). The study focused on narrative data so as to identify the core themes of the research.

1.9 OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS

In Chapter One, the background to the study, the justification to conduct research on the topic, the research aims and the significance of the study within a South African

context were presented. The findings could lead to future studies in the under-researched area of track and field athletics and the management thereof.
In Chapter Two, the literature on the challenges athletes face during the transition from school to senior level track and field athletics in South Africa is reviewed. A brief review of the development trajectory of an athlete and the challenges embedded in the transitioning from school to senior athletics is outlined. Possible reasons revealed in previous research for the attrition of school athletes after their transition to senior track and field athletics are examined.

The methodological approach and assessments used in this study are detailed in Chapter Three. The design adopted, selection criteria employed for identifying potential participants and the methods used to collect the data are outlined. The modes of data analysis as well as trustworthiness and reflexivity issues to ensure trustworthiness are explained. Furthermore, there is an elucidation of the ethical considerations that I took into account.

In Chapter Four, the findings of the study are reviewed in a qualitative thematic format. The themes and subthemes originating from the inadequate support and various other challenges athletes faced when advancing from school to senior level track and field athletics are detailed.

The data analyses and summary of the key findings identified in Chapter Four are the focus of Chapter Five. Recommendations are provided for each identified theme as well as the possible way forward for senior track and field athletes. These recommendations and concluding remarks are made so that solutions can be found to the challenges that South African athletes face during their transition from school to senior level. Recommendations for further research in the area of elite sport management in South Africa are also suggested. These research findings could support the management of top athletes and might influence South Africa's performances at international senior competitions like the Olympic Games - the world's most important track and field athletics event.

1.10 CONCLUSION

The background and problem statement of this study were introduced in this chapter. Furthermore, the research questions that the study attempted to answer, the rationale behind the study and the aims of the study are detailed. Specific terminology that is used throughout the study was defined. Finally, the theoretical frameworks as well as the research design were explained. In the next chapter, the currently available literature is discussed.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, an overview of research related to the transition of school athletes to senior level track and field participation and how national and international stakeholders try to address the challenge is reviewed. Furthermore, the development trajectory of an athlete and the challenges embedded in the transition from school to senior athletics is outlined. The aim of the chapter is to explore the literature so as to determine possible reasons for the attrition of school athletes in their transition to senior athletics.

The research literature suggests that there is no isolated reason for the challenges athletes face when transitioning from school level athletic participation to senior level athletic participation in track and field. Frequency of injuries, stagnating performances, educational and work-related demands, and a general lack of motivation are common reasons many talented track and field athletes have dropped out in their late teens and early twenties. The influence of social factors such as demanding work situations, military service, marriage and domestic responsibilities as well as the choice between participation in other sports are also non-normative reasons for some athletes dropping out. Enoksen (2011) and Samuel and Tenenbaum (2011) found that elite performers' transitions were mainly normative and that the most significant events in their careers were transitions to a higher level, major accomplishments and severe injuries. In the next section, the trajectory of an athlete's development and the concomitant transitionary problems are described. The model of Wylleman *et al.* (2004) which was presented in Chapter 1 (see Figure 1.1) is employed in this explanation.

2.2 THE TRAJECTORY AND TRANSITIONS OF AN ATHLETE'S CAREER

2.2.1 Analytical model of Wylleman, Alfermann and Lavallee (2004)

A sport career may be described as a multi-year sport activity, which constitutes the succession of three critical stages. The 'early years' are characterized by process-oriented and playful practising as well as support from parents. The 'middle years' are known for a more performance achievement orientation and the demand of an increasing commitment to sport, and the 'late years' are when athletes become experts and dedicate most of their lives to sport. These three stages were later labelled the initiation stage, the development stage and the mastery or perfection stage (Dubois, Ledon & Wylleman 2014)

An athlete's career could also be described in terms of transitions, that is, moments or events that can be viewed as a turning point and which result in a change in the assumption about oneself and the world. Consequently, a corresponding change in one's behaviour and relationships is required (Schlossberg 1981). Furthermore, within these transitions, a distinction could be made between normative transitions that are predictable and that can be anticipated such as the transition from school to senior and retirement from the sport, and non-normative transitions, which are involuntary and are caused by unplanned important events that take place in an individual's life like injury and the unexpected failure to participate in a major competition (Dubois *et al.* 2014).

The Sport Career Transition model (Stambulova 1997, 2003) includes crisis transitions (see Figure 1.2). A crisis transition is an alternative transition outcome, which relates to athletes' inability to cope with the demands of their own challenges and to a perceived need for psychological assistance or intervention (Alfermann & Stambulova 2007). Stambulova (2003) showed that athletes cope better when there was a balance between resources and demands, and were more likely to have a successful transition from school to senior level when such a balance existed. An unsuccessful transition was more likely to occur when the athlete had poor internal and external funding and/or support; lack of mentorship; had not met the qualification standards or differences in levels of standards; and injuries.

In the analytical model proposed by Stambulova (1994), there are seven identified transitions in an elite athlete's sports career:

- The beginning of sports specialisation;
- The transition to special intensive training in the chosen sport;
- The transition from mass popular sports to high-achievement sports;
- The transition from school to adult sports;
- The transition from amateur sports to professional sports;
- The transition from the culmination to the end of the sports career; and
- The conclusion of the sports career.

This model also suggests that only a select few athletes reach the top and enjoy an athletic career as full-time professionals.

In line with the continued need to identify the transitional challenges athletes face at different levels of their career as well as after their sport career, there is a need to examine athletes' ability to cope with such. Sinclair and Orlick (1993) distinguished positive transitions in which athletes did not have any need for specific assistance and crisis transitions where athletes required psychological support. Stambulova (2000) not only described three types of crisis transitions, namely, age-related, athletic career-related and situation-related, but also noted that a crisis transition is higher when athletes change from one stage in their career to the next as this transition generally occurs in conjunction with other transitions in other spheres of their life, including biological maturity and an academic career. For example, when talented athletes advance from secondary school to higher education, their parents may have higher expectations in the academic domain and they may also experience an increasing training intensity and significant changes related to puberty to biological, psychological and psychosocial aspects. Samuel and Tenenbaum (2011) found that most transitions by elite performers were normative and that most significant events within the career were transitions to a higher level, achieving a major accomplishment, or even severe injuries.

2.2.2 Athletics South Africa pyramid

Dudgeon (2017) asserted that while all athletes must overcome difficult challenges, those at the forefront of international performance are the ones for whom everything works out while the rest fall by the wayside somewhere along the journey. This reasoning can be illustrated as a pyramid with mass participation at the base and only a few top performers at the summit. In Figure 2.1, the levels of participation that South African school track and field athletes follow should they strive to participate in the Olympic Games and World Championships are illustrated.

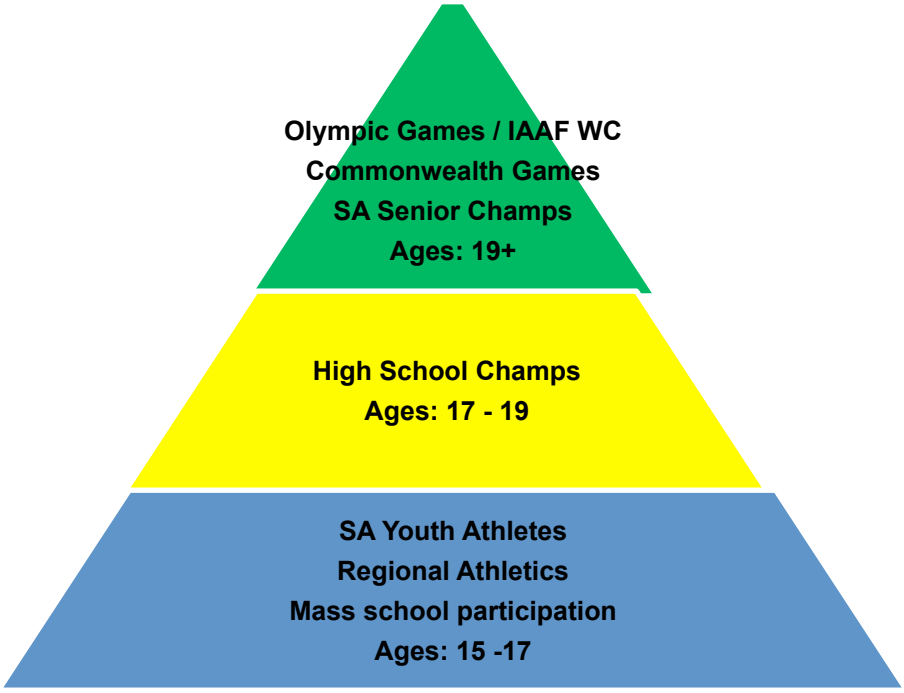

Figure 2.1: Pyramid of levels of participation in South African Athletics (ASA 2008).

The base of the pyramid, depicted in the colour blue, represents mass sport participation where a whole school attends the inter-house or colours athletics meeting. At these internal competitions, athletes of varying abilities are exposed to the various track and field events. It is common for these athletes to represent 'houses' or other forms of internal divisions of competing teams. Not only do these mass participation events ensure that all learners are exposed to both track and field events, but they also allow for talent identification. The top athletes from these internal athletics events represent the school team at local and regional inter-school track and field athletics competitions. Only the best performers at regional

competitions advance to the next level where they are given the opportunity to represent their geographical regions or provinces.

The middle level, coloured in yellow, represents South African High School Track and Field Championships where athletes need to be selected for their senior provincial championships. Seventeen geographical regions such as Central Gauteng Gauteng North make up ASA at regional championships, a selection panel consisting of representatives from each region selects a provincial team to participate at the National School Championships. These athletes proceed to the national championships. Representatives from every region serve on the ASA board that selects a national team from the participants at the South African School Championships to participate at international events (ASA 2008).

The top level, represented in green, includes the SA Senior Championships where a national team is selected by ASA to participate at international events like the Olympic Games and World Championships.

There are several talented youngsters who have private coaches and do not follow the school route, but enter regional and junior championships as private athletes. However, they are the exceptions to the rule.

2.3 CONCEPTUALISING THE TRANSITIONAL CHALLENGES IN TRACK AND FIELD ATHLETICS

Several studies conducted in the United States of America (USA) have revealed the challenges faced by many countries of athlete attrition. Furthermore, it has been shown that approximately 35% of adolescents drop out of field and track athletics annually. It has also been revealed that 80% of children between the ages of 12 and 17 drop out of sport programmes in which they are involved. Cervelló (2002:185) defined dropping out of sport as "The situation in which the person stops their sports commitment explicitly" (cited in Monteiro Cid, Marinho, Vitorino, & Bento 2017:2). The number of youth aged between 14–17 years who participate in sports is continually decreasing when compared with those aged between 5–13 years. According to evidence compiled in North America, this trend is also evident in Australia; 72% of study participants dropped out of sport practice in the transition

from high school to college (Monteiro *et al*. 2017:2). It is estimated that “more than one-third of all participants aged 10–17 dropout of sports practice annually, a significant percentage that represents several million youngsters across Europe and North America. (Monteiro *et al*. 2017:2). Drew (2018) conducted a study on track and field athletes who represented Great Britain at the World Junior Championships between 1998 and 2012. The results revealed that 63% of the athletes did not go on to improve their personal bests as senior athletes and 68% did not go on to represent Great Britain at senior international competitions.

Hanin and Stambulova (2004:1) asserted, “Every athletic career of every individual athlete is unique, it is becoming ever clearer that interaction of several groups of factors can either help or hinder an athlete’s development and achievement of athletic performance. The groups of factors are subjects such as an athlete’s talent, environmental factors (for example; competent coaches, family support, practice opportunities etc.), athlete’s ability to develop, engage and how the athlete uses its resources in coping with the demands that occur during an athletic career.”

Durand-Bush and Salmela (2002) identified a set of multidimensional factors that facilitate the development and maintenance of elite athletic performance including factors related to their social environment, for example, parents, coaches and support staff members; personal factors such as personal characteristics and choice of a dual career; and factors that are related to athletic commitment including deliberate practice, and mental and organisational skill development strategies. Although providing more insight into an athletes' ability to cope with transitional challenges, most studies have generally limited their focus to those transitions, which occur during an athlete’s actual sport career (e.g., Johnson, Schulte-Mecklenbeck & Willemsen 2008; MacNamara, Holmes & Collins 2010) and thus, have not explored athletes’ perceptions of transitions at other levels of development or those that occur in anticipation of their post-sport career (Dubois *et al.* 2014).

Identifying young talent and knowing when to harness that particular talent is difficult. Vujic (2004) demonstrated in a study with two contrasting cases of athlete transition in swimmers that available resources and support systems play a vital role in the success of athlete transition from school level to senior level.

In the next section, the specific challenges and problems that may contribute to athletes not successfully transitioning from school level to senior level participation are examined.

2.4 POSSIBLE CHALLENGES DURING TRANSITION

According to Bussman (1999), dropouts are those athletes who have terminated their athletic career prematurely before they have realised their best performance. Bussman (1999) identified the following factors as decisive in the termination or continuation of an athlete's career: School and work stress and strain; injuries; a desire for free time; conflicts in the athletic environment with coaches, the club, the training group and officials; lack of family support; a lack of or inadequate motivation; low social mobility; and a critical attitude towards competitive sport.

Bussman (1999) explained that the risk of dropout could be minimised by ensuring:

- An athlete's personal context outside of sport such as school, education and job is taken into account when planning the athlete's career;
- An athlete who is in the process of overcoming an injury is supported by a physiotherapist or biokineticists during physical rehabilitation;
- Tension between the competitive sport activity and leisure activities are identified and addressed;
- A socially supportive and harmonious climate exists in the athlete's club and training group;
- The athlete is supported emotionally by his or her family;
- The athlete's coaches have basic knowledge of performance motivation in general and of their respective athlete's motivation in particular; and
- The athlete's attitude towards competitive sport is supported.

Some of the challenges that athletes face and at times, succumb to when transitioning to senior level competitions are subsequently detailed.

2.4.1 Support systems

Le Bars, Gernigon and Ninot (2009) conducted two studies, which revealed the importance of coaches, peers and parents in creating a motivational climate that ensures athlete persistence in sport. Such a supportive climate corresponds with key support behaviours including challenging task choices and the promotion of greater effort and persistence regardless of perceived ability (Sheridan, Coffee & Lavallee 2014).

Recent advances by Sheridan *et al*. (2014) have found that conceptualisations of social support have generated diverse methods to examine the quantity and satisfaction of social support in a sports context. Coaches were identified as the most prevalent provider of social support as they offer unique forms of tangible, informational, emotional and esteem support (Samuels 2016). Furthermore, support from coaches, parents and peers plays a significant role in shaping youth sport experiences both from a positive perspective, which includes athlete motivation levels and elite sport participation, and from a negative perspective such as dropping out (Sheridan *et al*. 2014).

Coaches (coaching duties such as training programme and advice).

Coaches play a critical role in any athlete's career and without a suitable coach, success may become even more difficult to achieve. Coaches can "offer support and guidance to athletes that ultimately facilitate the formation of strong bonds" (Jowett & Poczwardowski 2007:15). This support has been demonstrated to have an influence on the enjoyment, motivation and development of key competences (Fraser-Thomas, Côté & Deakin 2008). Pelletier *et al.* (2001) found that those who persisted with swimming perceived their coaches to be more autonomy-supportive while those who withdrew perceived their coaches as more controlling.

Coaches interact with parents and peers in similar and unique ways. Keegan *et al.* (2010) showed that parents and coaches who influenced player motivation displayed similarities across a number of key support behaviours including leadership style, evaluative feedback, emotional and affective responses, and pre-performance motivating behaviours. Taylor and Bruner (2012) found that a coach's ability to

establish rapport with players reduced social exclusion amongst a group of youth participants.

Parents

Parents play a decisive role in the development of youth participants in sport. Their roles initially include introducing their children to sports, enrolling them in diverse activities, and providing them with the necessary resources and equipment. However, during adolescence their role changes as they become less involved while at the same time, they provide more financial and emotional support to help their children through challenges and obstacles. Parents generally progress from a leadership role during their children's developing years to a following and supporting role during the years they specialise and in which they invest (Fraser-Thomas *et al.* 2008).

Although research has examined multiple ways in which parents can support the development of their children's talent, in some cases the involvement of parents has a negative impact; the latter may include the stress young participants suffer (Sheridan *et al*. 2014).

Furthermore, parents interact with coaches and peers in creating the environment in which youth participants experience sport. Jowett and Timson-Katchis (2005) explored the influence parents have on the athlete- coach relationship. The results revealed that parents provided a range of information, opportunities and emotional support, which had a positive impact on the athlete-coach relationship. Carr (2009) investigated the link between the parent-athlete relationship and peer friendship. The results showed that relationships that displayed secure and attached characteristics had a positive effect on sporting friendships amongst youth peers (Sheridan *et al*. 2014).

Other athletes/friends (positive training environment)

Positive relations amongst peers, parents and coaches have been found to encourage continued participation while pressure, lack of support and recognition have often resulted in sport withdrawal (Carpenter & Coleman 1998; Coakley 2001; Horton & Mack 2000; Kenow & Williams1999; Stein, Raedeke & Glenn 1999).

The timing of a transition from school to senior level is crucial; it should not occur too soon or too late. According to Vujic (2004), swimmers' careers end at approximately 30 years of age, but those of female swimmers may end earlier. The transition should not occur if the swimmer does not have the support or resources to manage all the demands and barriers that make it harder to adapt to the new level (Vujic 2004).

According to Carlson (1991), a social and stimulating training climate with good relationships among friends, parents and competent coaches may have a positive impact on the choices that athletes make. On the contrary, research has revealed that a negative social environment and unsatisfactory support from significant individuals often result in early quitting (Ferreira & Armstrong 2002). A demanding work or family situation in conjunction with social immobility may determine whether athletes decide to end their career or not (Jonsson 1983).

2.4.2 Psychological factors

The transition from school to senior level may also be influenced by psychological factors such as the degree of motivation, belief in oneself, mental toughness and conflict of interests.

Psychological issues have been believed to have the most significant influence on sport participation or withdrawal; studies have revealed similar results in relation to reasons for sport withdrawal. Hollings, Mallett & Hume (2014) found that most of former athletes possessed little or no self-belief in their ability to progress to the next elite level of track and field participation. This was partially attributed to a lack of success early in the transition phase as a result of the huge gap in performance standards between school and senior competitions (Bussman 1999; Klint & Weiss 1986; Schmidt & Stein 1991; Semple 2000).

The literature on motivational aspects has indicated that young promising athletes continue in a sport as long as they achieve new goals, show signs of improvement and regularly win competitions (Ames 1992). However, athletes with a negative performance development in sport generally experience lower self-esteem, poorer estimation of potential success and lack of motivation (Butcher, 2002; Gabler, 1981).

Sarrazin *et al.* (2002) stated that athletes who dropped out of sports at an early age exhibit more stress and anxiety in training and competition situations compared to those who continued. Some studies have also demonstrated that poor training facilities may influence the athletes' decision to drop out from competitive sport (Bussmann 1995; Gabler 1981).

Many young talented athletes experience a strong conflict of interest in today's elite sport when they have to prioritise a special sport (Næsje, 1985). Prioritising other activities and interests (Klint & Weiss 1986; Sisjord 1993) and the desire to spend more time with friends (Patriksson, 1987, 1994) are marked reasons many younger athletes choose to stop participating.

2.4.3 Early sport specialisation

Children enjoy many advantages if they participate in a variety of sports at an early age. Many of the world's most successful athletes did not specialise at an early age, but rather participated in several sports and physical activities as children. Eventually, the variety of movement and mechanical skills they developed helped them to succeed in the sport in which they chose to specialise.

Often athletes drop out because training programmes are too focused on early specialisation (Baker 2003) Although there is evidence that early specialisation can lead to elite performance in adult sport, the associated personal development and long-term participation costs of this approach can be devastating as early specialisation results in less enjoyment and more attrition, burnout and injuries (Nyland 2014).

It is evident that all future expert athletes need to adopt intensive, sport-specific training programmes in order to be competitive and successful internationally; however, these programmes should only be implemented gradually at developmentally-appropriate stages. The commitment to full-time training in one sport before the age of 16 in order to achieve high levels of performance does not seem vital in most sports (Baker 2003).

The age at which athletes tend to dropout suggests it is linked to the age at which

specialised training starts. Furthermore, this age also plays an important role in the successful transition from school to senior level.

The South African Sport for Life Long-Term Participant Development Plan (LTPD) defines periodisation as a time management and planning framework for arranging the complex array of training processes into a logical and scientifically based schedule. Its purpose is to bring about optimal and observable improvements in performance (Sport for Life 2012).

LTPD periodisation sequences the training components into weeks, days and sessions. Periodisation is situation-specific depending upon the priorities and the time available to bring about the required training and competition improvements. In the LTPD context, periodisation connects the stage the athlete is in to the suggested requirements of that stage (Sport for Life 2012). Periodisation includes:

- Single periodisation in which there is one preparatory and one competitive period within a year;
- Double periodisation when there are two preparatory and two competitive periods a year;
- Triple periodisation when there are three preparatory and three competitive periods a year; and
- Multiple periodisation, which involves competing all year round while maintaining physical and technical skills (Sport for Life 2012).

According to Vardhan, Balyi and Duffy (2012) early exposure to a wide variety of sport and physical activities helps athletes to develop various physical attributes that are imperative for later success; these include agility, balance, coordination, speed, stamina, suppleness and core body strength. On the contrary, early specialisation in a late specialisation sport may contribute to:

- Overemphasis on sport-specific or one-sided preparation;
- Inadequate development of basic movement and sport skills;
- Overuse injuries;
- Early burnout; and
- Premature retirement from training and competition (Vardhan *et al.* 2012).

Wall and Côté's (2007) found youth hockey players who were still actively involved in their sport made associations between early specialisation and dropout. They found that dropout players started specialised training significantly earlier than active players (mean age of 11.75 years versus mean age of 13.8 years) and did significantly more specialised training than active players throughout development. Thus, if specialised training is introduced too early, the risk of burnout is high. If athletes start specialised training too late, their possible performance levels may be compromised. It is thus imperative that these aspects are considered carefully.

2.4.4 Physical injuries

When athletes are asked what the biggest challenge in their careers are when preparing for competitions or events, they are likely to say to stay injury free. When specialised training starts too soon, there is a risk of injury. If the injury is not rehabilitated enabling the athlete to keep competing, there is a high probability that the athlete will dropout and not successfully transition from school to senior level athletics (Maffulli, Baxter-Jones & Grieve 2005).

Injury is rarely the main reason for withdrawal, but plays a role in the decision to continue with the sport (Johns *et al*. 1990; Klint & Weiss 1986; Linder & Caine 1990; Massimo 1984). Athletes who terminate their career due to injury have been referred to as reluctant dropouts (Maffulli *et al.* 2005).

The early dropout rate among young promising athletes in sport is often related to stagnation in athletic performance and the occurrence of serious injuries (Bussmann 1995; Kröger 1987 Furthermore, many coaches tend to emphasise overly rigorous training and tough competitions while almost entirely neglecting social aspects (Abraham 1986; Augustini & Traubal 1995; Molinero *et al*. 2006). This generally leads to unnecessary and preventable injuries.

2.4.5. Physiological changes

Several studies have indicated that first year USA university students gained two to three kilograms (Economos, Hildebrandt & Hyatt2008; Edmonds, Ferreira & Nikiforuk 2008; Gropper, Simmons & Gaines 2009; Hajhosseini *et al.* 2006; Hoffman *et al.*

2006; Holm-Denoma, Joiner & Vohs 2008; Hovell *et al.* 1985; Levitsky, Halbmaier & Mrdjenovic 2004; Mifsud, Duval & Doucet 2009; Provencher, Polivy & Wintre 2009; Pullman, Masters & Zalot 2009). However, only a handful of studies have been conducted on weight gain after first year. During students' second year, weight gain of one kilogram and increased overweight rates have been reported, but waist circumference has not been studied and body composition has not been examined in either sexes (Hovell *et al*. 1985; Hull *et al.* 2007; Lloyd-Richardson *et al.* 2009; Racette *et al.* 2005).

2.4.6 Financial factors

The resources needed in sport are usually considered from a monetary perspective; these resources include funding for daily living, and medical and coaching expenses. However, when referring to elite athletes, resources also include strength and conditioning guidance, local sports camps and competitions, nutrition services, and career and education services.

Evidence has highlighted the immense pressure on athletes to sustain financial security or gain further education upon completion of high school as expected of adults who should be responsible for their own lives (Reimer, Beal & Schroeder 2000). Although access to athletic scholarships and financial assistance has improved, the distribution of funds has been inequitable and not available to all elite athletes (Tarbotton 2001). Consequently, athletes often have to choose between a career in athletics and a career in the workforce (Hollings, Hume & Trewin 1997).

2.4.7 Other obligations

As noted previously, another possible reason for athletes not participating competitively after leaving school is the difficulty of adequately balancing quality athletic endeavours with work and/or study commitments (Kidman, McKenzie & McKenzie 1999) Several studies have focused on the lack of time and coordination of schedules as a typical reason for dropout in competitive sport (Enoksen 2002; Kreim & Mayer 1985; Lippe, v.d. Frafallsproblemer & Kvinneidretten 1976).

2.5 OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

2.5.1 Adult support

Ogilvie (1981) provided ideas on how parents can play a holistic supportive role in the life of an aspiring child. Ogilviie (1981) further stated that the ideal support might be provided by a parent who acts as a guest in the life of the child. This would permit the child to remain in control of decisions yet the parents would be invited to share whatever they might be experiencing or offer advice when requested to do so. Child competitors should have control over their own choices and have total responsibility for valuing their experiences in personal terms. This is particularly relevant to decisions that are made regarding children's participation and the extent thereof in a certain sport.

Adult support, especially from coaches, plays a crucial role in the transition phase. Coaches believe that coping strategies such as thoughtful problem-solving, acceptance of responsibility, self-control and positive revision are beneficial to transition success (Finn & McKenna 2010). Successful coping with this transition is associated with athletes' identity modification and personality maturation (Bruner *et al*. 2016; Pummell, Harwood & Lavallee 2008: Stambulova *et al*. 2009).

2.5.2 Introducing the 'Fun Factor'

In addition to factors that reduce dropout, which were listed by Bussman (1999), Active Kids have creative ideas by promoting fun elements to reduce dropout and create intrinsic interest as well as setting individual goals in the training programme (Activekids, 2016). Riewald (2003) placed particular emphasis on the 'fun factor' and listed the following strategies to overcome dullness and incorporate more pleasurable elements into the youth athletics environment:

- Introduce more relays to school athletics;
- Structure multidisciplinary competitions in which each athlete competes in a throwing, jumping and running event;
- Allow for or create opportunities to interact with friends regularly;

- As a coach, know the athlete holistically as a person;
- Communicate with and provide personalised feedback to each athlete on a regular basis; and
- Be creative with scoring so that many youth athletes experience positive feelings of success.

Incorporating fun into athletics implies that athletics for children should be done in moderation. In other words, they should not be forced to compete and train excessively when they are young (Frey 1992). A proportionate athletics programme for children should have multiple aspects and supported by motivational psychology. The training volume, training frequency and number of competitions should not be simply a scaled-down copy of training programmes for adults. Rather, a variety of participation methods in athletics to make the sport more attractive may reduce the number of dropouts.

The British concept of *Fun in Athletics* has been made particularly attractive by moving the competitions that take place in autumn, winter and spring indoors. This makes it possible to provide a different environment for the novel events, which are conducted as a team competition. Emphasis on fun competitions is placed on team effort, thus, creating a need for all team members to play their part even when they have to line up for events that are not among their favourites. This approach assists in avoiding early specialisation and seems to afford enjoyment and gratification.

2.5.3 Structured programmes

Hollings *et al*. (2014) described an athletic transition from school to senior level in high performance sport as a complex process that involves an exceptional mix of genetic and environmental influences. Transitions in sport are linked to a set of specific demands that need to be met to be successful in the sport. The identification of athlete potential at an early age is commonly perceived to be beneficial as specialised coaching and training for gifted youngsters at an early stage accelerates their development process and facilitates success in senior sport. Structured programmes generally offer young athletes formal but relaxed opportunities to

participate and even compete against each other, but without the stress and pressure of having to achieve.

Kid's Athletics is an example of a team athletics programme developed by the IAAF to avoid early specialisation. Therefore, events are models of adult competitions. Participation takes place in three age groups: Groups 1, 2 and 3 comprise children between 7 to 10, and 11 and 12 years of age, respectively. Teams are mixed and generally comprise of 10 members. The majority of events are conducted in a relay format. Events include sprinting, running, throwing and jumping. Scoring is designed to keep the event outcome unpredictable and give participants a feeling that they can win the event in which they participate.

Kid's Athletics aims to offer children opportunities in athletics that are attractive, accessible and instructive. The key objectives are to have as many children as possible active at the same time; children experience varied and basic athletic forms of movement. Furthermore, not only do the stronger and/or faster children contribute to good results (IAAF 2008).

The fragility of athletes' relationships with significant others during their adolescent years is also taken into account in such structured programmes (Fraser-Thomas *et al*. 2008).

2.5.4 Talent identification

Abbott and Collins (2002) claimed that in order to predict future accomplishments successfully, it is necessary to identify young athletes who show potential to become successful senior athletes. Such a strategy demands a longitudinal approach. An example is United Kingdom Athletics that has implemented a 'talent confirmation' process where a three- to six-month programme has been identified and evaluated for athletes. The exposure to systematic training is designed to support and validate the initial talent selection process (Vaeyens *et al.* 2008).

For the promotion of specific sports and sports systems to be effective, the process needs to be implemented by a specific sporting organisation. The 'system controller' stakeholder is a sporting organisation that takes responsibility for and manages

policy and systems in a particular sport with the aim of developing and growing the sporting code. One major policy of national organisations is to achieve success in world-class competitions. Policies inevitably dictate systems (Parkhurst & Collins 2013).

School track and field performances locally and internationally are showcases of the amount of talent South Africa has. National school track and field athletics meetings start with inter-house school competitions in January until April. The South African School Championships follow.

Vaeyens *et al*. (2008) found that talent promotion programmes are by definition not always associated with greater success at senior level. Alternative methods such as 'talent recycling' and 'mature-age talent identification' help the transition from school to senior stage. Talent recycling helps to retain a larger pool of promising athletic talent in the national senior sport system (Vaeyens *et al*. 2008).

Athletes recognise the transition from school to senior participation is a large step, which is accompanied by much higher standards in practice and performance than previously experienced. The challenge of a raised bar in terms of competition is exacerbated as the transition coincides with changes in other areas of an athlete's personal life; studies and social aspects prove to be the most challenging. Athletes' ambitions to succeed in this transition and meet the expectations of significant others, together with uncertainty about success in coping, lead to high levels of stress and increased sensitivity to social influences (Vaeyens *et al*. 2008).

2.5.5 Financial Assistance

Many of the challenges listed in section 2.4 would be easier to overcome if athletes were provided with improved financial assistance as this would help them pay for coaches, medical expenses, travelling costs, competition accommodation and entry fees. Athletics in South Africa is further explored in section 2.6. However, there is a preconceived notion that there is just not enough money available to improve support for athletes. Consequently, it is important to explore the literature regarding this notion while considering how athletes can overcome the challenges they face.

Akua Achiaa Adom-Aboagye (2015) claimed that although funding is available through the OPEX programme, there are very few policy documents provided by SASCOC, which outline how athletes are selected to become part of the OPEX programme.

The National Sport and Recreation Plan (2012) notes that funds are made available for sport through various government programmes like the National Lottery. The document also states that less popular sports have struggled to attract private sponsorship and funding. However, athletics in South Africa, having been sponsored by multiple private corporations over the last two decades, is not one of these sports (Dsr.wa.gov.au 2016).

The literature referenced in this section and in section 2.6 noted that although there are always financial limitations on the amount of support that can be provided to athletes, the money that is available is not used as adequately as possible.

2.6 ATHLETICS IN SOUTH AFRICA

The Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy (2002)

The Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy (2002) asserts that sport has the potential to *"… transcend language and culture and achieve cohesion, promote tolerance and trust and affirm respect between individuals and communities arbitrarily kept apart in the past.*" The manifesto stresses the importance of the promotion of sport as part of schooling. However, 45% of South African athletes leave the system at 18 years of age while the minority proceed to higher education where possibilities exist for sport development.

Swanson, Colwell and Zhao (2008) noted a variety of reasons the promotion of sport is important, not only for the self-esteem and motivation of athletes, but also for their social interaction and development. Therefore, athletes that drop out of sport may become important support systems for co-athletes and coaching staff (Department of Education Republic of South Africa 2002).

Sport has the potential to contribute significantly to nation building along with concerted efforts to eliminate other forms of inequality. Sport can also be used at this present juncture to contribute to the health status of the nation generally and to that of our youth in particular by involving them in a constructive activity (Sport and Recreation South Africa - Saamtrek Conference 2001).

2.6.1 National Government

Moving from being a talented young athlete through different championships to becoming a senior athlete who participates nationally and internationally entails abiding by the laws and policies of sport participation. This applies to all athletes, officials and sporting organisations equally. Whereas the National Government is top of the hierarchy and puts the laws and policies in place, the SRSA is the vehicle for the Act to be implemented. All the sporting codes are affiliated with the South African Confederation Committee (Sport and Recreation Act No 110 of 1998). There are several national laws, regulations and policies that have been formulated by the various agencies. This is depicted in Figure 2.2.

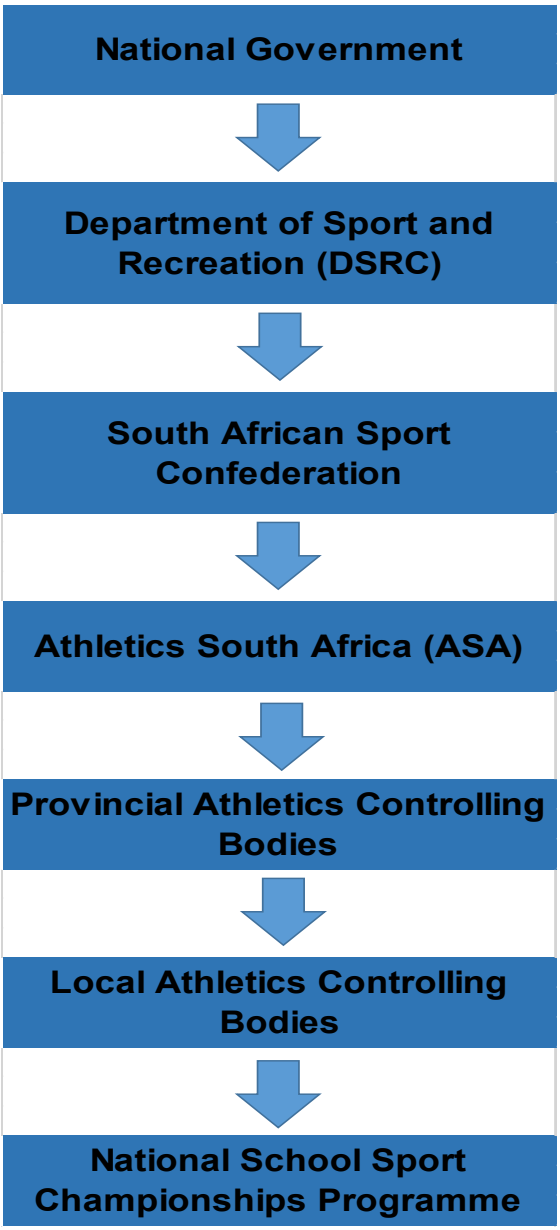

Figure 2.2: Agencies in South African sport (Sports and Recreation Act No. 110 1998).

This study focused on several key instruments and shed light on the support systems that are in place for track and field athletics in South Africa.

2.6.2 Department of Sport and Recreation South Africa Act 110 of 1998

In the foreword of South Africa's most recent Sport and Recreation Strategic Plan (2011:10), the former Minister of Sport and Recreation, Mr. Fikile Mbalula stated,

“The strategic direction of sport and recreation in South Africa is continuously being evaluated and reinvigorated to ensure that we remain ahead of the curve and latest trends in the very competitive world of sport and recreation, and equally fulfil our strategic mandate.” In essence, that is an active and winning nation In South Africa, the SRSA provides for the promotion and development of sport and recreation and co-ordinates the relationships between the sports commission, national and recreation federations, and other agencies. It also provides for measures that are aimed at improving imbalances in sport and recreation, and promotes equity and democracy in sport and recreation. Furthermore, it implements dispute resolution mechanisms in sport and recreation and is able to empower the minister to make regulations and to provide for matters that are related (Sports and Recreation Act 110 of 1998). These extensive roles and responsibilities as outlined in the policy document imply that athletes enjoy sustainable support from the managing committees.

For South Africa to be successful in sport and recreation, it is essential that there is one authority charged with the responsibility to develop, coordinate and monitor a comprehensive system established in accordance with a broadly agreed national strategy. SRSA is assigned this responsibility and must ensure that the required sports development system is in place and fully operational.

The National Sport and Recreation Amendment Act guides all the activities of SRSA. SRSA is fundamentally a facilitator and regulator. The main responsibility of SRSA is to develop legislation, regulations, national policies and guidelines for sport and recreation in the country. SRSA ensures that effective partnerships are in place with other implementers of sport and recreation such as provinces and municipalities as well as SASCOC and national federations (Sports and Recreation Act 110 of 1998).

Furthermore, SRSA supports those responsible for the delivery of sports and recreation related services with their available resources and other support. SRSA also oversees the implementation of projects and evaluates the results to ensure that it delivers value for public funding and provides feedback so as to further policy development (Sports and Recreation Act 110 of 1998).

SRSA works closely with the minister in its role in facilitating inter-departmental and

international relationships. SRSA also enters into service level agreements with national federations in order to oversee and monitor the implementation of policies by the federations in the country (Sports and Recreation Act 110 of 1998).

SRSA acknowledges the autonomy of national federations (NFs) with regards to the administration of sport and recreation in South Africa. However, this autonomy should be conducted within the framework of the national White Paper on Sport and Recreation and on the understanding that a great deal of NFs' funding comes from the government. SRSA recognises that NFs are the centre of the sport system and the main custodians for the development of their sport. They should know their particular sport and the requirements of their athletes (Sports and Recreation Act 110 of 1998).

The primary focus of the NFs should be the welfare and performance of their athletes. Furthermore, they should accept ultimate responsibility for the success or failure of their sports. Each NF has to develop a strategic plan, which outlines its goals and the activities it intends pursuing to achieve those goals. The performance indicators for the individual NFs should be related to the identification and nurturing of talented participants in their sport, club development, transformation and the continuous improvement in international rankings (Sports and Recreation Act 110 of 1998).

Accordingly, each NF should appoint a head coach. The appointed person should be responsible for establishing a national training programme for the sport and for identified individual athletes. SRSA's funding of NFs is based on the achievement of identified results and the signing of a service level agreement in respect of mutually agreed programmes (Sports and Recreation Act 110 of 1998).

2.6.3 South African Sports Confederation and Olympic Committee (SASCOC)

The role of SASCOC and SRSA is to support one national governance model to serve as a multi-sports organisation in order to avoid duplication and resource wastage. SRSA recognises SASCOC) as the only multi-sports organisation in the country. To maximize service delivery, SRSA and SASCOC have signed a service

level agreement outlining the services to be delivered by the respective parties and the targeted outputs annually.

SASCOC is responsible for all activities assigned to the organisation as outlined by NSRA. Their key areas of responsibility include the development, implementation and monitoring of a high-performance programme for national athletes in South Africa. Furthermore, this body is responsible for the selection and preparation of all South African teams that take part in multi-sports events. The concept, Team South Africa has been advanced with the objective of achieving a unified approach to the organisation and management of South African teams in multi-sports events (SASCOC 2014).

SASCOC is also responsible for:

- Ensuring compliance with the laws of the country;
- Ensuring that government priorities and the policies as outlined in the White Paper are met and implemented by itself and its members;
- Managing and controlling affiliation of organised sport at international level;
- Determining affiliation criteria and managing the membership of its members;
- Developing a business plan and ensuring that business plans are in place for all its members;
- Ensuring good governance of itself and its members;
- Managing conflict resolution amongst members;
- Facilitating the mobilisation of resources for itself and members;
- Ensuring that resources are accounted for according to accounting principles; and
- Establishing and managing provincial sports councils in all nine provinces (SASCOC 2014).

To support athletes, SASCOC implemented the Operation Excellence Programme (OPEX)[3]. The main objective of the programme is to provide those identified as potential future medal winners at international competitions with support while they

[3] *Opex is a support programme that allocates funding to help athletes who have the potential to qualify and return medals at the highest level of competition in multicoded events (SASCOC 2004).*

are training and preparing for these events. This support is provided through an annual grant that covers athletes' basic expenses including travel primarily for overseas competitions, coaching, equipment, medical and scientific testing, and training camps. Support is offered through three tiers (SASCOC 2004).

- Tier one is allocated to potential medalists: Athletes who through their past performances have shown that they could win medals at major international competitions. To qualify for tier one, elite athletes have to be ranked in the top eight competitors in the world in their discipline and should have won medals at world championships (SASCOC 2004).
- Tier two is allocated to potential finalists: Athletes who through their past performances have shown that they could make a final at major international competitions. Qualifying athletes need to be ranked between 9th and 16th in the world in their disciplines and shown that they are able to reach a final or finish in the top eight at previous world championships (SASCOC 2004).
- Tier three is allocated to potential school athletes who through their past performances have shown that they could match or exceed qualifying standards set to attend future Olympic Games (SASCOC 2004). Tier three is regarded as the development tier. It focuses on athletes who are ranked between 17th and 24th in the world in their disciplines and who have won medals at continental championships such as the IAAF World Schools Championships. Tier three also promotes athletes who have the potential to participate at major international competitions, especially athletes of colour (SASCOC 2004).

2.6.4 Athletics South Africa (2008)

Athletics South Africa (ASA) is the sole organisation that administers and controls athletics within the boundaries of South Africa as defined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa *(*Athletics South Africa 2008).

ASA is the governing body for track and field in South Africa. The roles and responsibilities of the federation of which ASA is one are to link and support school sport code structures and provide guidance for the track and field athletics development and tracking system. Although ASA has experienced some financial

and political challenges recently, in 2014, many positive changes were made. A new, democratically elected board was appointed and a 'strategic turnaround plan' was initiated. With this plan, ASA committed itself to (Athletics South Africa 2014:6):

- "Developing track and field athletics in South Africa;
- ensuring that people from previously disadvantaged communities participated in track and field athletics; and
- preparing athletes for participation at international competitions."

This formulated strategic turnaround plan is supported by ASA's Constitution, which states that they are responsible for sourcing sponsorship for teams to international athletics competitions and the development of the sport so as to achieve highest levels of excellence (Athletics South Africa 2008). This reflects their efforts to "work towards strategically positioning themselves to monitor and obtain support for athletes at national and international levels in order to produce world-class athletes" (Athletics South Africa, 2014:6).

Thus, it is evident that attempts have been made to provide athletes with support. However, the focus of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of the means implemented further and to identify more appropriate structures.

2.6.5 Provincial athletics controlling bodies

Seventeen geographical districts or provinces such as Central Central Gauteng Gauteng North are affiliated to ASA. At each regional championship, a panel drawn from the regions selects a provincial team to participate at the National School Championships. Representatives from every region serve on the ASA board. They select a national team at the South African School Championships to participate at international events (Athletics South Africa 2008).

2.6.6 Local athletics controlling bodies

The development of sport on a local level is essential because this level is associated with communities. Furthermore, the majority of talented athletes and potential future successes need to be identified at this level.

At a provincial level, the focus is on the development of sport at sub-elite level events (Athletics South Africa 2008). The sport and recreation of the community and its entire people also need to be accounted for at this level. Therefore, provinces are responsible for fostering sport at the sub-elite level by concentrating on the development and training of provincial teams in the interests of providing the highest possible level of domestic competition.

2.6.7 National School Sport Championships Programme (NSSCP)

The DBE and SRSA implemented the National School Sport Championship Programme (NSSCP) in 2012. The latter aims to increase the pool of talented athletes that feeds the national teams, thereby increasing the chances of international success. It also enhances the opportunity for learners at all schools to participate in organised sporting events, which subsequently broaden the base for talent selection. The national championship tournament takes place annually during December (Report on the Implementation Evaluation of the NSSCP 2016).

SRSA transfers a conditional grant or budget to provinces. Furthermore, they approve business plans to enable provinces to prepare for the National School Sport Championship, which starts at the level of intra-school sport competitions. Provinces also utilise voted funds to supplement the conditional grant. School sport unit members at both national and provincial level, local organising committees (LOCs) and school sport task teams work together to prepare for the National School Sport Championship. NFs must deploy talent scouts at all levels of competition so that more promising learners can be identified for further development (Report on the Implementation Evaluation of the NSSCP 2016).

It is the responsibility of SRSA to organize school sport competitions starting from district level until the national school sport level. However, both SRSA and DBE are responsible for ensuring that the National School Sport Championships take place. Talent scouts from district level identify potential and such learners are then expected to start specialising in a sporting code. The ministerial bursary for educational purposes is given to talented learners who have won at the national level.

To determine the success of this programme, the DBE and SRSA collected data from learners who participated in the programme from 2012 to 2015. Data were also collected from both government and non-government officials. The objectives of the study were to determine how well the programme was being implemented; whether it was being implemented as planned and to what extent the programme was reaching the intended beneficiaries. Furthermore, the intended outcomes of the programme were matched against the actual outcomes and operational constraints were identified with measures to address them.

The core findings indicated that the programme was relevant and of benefit to the learners. It caters for all learners irrespective of race, gender, disability and geographical location. This diversity contributes to social cohesion, which addresses the 14th outcome of the national government's delivery agreement. Learners develop sporting skills and move on to become professional sportsmen and women who are eventually able to compete at an international level. This is linked to the fifth outcome of the government's delivery agreement. The learners are able to socialise, make friends and cultivate team spirit while becoming fitter as they continue participating in school competitions and live a healthy lifestyle. This concurs with the second outcome of the government's delivery agreement. In line with the first outcome of the government's delivery agreement, school sport is becoming attractive to young athletes and also contributes positively to their academic performance.

In essence, the NSSCP contributes to social cohesion, active building and supports the 14th outcome of the government's delivery agreement. It also brings about change and development in South Africa and thus, contributes to transformation in the country. The findings of this report have suggested that enough is being done in South Africa to involve children in sport and create a healthy cohort of available athletes at school level (Report on the Implementation Evaluation of the NSSCP 2016).

2.7 SPORT FOR LIFE: SOUTH AFRICAN MODEL FOR LONG-TERM PARTICIPANT DEVELOPMENT (LTPD)

The pursuit to ensure an active lifestyle for all South Africans enabled SASCOC to gather a diverse group of people to design the Sport for Life programme that is

meant to guide South Africa in achieving their goal of being a healthy nation and a nation of champions. The 2012 Olympic and Paralympics are now something of the past; although still something to savour and never forget. Sport for Life (2012) stated that South Africa needed to move forward and start planning for the next generation of sporting heroes, not only for Rio de Janeiro 2016, but also far beyond.

2.7.1 The Model for Long-Term Participant Development (LTPD)

The Sport for Life document outlines a comprehensive South African model for LTPD that has been designed to meet the needs of participants at all levels. LTPD outlines "the stages and capabilities that are necessary to promote both mass participation and excellence on a much wider scale throughout the country. These stages and capabilities should to be tailored to the needs, context and the stage of each participant's development" (Sport for Life 2012:20).

LTPD may be regarded as a tool kit that assists in decision-making and practice for participants, coaches, NF's, policy makers and others. Furthermore, it is a powerful tool to implement the vision, values and principles of SRSA, White Paper (2011) and the National Sports Indaba. However, it is not a panacea or rigid set of prescriptions. Rather, LTPD should be viewed as a guide and enabling tool to support and facilitate the development of mass participation and high performance. LTPD resulted from extensive international research, dialogue and practice. Furthermore, an extensive series of workshops with NFs, provinces, government organisations and other interested parties between 2008 and 2012 helped inform LTPD. In addition, LTPD imparts core recommendations for participant development and to date has been employed to create 31 sport-specific models. LTPD provides a "methodology that allows each sport, province and sporting organisation to adapt the principles and guidelines to their own circumstances" (Sport for Life 2012:20).

The main elements of LTPD are outlined in Figure 1, in which the LTPD stages are schematically illustrated.

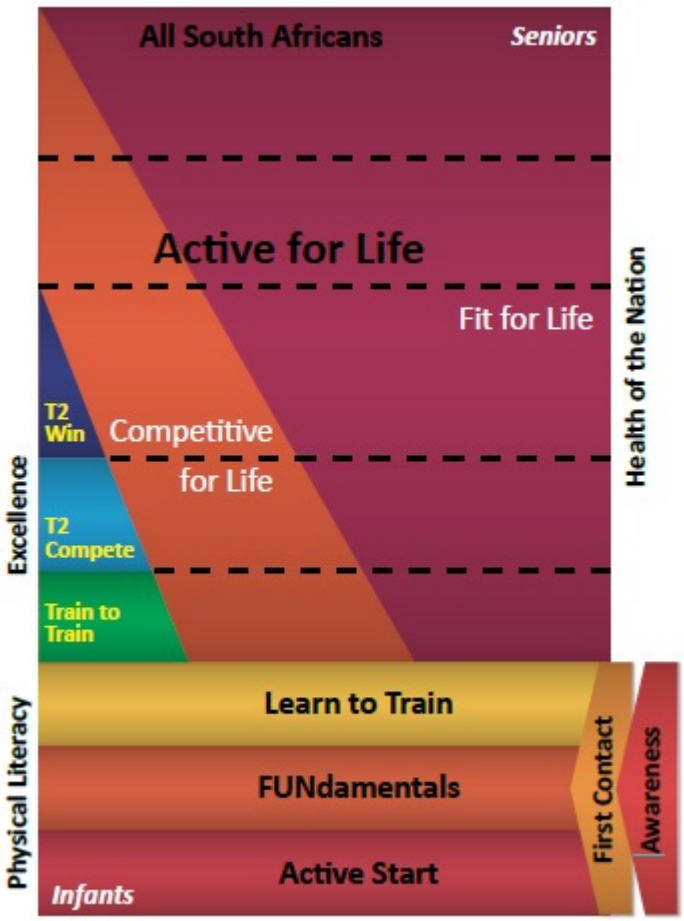

Figure 2.3: Main elements of LTPD stages (SASCOC 2012).

The main elements of the LTPD stages are as follows (Sport for Life 2012:20):

- "The *Active Start*, *Fundamentals* and *Learn to Train* stages provide for physical literacy.
- The *Train to Train*, *Train to Compete* and *Train to Win* stages are for excellence and transition at any age to an *Active for Life* stage.
- The *Active for Life* stage reflects lifelong participation in physical activity or in sports.
- The *Awareness* and *First Contact* refers to disability sports."

"The holistic development of the participant is central to SA Sport for Life. While much attention to date has been given to skills development, physical literacy and the technical and tactical elements of each sport, the consolidated model of LTPD provides a more comprehensive picture of the capabilities that require development

at each stage" (Sport for Life 2012:19).

2.7.2 Why the LTDP was initiated

The strong desire of governments for national athletes to achieve success at an international level and promote the reputation of their countries has resulted in a search for sporting systems, which will develop young athletes and culminate in achievement. Although the 2016 Olympic Games demonstrated some progress in South Africa's high-performance system, it was perceived that much remained to be done. Essentially children, players and athletes require identification and high-performance resources over an extended period of time if they are to build their skills discover their talent and pursue their dreams on the international sporting stage (Sport for Life 2012:3).

Sport should be an absolutely integral part of each and every South African and if we can get the entire nation to have a sporting mind set from an early age, half the battle will be won. It will not be easy, though - getting to the top is never easy, but from what we have seen, the long-term participant development has an enormous role to play in the future of South African sport and I have every confidence in its success (SASCOC 2012).

According to the executive summary of the South African Model for LTPD, "Sport builds cohesion across social, economic and cultural divides within society. Through sport, our athletes can develop a powerful sense of fellowship and shared identity regardless of colour, ethnicity, race or religion. Through their shared experiences in sport, they arm their own identity and commit to an individuality that is diverse and uniquely South African" (Sport for Life 2012:78).

The executive summary further stated, "To achieve the above, SASCOC cannot do it alone. We need an active partnership with SRSA, the Department of Health, the Department of Basic Education and the Department of Higher Education. We have to tackle the problem with a multi-level integrated strategy. For the sport sector, the LTPD is that strategy. The only way to achieve these is to lay a solid foundation and to sustain our efforts over decades. The long- term approach and investment of resources has proven to work very successfully in other countries that lead the

medal tables or international competitions. I am sure we can do the same. Let us all unite behind this LTPD program and make it work" (Sport for Life 2012:9). In tandem with the Long-Term Coach Development model, South African Coaching Development as outlined in the South African Coaching Framework, forms a key element of the implementation of the aspirations outlined in the National Sports Plan.

2.7.3 The goals of LTDP

By creating a clear framework for the identification of key stages and capabilities associated with participation and performance-oriented sport, the document is a key point of reference for all organisations and practitioners. The framework also intends to "provide guidance and advice in the creation of high quality experiences that are in line with the needs and stage of development of children, players and adults at all levels of sport in South Africa. Through this process, South Africa will move progressively towards a unique, more informed and inclusive approach to participant development. This systematic and participant centred approach will form the bedrock of an active and winning nation" (Sport for Life 2012:21).

LTPD sets out to:

- Address challenges and ensures the vision, values and principles of the SRSA White Paper and the outcomes of the National Sports Indaba are met (Sport and Recreation South Africa 2010).
- Provide a framework so as to achieve the performance goals of SASCOC and make South Africa an active and winning nation (Sport and Recreation South Africa 2010).
- Promote unity and social cohesion and foster a South African identity through the success of our athletes.
- Serve as "a structured pathway model that provides guidance and principles to optimize the development of participants at all ages and stages" (Sport for Life 2012:29).

By focusing on the needs of participants, LTPD provides a solid basis upon which programmes can be designed and implemented. "When adapted and implemented

to a wide range of contexts, LTPD will represent a paradigm shift in the way sport participation and athlete development are managed and delivered in South Africa." (Sport for Life 2012:29).

2.7.4 How LTPD relates to this study

Various elements of South African school sport display a high degree of organisation and competitive orientation thus reflecting the strong elements of the culture of school sport fostered from the apartheid era. Although the pursuit of success through inter-school competitions is a notable feature of the sporting landscape, it detracts from holistic development. There is, without doubt, much good work being done in these schools and the existence of many vibrant leagues and national level competitions provides a clear focal point for schools that have the resources to take part. However, accessibility to these competitions is limited and there is no evidence of a systematic approach to the design of competitions. Therefore, it can be concluded that the primary driver may be the tradition and profile of the school, rather than any well-planned framework to develop the athletes and provide the basis for participation and excellence beyond their school years. Thus, even in schools where sport is a key feature, the return in terms of participation and performance appears to be less than optimal (Sport for Life 2012).

Any framework, regardless of how simple, is relevant to sporting development and its effectiveness, or lack thereof, must be considered. Consequently, an understanding of LTPD is of utmost importance for this study.

2.8 CONCLUSION

It is clear from the studies discussed in this chapter that isolating a single factor, which leads to dropout, may be problematic. Multiple factors need to be considered when attempting to establish the reasons athletes do not transition from school level to senior level competitive sport successfully. What is widely understood and accepted is that every athlete is unique both as an individual and athlete; moreover, their sporting career is just as unique.

Baillie and Danish (1992) stated, sport participation has a positive influence for many individuals. However, some athletes place too much emphasis on their status and uniqueness as members of an elite, privileged class. A significant proportion of these athletes' identity becomes closely linked to their perceived image. Unfortunately, the end of a career in sports may result in a multitude of negative outcomes.

The South African Government plays an active role in creating a healthy, well-functioning sporting culture. This is evident in the NSSCP, which is supported by a budget from SRSA. However, it is perceived that although the implementation of the programme is as desired, further improvements can be made to further the National Sports Plan's notion of building a winning nation.

In the next chapter, the research design and methodology employed in this study is explained.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the research design and the methodology that was employed is explained. The criteria used to select participants as well as the self-designed protocols used to conduct the interviews are described. Furthermore, there is a detailed account of how data were collected and analysed. An overview of how I ensured trustworthiness and adhered to foundational ethical considerations in the study is also provided.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is a plan or strategy, which includes the philosophical assumptions, specification of the selection of participants, data collection methods employed and the data analysis conducted. The choice of research design is based on the researcher's philosophical and epistemology perspective in accordance with Nieuwenhuis (2016). Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2004) described methodology as the bridge that brings the researcher's philosophical stance and the method (tool) together. Sandelowski (2000) also noted that the terms, method and methodology require some understanding of the world as we know it; this is commonly referred to as a paradigm.

Consequently, to provide a holistic understanding of the research design, the subsections that follow explain the ontological position, epistemological approach and qualitative research design of this study.

3.2.1 Ontological position

This study is based on the belief that people are the active creators of the world as we know it (Nieuwenhuis 2016). Reality is seen as a product of social, historical, political and economic interactions that are in constant flux resulting in an ever-changing social context. Therefore, to understand reality requires one to try seeing

the world through the eyes of people (Riley & Hawe 2005) interacting with a specific phenomenon in which they are interested. Knowledge is thus obtained by talking to others to establish how they see reality. To understand people's experiences and behaviour requires seeking reasons for specific actions. The interpretation of their reality implies that my study is imbedded in the interpretivist paradigm (Mertens, 2009). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011), Nieuwenhuis (2016), Schwandt (2002) and Tuli (2010) described interpretivism as a paradigm where individuals actively partake in the research process and make sense of the complex world of experiences from the viewpoint of those various individuals; that is, they socially construct knowledge.

Smith (2004) stated that the goal of interpretivism is to understand the 'lived experiences' from the view of those who lived them. Cohen *et al.* (2011) argued that interpretivism focuses on action 'behaviour-with-meaning' and the actual intentional behaviour of the person. Tuli (2010) noted that researchers who use an interpretivist paradigm are realists since they study real-world situations as they unfold naturally, and they are inclined to be non-manipulative, unobtrusive and non-controlling. Merriam (1998) cautioned that since the interpretivist paradigm places a strong emphasis on a better understanding of the world through first-hand experience, truthful reporting and quotations of actual conversations from the insiders' (participants) perspective are crucial.

The aim of the interpretive approach is to offer different perspectives of a specific situation and to analyse the situation so as to acquire insight into a particular group of people and draw certain conclusions from the situations they encounter. An interpretivist approach generates valuable insights into social structures and human behaviour, and enables researchers to adopt a flexible and broad-minded approach to capture the social constructs of athletes that were faced with the transition from school to senior athletics. This open-mindedness is essential in order not to pre-empt the findings, but to shed light on the experiences, challenges, and misinterpreted challenges emanating from the stories of my participants.

Creswell (2003) stated that the interpretivist research paradigm is closely linked to the constructivism paradigm as the focus is on understanding the participants and how they provide meaning to their social constructs and environment. According to

Cohen *et al.* (2011), efforts must be made to understand the perceived observations and experiences of people by investigating interaction amongst individuals in historical and cultural contexts, which individuals inhabit (Creswell 2009). Creswell 2009) also emphasised that the intention of an interpretivist is to understand a phenomenon, not to generalise findings to the general population. However, even though my research presents the experiences and stories of individual athletes, which may resonate with the experiences of others, they remain personal experiences. Based on my ontological position and choice of paradigm in which the study is rooted, a qualitative approach to the research was most apposite.

3.2.2 Epistemological approach

Epistemology refers to how we have come to know what we know and the relationship that exists between the knower and the known. It varies from ontology, which relates to what exists and the nature of reality, axiology, which is related to values, and methodology. However, a broader use of epistemology is common in writing about approaches to research. It includes ontology and at times, axiology and methodology (Maxwell 2005).

The truth lies within the human experience. A statement on what is true or false is, therefore, culturally bound and dependent on historical and contextual factors. Yet, some of these statements may be universal. Within this context, communities' stories, belief systems and claims of spiritual and earth connections find are legitimate knowledge.

Epistemology deals with how people came to know what they know and thus, it is justifiable to assume that validity of knowledge claims is based on how research findings or results were arrived at. In other words, knowledge claims should be based on real life data, which have been accurately obtained from systematic and methodological approaches that will result in credible and trustworthy findings. Consequently, I adopted a qualitative approach in the study (Soini, Kronqvist & Günter 2011).

3.2.3 Qualitative research design

The investigation was conducted in natural settings, namely, sporting grounds and training facilities; that is, contexts in which the participants were comfortable.

The focus of the research design was on narrative data, with the goal of identifying core themes within the research through thematic analysis, which identifies and assesses whether there are any relationships or patterns in the data (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter 2006).

The qualitative research approach was also chosen so that athletes could use their own words to describe their experiences, and to determine if there were parallels between their experiences of making a transition and international lessons of experience (Arnold, Fletcher & Molyneux 2012). Qualitative research provides insightful and informative data, which could give new insights into the experiences and challenges athletes in South Africa face when transitioning from school to senior level athletics. The strength of the qualitative approach is the richness and depth of exploration of the athletes' experiences (Maree et al. 2010). Athletes at school level in natural sporting environments, whether they are training or competing, automatically and often unknowingly form part of an athletic system. It is within these athletic systems that certain challenges arise.

A narrative research approach was used where the athletes narrated stories of their lives. Subsequently, these accounts were integrated into a narrative chronology; in effect, their stories were retold. The narrative combined views from the lives of the athletes with those of the researcher's life in a collaborative narrative (Clandinin & Connelly 2000). This narrative study design allowed for an understanding of the challenges that track and field athletes face when transitioning from international junior to international senior track and field athletic competition. In Chapter Two, evidence from available literature that showed that there are several challenges that athletes face when transitioning from school to senior level athletics was provided. The improved understanding of these challenges and subsequent adaption of processes might result in fewer athletes who stop competing in track and field after leaving school. Based on the literature review and personal experience, I formulated probing interview questions to identify the challenges the athletes experience during

the transition.

Using qualitative research for a physical education study allows real-world events to be investigated, which aid the researcher in gaining a comprehensive and thorough understanding of the events under study (Edwards & Skinner 2012; Sparkes & Smith 2013). With respect to this particular study, it afforded conjecture of whether an improved understanding of the challenges experienced by school athletes in the transition to senior level athletics would lead to improved support options for athlete development in the future.

3.3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.3.1 Sampling

Purposive sampling was used. Because I am a three-time Olympic track and field athlete, I had access to friends and team members who went through the transitioning process. Cresswell, (2013) identified different approaches to purposeful sampling in qualitative research. Based on Creswell (2009) description, I used typical case sampling where potential participants were identified from the pool of South African athletes who qualified for either the 2010 or 2012 IAAF World Junior Championships. The inclusion criteria made provision for both male and female athletes from all racial ethnic groups, aged between 17 to 20 years at the time of participation in the championships. I chose this criterion because by being selected as part of the South African National Junior team to participate abroad, the participants were identified as having the potential to succeed at a senior level in athletics.

In total, 29 athletes were included in the World Junior Championship squad for Canada, Moncton in 2010 and 29 athletes for Spain, Barcelona in 2012. Of these 58 athletes, I purposefully selected and approached 12 athletes whom I had been in contact previously as a consequence of my own athletics experience. A specific effort was made to maintain gender diversity within the selected athletes. The interview schedule was piloted with a comparable athlete profile.

3.3.2. Data collection protocol: Narrative interviews

A narrative study is a way of thinking about, examining and reporting experience. Clandinin and Huber (2006:124) stated, “Narrative inquiry follows a recursive, reflexive process of moving from fields (with starting points in telling or living of stories), to field texts (data), to interim and final research texts. Commonplaces of temporality, sociality and place create a conceptual framework within which different kinds of field texts and different analyses can be used. Narrative studies highlight ethical matters as well as shape new theoretical understandings of people’s experiences.”

According to Chase (2008), if narrative interviews are used in the correct manner and conducted sensitively, they provide valuable data, deep insight into the topic, and information based on emotions, feelings and experiences. The aim of the narrative interviews was to get athletes to tell stories about their experiences and those of people who were important to them. Narrative interviewing can be regarded as a particular subtype of qualitative inquiry (Chase 2008). Narrative interviewing, which is a way of classifying the phenomena of human experience (challenges) and the entire field of study, is commonly referred to as narratology (Connelly & Clandinin 1990).

The three main questions that drove my study as well as the conversations during interviews were:

1. What are the experiences of athletes after participating at a junior track and field international level?
2. What type of support was provided to school athletes in their transition to senior athletics level?
3. How could support for track and field athletes be improved when they finish school, according to the athletes?

(See Addendum A)

3.3.3. Field notes

While conducting the interviews, I kept field notes, which provided additional data on how participants behaved and reacted, their physical gestures, subjective responses and how they were positioned in relation to me; in fact, anything I observed or found unusual that would compliment the story of the participants' experiences. Field notes were written either discreetly during the interview or shortly thereafter. When notes were taken following the interview, they were expanded as soon as possible before memory of the details faded (Mack *et al.* 2005).

Owing to my own experiences in elite athletics, I needed to monitor my bias and not allow it to impact on the study in any way, specifically during the data analysis (Lietz, Langer & Furman 2006). My awareness of this prompted me to appoint a research assistant who was not involved in the same field of study and who would observe the interviews and take her own notes when schedules permitted once the participants had given their consent.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

The study incorporated two sets of data. The first set of data was collected by means of narrative interviews because the focus was on participants' experiences of the research topic (Edward & Skinner 2012). An interview guide was developed and reviewed externally by an expert in the field to assess the appropriateness of the questions. In addition, field notes were kept that allowed for the gathering of non-verbal information on how the athletes experience the transition from school to senior level and how it influenced and impacted on their individual careers. These include aspects included a show of anger, disgust, disappointment and even tears.

Before the data collection process could start, I had to apply for institutional ethical clearance (HU17/03/04)[4] and upon receiving approval. I adhered to all internationally accepted ethical considerations relevant to my study.

To ensure the quality of the research data, I followed Edwards and Skinner's (2012) seven-step interview process:

[4] *University of Pretoria ethical clearance number*

3.4.1 Step One: Contacting the respondent

As noted in section 3.3, the athletes first identified as research participants. The athletes were then contacted via email, cell phone and social media inviting them to participate in the study.

3.4.2 Step Two: Set time and setting

After the participants had given their voluntary consent to participate in the study, appropriate dates and times were arranged with them to conduct the interviews. The interviews were conducted at their location of choice, which had to allow for private conversation and be relatively free from interference. Consequently, interviews were performed at various locations including hotel rooms, athletic stadiums and coffee shops depending on where the athletes felt most comfortable. The interviews were also conducted at a time that suited the participants.

3.4.3 Step Three: Establishing rapport and neutrality

An informative email with a summary of the study was imparted to the athletes along with the interview guide. An attempt was made to conduct interviews in natural settings, which allowed for a relaxed atmosphere so as to avoid the interviewees feeling intimidated in any way. These naturalistic settings allowed the athletes to feel comfortable and share their experiences in an open manner from their own perspective and in their own words. The athletes freely engaged with me about the challenges at school and senior level athletics as well as the highs and lows of support structures and how they perceived these structures affected the management and development of the athletes.

3.4.4 Step Four: Opening questions

I developed an interview guide (see Addendum C) with the knowledge gained from conducting the literature review, which can be found in Chapter Two. Apart from establishing rapport, 18 questions related to the athlete's background, career, and support structures and challenges he/she experienced were asked. These questions

were put to the selected senior track and field athletes who had participated in the IAAF World Junior Championships in 2010 and 2012. The questions sought to establish the challenges they experienced during the transition from school to senior level athletics and special reference was made to the support structures provided by SRSA (Edwards & Skinner 2012). The order of questions changed because of changes in settings and environments in which the interviews were conducted.

3.4.5 Step Five: Probing questions

In accordance with Creswell's (2013) view that semi-structured interviews are normally used in research projects to corroborate data that emerge from other data sources and that this type of interview allows the interviewer to probe and clarify answers, I asked such questions when the opportunity arose in accordance with the participants' responses. This allowed me to acquire richer information that was particularly relevant to the study.

3.4.6 Step Six: Inviting a summary

At the end of interviews, athletes were asked to summarise the most important things that they had shared with me during the interview to ensure that the relevant information had been recorded accurately.

3.4.7 Step Seven: Concluding the interview

Once the interview had been summarised, I cordially concluded the interview and thanked the athlete. The only incentive the athlete received was that I offered to pay the restaurant bill.

The athletes were encouraged to speak in their home language so as to ensure what they said was interpreted correctly. Accordingly, 11 of the interviews were conducted in Afrikaans and one in English.

The interviews were recorded in their entirety on an Apple iPhone by using the pre-installed Voice Memos software. Furthermore, a backup audio recording was made on an Apple iPad. Interviews were scheduled to run for between 30 and 45 minutes,

with the specific length dependent on the schedules of athletes and how much they were willing to share on the day. Interviews were transcribed verbatim by a professional service provider.

Some of the interview venues were very noisy because they were held in public places. Consequently, background music and other voices in coffee shops and similar settings were a noticeable distraction during the recordings. This implied that some of the recorded words were inaudible to the service provider, but I was able to listen to the recordings carefully to complete the gaps or correct the faulty transcriptions.

Follow-up interviews were not necessary after the initial data had been transcribed and analysed because enough data were collected during the initial interviews (Arnold *et al.* 2012). By the 12th and final interview, no new themes had emerged. This demonstrated that theoretical and data saturation had been reached.

3.5. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Data analysis involved organising, accounting and elaborating on the data to make sense of the athletes' explanations of certain situations. In this qualitative study, raw data were analysed and interpreted (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000).

Once all the digitised audio recordings had been transcribed, I was able to organise the data to obtain a better idea of what was relevant to the study and what would answer the research question (Edwards & Skinner 2012). The transcripts were read multiple times and using a coding index, possible themes and pertinent concepts (Edwards & Skinner 2012) were identified. The coding was based on words or phrases, which were related to each other and noticeably used by research participants in relation to specific incidents or mentioned by more than one participant (Bayle & Robinson 2007).

Connelly and Clandinin's (2006) argument for the development and use of narrative inquiry is inspired by a view of human experience in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives. The athlete's responses were thoroughly analysed and were written as stories in order to be part of the narrative study. The interview data

were analysed for themes and concepts to determine if there were links between the support structures as documented by ASA, SASCOC'S OPEX programmes and other such athlete management policies and the athletes' eventual performances (See Chapter Five). These narrative themes were then grouped together and analysed in-depth.

Data analysis is generally interpretive; hence, it is not intended to be a completely accurate representation, but a more reflexive, reactive interaction between the researcher and the decontextualized data.

3.6. TRUSTWORTHINESS

Trustworthiness is evident when the findings of a study provide similar meanings to what the study participants shared (Lincoln & Guba 1985, cited in Lietz *et al.* 2006). Peer debriefing was one of the methods used to ensure this through the verification of data coding. A professional acquaintance of the researcher, who was familiar with the research process employed in this study, was called upon to review the findings and verify the coding (data labels). Another peer was asked to review the interview transcripts and confirm the coding and themes that were identified (Lincoln & Guba 1985). This was to ensure the elimination of bias because of assumptions that the researcher may have had during the process (Lietz *et al.* 2006). The elimination of bias is discussed in the section on methodological constraints (section 3.8).

Creswell (2013) described reliability and validity or trustworthiness in terms of eight strategies that were employed to verify the findings:

- Triangulation of different data sources was conducted by examining evidence from alternative sources and using both sets to build a coherent justification for the proposed themes.
- Member checking was used to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings by asking the participants to verify the accuracy of the final findings.
- I formulated questions, which provided me with rich, descriptive data.
- By using self-reflection, I was able to create an honest narrative that would resonate well with readers.

- Life comprises positive and negative perspectives. The inclusion of negative information made this study more credible.
- I implemented peer debriefing to enhance the accuracy of the accounts as well as an external audit trail in my data collection process to review the entire project (Lincoln & Guba 1985).

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3.7. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Permission to conduct this research was obtained from the University of Pretoria after adhering to all the institutional processes and policies (see Addendum F).

In accordance with Marczyk, Dematteo and Festinger's (2005:233) view that "almost all studies with human participants have some sort of risk …rang[ing] from slight embarrassment caused by the interview questions to more serious effects on participants' physical and emotional well-being…" this may be regarded as a low-risk study.

Athletes gave consent to participate voluntarily and were assured that they could withdraw at any time without any consequences. They were made aware that the study might involve disclosing information that they might not want to share, but were assured that they were under no obligation to answer. They could decline to answer and ask to move to the next question if such a situation arose (Creswell 2013). To solidify this study ethically, the rights to self-determination, anonymity, confidentially and informed consent were observed.

In this study, confidentiality was maintained by keeping the collected data safe on my computer with a passcode. All the participants were given pseudonyms so as to protect their identities. However, because many of these athletes are known in the public domain, it was not always possible to conceal their identities fully. Consequently, they were given a draft of Chapter Four for approval. Only the athletes who gave their consent were included in Chapter Four. All the audio recordings and transcripts are to be stored at the University of Pretoria for 15 years after the completion of the study.

Cohen *et al.* (2000) advised that a good relationship is the key to successful research and leads to feelings of trust and confidence. Five key principles of ethical research that appear in the ethical codes of research institutions are as follows:

- Informed and voluntary consent. None of the athletes were forced to participate in this study.
- Confidentiality of shared information. All the athletes' details will remain confidential and will not be made public.
- Anonymity of research athletes. The athletes' names were changed together with their biographical information.
- Beneficence of no harm to athletes. Since athletes are public figures, efforts were made to respect their societal standing.
- Reciprocity. The athletes understood the benefit of participating as the research findings may assist the next generation of athletes.

All relevant information was contained in a letter that also indicated the extent of time, potential impact, and the outcome of the research (see Addendum C).

3.8. METHODOLOGICAL CONSTRAINTS

My knowledge of the athletes' situation before the interviews could have influenced the data since I knew many of the athletes personally before starting my study. This is referred to as the halo effect; it is a form of "cognitive bias in which our overall impression of a person influences how we feel and what we think about his or her character" (Cohen *et al.* 2000:189). Some of athletes I knew changed their behaviour and were very nervous. Furthermore, they did not appear to be too forthcoming about their challenges because they did not want me to judge their character or label them as dropouts. This was one of the most difficult built-in biases to eliminate and factor into the design. I attempted to reduce this effect by reassuring the athletes that being part of a national junior team was a major accomplishment, rather than focusing on what the athletes considered to be their failures during their senior athletics careers.

I could identify with the participants as my personal athletics story and concomitant challenges were similar to theirs. To avoid this leading to personal bias, I made considerable efforts to think like a professional researcher and not as a teammate or friend. I constantly checked my thinking for bias and eliminated it when I recognised it. Admittedly, this was not always possible.

3.9. REFLEXIVITY / RESEARCHER STANCE

The stories and experiences of the research participants, together with my own personal analysis of my fellow athletes' challenges, formed the gist of this study. I also kept a reflective diary in which I recorded my personal interests and history. This helped shape the research topic and also affected data collection, final analysis and recommendations by providing the reader with the rationale behind decisions I made as well as documenting any personal challenges that I experienced during the research process (Houghton *et al*. 2013; Lietz *et al.* 2006).

3.10. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, a detailed explanation as to why I chose a qualitative research design for this study was provided by referring specifically to the narrative nature of data collection and limited amount of literature involved. Furthermore, the study design, methodology (including participant selection), data collection process, analysis, trustworthiness, reflexivity, and ethical considerations were discussed. Finally, special attention was drawn to how the methods and processes adopted in the study limited bias through means such as member checking and peer debriefing. In the following chapter, the findings and discussion thereof are presented.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

It is commonplace for human beings to share stories about the unique experiences they have had throughout their lives. By sharing these stories, humans create meaning in their lives and enlist each other's help in mutually improving their lives and communities (Clandinin & Connely, 2000). In this chapter, I share the stories of 12 athletes who participated in the International Association of Athletics Federation's (IAAF) World Junior Championships in Canada, Moncton 2010 and in Spain, Barcelona 2012. My sample consisted of athletes that did not qualify for the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympic Games as well as athletes who did or currently participate at a senior level having also represented South Africa.

The purpose of this study was to examine the apparent challenges these athletes faced during their transition from school to senior level track and field competition in South Africa. Furthermore, a secondary purpose was to investigate the type and level of support that elite athletes can rely on to overcome these challenges. An improved understanding of the challenges these elite athletes faced during the transition might assist in measures being introduced to prevent athletes from ending their careers at a young age. If effective, this will increase the number of track and field athletes who could ultimately enjoy successful athletic careers and also afford South Africa international sporting recognition.

In the following sections, the profile of the participants and the data I collected by means of semi-structured interviews by employing the Sport Transition Career model (Stambulova, 1997 cited in Stambulova 2003), as discussed in Chapter Two, as the analytical framework are described.

4.2 PARTICIPANTS' PROFILE

The bio-details of the participants in order the interviews were conducted are presented in Table 4.1. As noted previously, pseudonyms were used in order to

protect the participants' identities.

Table 4.1: Profile of interviewed athletes

Name	Gender	Age	Race	Event	Status
Nthando Khumalo	Male	24	B	100m & 200m	Olympic athlete
Roy Van Straaten	Male	24	W	400m	National athlete
Jan Swart	Male	24	W	200m & 400m	Retired athlete
Janey Jones	Female	22	W	200m & 400m	Olympic athlete
Johan Eksteen	Male	24	W	200m & 400m	Provincial athlete
Rohan Cronje	Male	24	W	800m & 1500m	Retired athlete
Yolande Pienaar	Female	25	W	Long jump	Olympic athlete
Michelle du Plessis	Male	24	W	800m	Retired athlete
Herman de Villiers	Male	25	W	800m	Olympic athlete
Pertronelle Botha	Female	24	W	400m	Retired athlete
Kevin Vermaak	Male	24	W	400m hurdles	Olympic Athlete
Stella Davis	Female	24	W	400m	Retired Athlete

4.3 PARTICIPANTS' STORIES

A narrative analysis method was used in this study to present the data. In other words, the study was conducted by collecting data from athletes who shared their personal experiences with specific reference to the transition from school to senior level athletics (Clandinin & Connelly 2000). The qualitative data was analysed in accordance with an interpretive philosophy aimed at examining meaningful and symbolic content of the qualitative data. This philosophy attempts to establish how athletes find reasons for a specific phenomenon by analysing their perceptions, attitudes, understanding, knowledge, values, feelings and experiences, which are then used to approximate their construction of the phenomenon, which is best achieved by means of inductive analysis (Nieuwenhuis 2016).

4.3.1 Nthando Khumalo

Nthando was a 24-year-old athlete who came from the Southern Cape Province; he attended school at Lost Petersburg and Grayson. Nthando was a full-time professional athlete who competed at the 2012 Olympic Games and a part-time

student. He was studying towards two degrees: The first was a physical therapy degree that he was unable finish in the USA when he had a visa problem and the second a degree in Economics for which he enrolled upon his return to South Africa.

As a school athlete, his athletics coach sent Nthando a training programme on a weekly or monthly basis. He was only able to train under the supervision of his coach when he could manage to travel to Windy City or on occasion when his coach travelled to Zagreb City. As a newcomer to his coach's training programme, Nthando found some of the exercises, particularly the ones to which he was unaccustomed, tough. The training programme included a progressive mixture of middle distance and speed training. Despite the unfamiliar training setup, he was able to adjust well to the training programme and did improve his speed.

At the age of 16, Nthando qualified to participate at the 2010 World Junior Championships in Barcelona, but unfortunately he sustained a hamstring injury, which took an unnecessary long time to heal as a result of the little knowledge available and subsequent incorrect treatment of the injury at the time. Disappointingly, there were no experts who could help him initially to treat the injury correctly, but he was lucky to be in a position where, after doctors had diagnosed the injury correctly, he had the means to obtain more information about it. He consulted Google daily and finally found an article, which he sent to a physiotherapist who was able to give him the correct treatment. In 2014, he had a sports hernia for which he needed surgery. At the end of 2015, he suffered from Osteitis Pubis[5], which left him with only six weeks to prepare for the 2012 Olympics.

Nthando described his dad as always being very supportive, even to the point of allowing Nthando to go to the USA for training in order to build his confidence sufficiently to participate against some of the best athletes in the world. Nthando

[5] ***Osteitis pubis*** *is a noninfectious inflammation of the pubis symphysis (also known as the pubic symphysis or symphysis pubis), causing changeable degrees of lower abdominal and pelvic pain (Koulouris 2008).*

expressed his positive opinion of the NCAA[6], a format of college track and field competitions in the USA, which has a history of producing athletes that qualify for the Olympics. His mother was more reluctant to let her son leave as Nthando had good grades. She would have preferred her son to study and qualify for a profession.

Just before the provincial trials, when he started feeling as though his hamstring injury would never get better and was ready to quit, his high school coach encouraged him to "just go and run" and argued that if there was a chance that the injury would not hinder him again, he would still have his future in his own hands. He had made plans to go to the USA, but felt that if he could not run well enough, he would make a fool of himself. As noted, there was nobody who had really helped him medically and he was not yet known as an accomplished athlete. Fortunately, he was able to compete at the provincial trials without any serious injuries and his performances improved from there onwards. He went to the USA and he believed that this move saved his athletics career. Initially, he convinced himself that he was there primarily to get an education, but he remained focused during training sessions, which he says is all that is needed in the NCAA system.

Nthando thus explained how his high school coach played a major supporting role during his career:

> *"My coach at that time helped a great deal because when injuries kept reoccurring I began to feel as though I would quit, but when I told him I was going to stop competing, he convinced me to go and run the Provincial Championships which were taking place, arguing that if I did not get injured again my future would be in my own hands – fortunately I did not suffer from another injury. He helped me to mentally overcome the injuries I was facing, giving me a chance of a future in athletics."*

Nthando described the training programme he made use of as a junior:

> *"It was a mixture of many things, I think because I was new to appropriate training programmes I didn't feel as if they were too difficult. There were 600, 500, and 400-meter repetitions but the programme also included speed work. One of the sessions I remember included four fast 50m*

[6] *The **National Collegiate Athletic Association** (**NCAA**) is a non-profit organization, which regulates athletes and organizes the athletic programs of colleges and universities in the United States of America (NCAA 2018).*

repetitions with 30 seconds between them, followed by four 100m repetitions. The programme was progressive, but it got me running faster and it was easy enough for me to manage the workload."

Nthando perceived the biggest challenge he experienced during the transition from school to senior level was overcoming his injury. He summarised the challenge of overcoming injuries perfectly as follows:

"I got injured right after nationals in 2010, suffering from a hamstring tear. That injury took a very long time to heal properly because nobody could give me the right advice for the injury at that time. I was getting incorrect information about my injury. Looking back, with the knowledge that I have now, it was probably a grade 1 or grade 2 tear, which, if I had gone through the correct rehabilitation process, would only have kept me away off the track for four weeks. Unfortunately, because I did not go through the proper rehabilitation process, it took much longer. In 2014, I suffered from a sports hernia, which I needed surgery for and then towards the end of 2015, I was diagnosed with Osteitis Pubis, which after recovery only gave me six weeks of preparation for the Olympics. The most important thing for an athlete is making sure that they stay injury free, and with a system which has a dedicated team of just doctors and physiotherapists who are readily available for athletes to get into contact when injuries occur, injuries would be properly diagnosed and keep athletes out for the minimum time possible. This would make athletes' jobs much easier when they don't need to worry about how to pay for a doctor or other medical practitioner."

Nthando expressed the view that:

"*It would make the transition from school to senior athletics much smoother if South Africa could have a more structured system of support for athletes, where knowledge, age-appropriate coaching, medical aid and financial compensation form part of an athlete's life. All departments of sport, SASCOC and provincial administrators will have to be more conscious of this. They (SASCOC) cannot only take care of athletes who bring home medals".*

He was also convinced that more South African world champions and finalists would be produced, over the entire spectrum of events and age categories, if South African athletes were provided with more opportunities because athletes are, of course, naturally competitive. Nthando made a powerful statement with regards to the recommendations to the structures and government bodies in South Africa:

"If South Africa was able to put in place a structured system to support athletics, I think we could be world beaters. However, this support system would need to assist all athletes, not just have one or two athletes who compete in 100m, 200m, or 400m sprint events. We could have three athletes in a final at every world championships and Olympics. But, it would require representatives from the Department of Sport, SASCOC, and provincial federations to put the athletes before themselves when distributing finances."

Nthando believed that South African coaches would have more success if potential is identified and developed from an earlier age. He stated that some school athletes are pushed too hard too early. Pressure from parents and coaches result in senior level methods of coaching for school athletes. Nthando argued that by the time these athletes finished school they were physically and mentally tired, and often just wanted to be finished with athletic competition.

Ignorance of and treatment of injuries at school level often cause athletes to quit. If Nthando had had more support when he sustained injuries by having access to medical sports specialists and funding, he would have found the transition much easier. It is imperative for athletes to make sure they are injury-free. Nthando asserted,

"With a structured system, a dedicated team of doctors and physiotherapists, athletes won't need to stress about how to pay the doctor. Such stresses affect performance negatively. In sporting codes that have a lot of funds available to them, sportsmen and sportswomen are less stressed because they have the assurance that doctors are already paid. Athletics is not important enough in South Africa."

When Nthando was asked whether he thought ASA and SASCOC could have played a bigger role in his career by helping him to recover from the hamstring injury he suffered prior to the World Junior Championships in 2010 and by helping him to find direction and support when transitioning from school to senior level athletics, he stated,

"If South Africa was able to put in place a structured system to support athletics, I think we could be world beaters. However, this support system would need to assist all athletes, not just have one or two athletes who compete in 100m, 200m, or 400m sprint events. We could have three athletes in a final at every world championships and Olympics. But it would require

representatives from the Department of Sport, SASCOC and provincial federations to put the athletes before themselves when distributing finances."

Some athletes do not have parents who are supportive or 'athletic guardians' who can provide them with assistance. Many athletes find it difficult to stay dedicated when faced with various challenges and they often quit athletics or change to other sporting codes for financial reasons. Nthando expressed his gratitude to the Eastern Cape Sports Academy for their assistance in his career. He further stated that such academies in other provinces might help in supporting school and senior athletes.

Looking back, Nthando concluded that his own personal motivation contributed the most to his six successful years after graduating from junior athletics. It had always been his dream to make a career out of running and he put all his energy into doing so. He would have done so even if no one was watching over him.

4.3.2. Roy Van Straaten

Roy was a 400m athlete who participated in the 2012 World Junior Championships in Barcelona. At the time of his interview, he was 22 years old. He grew up in Roodepoort and at high school, he did not compete in athletics, but played rugby. After changing schools, he met a coach who helped him start his athletics career.

Initially, he did not put much effort into training. However, because of the speed training that he did, he started improving his time especially when he was approaching Grade 12. He sustained a broken vertebra in his neck when he was involved in a motorbike accident. However, the only serious athletics-related injury he sustained was a torn hamstring.

His parents provided him with a firm support structure. They supplied him with the required basic equipment and took up financial responsibilities such as paying his coach and purchasing the necessary supplements. They also paid for him to compete abroad to gain experience. An example of one such competition was an athletics meeting in Bottrop, Germany, which he in ran prior to the World

Championships. Before competing in Germany he also competed in the Southern Regions Competition and in Namibia.

Athletics organisations like ASA and SASCOC did not support him in any way; they did not even invite him to a training camp. He made make use of the school's facilities, which proved to be sufficient at the time. The high school also provided him with sponsorship and reimbursed him for the tour to Europe. Roy had the following to say with regards to his correspondence with ASA and SASCOC after qualifying for the Youth Olympic Games in 2010:

> *"I was interviewed, and the interview was broadcast on television, but I never received any financial support. Following the Youth Olympics, I never heard from organisations again, despite running competitive times in my matric year. I was never approached by Athletics South Africa or SASCOC again."*

His biggest challenge during the transition from school to senior level athletes was finding direction. After school, he felt as though he had stopped improving. He did not have a set training programme like the one he was following at the time of the interview, which he believed was helping him to improve. He expressed the view that foreign athletes have fewer responsibilities in terms of looking after themselves in comparison to South African athletes. They were looked after in all aspects by their respective sporting administrations. On their contrary, South African athletes have to pay for medical doctors, physiotherapists, food, coaches and gymnasium membership fees themselves. Roy also said that overcoming injury was a major challenge:

> *"I felt as though I did not have the necessary access to the facilities and programmes necessary to rehabilitate and recover sufficiently."*

At the end of his school career, he spent some time in South Africa before he decided to study in the USA where he experienced the support structures and athletics systems to be very different from the ones in South Africa. An injury prevented him from running to the best of his ability abroad. As a result of the support that the NCAA provides, athletes do not need to worry about costs, necessities or where they are going to compete because everything is organised collectively by universities or the athletics federation. Competitions all take place in a

team format and the university competitions are particularly important. All he had to worry about as an athlete was training and academics for which various support structures were also in place.
Roy explained that many South African athletes stopped competing in athletics because as a developmental athlete, it takes too long to progress to a professional level where enough money can be earned to make a living. Consequently, it is often necessary for athletes to prioritise studying towards a degree, thus, making it difficult to continue with athletics. He added that few are as lucky as he was. It is difficult to focus on so many different aspects of life simultaneously and still make responsible choices. Many people cannot adapt to the increased pressure of being student athletes. He expressed the view that it is only possible to study and train effectively if there is a strong support structure. It is a reason why it is imperative for federations to assist young athletes.

Quitting was never an option for Roy because of his love for the sport. At the time of the interview, he did not see himself stopping in the future either. He dreamed of running at the Olympics and various other major championships while making a living through competing. That is part of the reason he found the transitional period so difficult. Suddenly he had had to run against outstanding athletes and younger athletes who were faster than he was. In addition, he did not fit in and found it much more difficult to win; thus, his dreams felt distant. He said that athletes should be able to stop worrying and be allowed to trust in a system, which will accommodate them and offer assurances in all aspects like the USA. Such a system should be organised and coordinated between South African universities and athletics organisations. To develop such a system, the whole country would have to work coherently.

However, he explained that not every athlete can go to university. Consequently, it should be primarily the responsibility of ASA and not the universities to put the structures in place. These structures would prevent junior athletes from being afraid of underperforming and help juniors during the transitional period as they ‘grow’ into the vastness of senior athletics. There also ought to be more opportunities for young athletes to gain experience gradually. Although more experience makes athletes stronger psychologically, having sport psychologists in the system would be even

more beneficial. Mentors who advise younger athletes about the sport help these athletes to understand what they are going through. This is an important role that more experienced athletes could play in a support system.
When asked why some athletes are successful at senior level while others are not, Roy answered:

> *"It is the willpower of some athletes who want to be successful and those having the support to do so. Having sufficient support for living expenses and physiotherapists."*

4.3.3 Jan Swart

Jan Swart, aged 24, participated in 400m at the 2010 Junior World Championship. As a scholar, Jan's training consisted of long-distance running, but later he had a more balanced training programme, which included long and shorter distances as well as gym workouts. With hindsight, he believed that he may have been overtraining and that he was putting too much pressure on himself. Although he initially trained for the 1500m, he struggled to excel at that distance. His school coach convinced him to train for the 200m and 400m in which he started performing well.

Jan sustained only one injury during his athletics career when he tore a hamstring in 2012, a week before the national championships. The same injury recurred to a lesser degree in 2014, but he recovered within three weeks of sustaining the injury with the help of a physiotherapy programme, which included Pilates[7] exercises and small movements.

Jan's parents never put pressure on him, but offered him indirect guidance occasionally when they felt he might have done better. However, they never criticised him. In their eyes, he always ran well. They always supported him financially and emotionally. Jan acknowledged that the support provided by SASCOC and ASA in the form of airline tickets and lodging to go abroad and participate before the 2010 Junior World Championships was a great help.

[7] ***Pilates*** *is a system of exercises using special apparatus, designed to improve physical strength, flexibility, and posture and enhance mental awareness (Physiopedia 2018).*

However, he never received any medical assistance and was never invited to training camps. He noted, however, that with the money that he won abroad, he could pay for physiotherapy and coaching. Jan noted the following about the support he received from governing bodies:

> *"I received support from Athletics South Africa and SASCOC before the World Junior Championships in 2010 when they paid for my airplane ticket, but I did not receive continued and consistent support from them. It would have benefitted me if Athletics South Africa contributed towards my medical bills and sent me on training camps. Not having to worry about things like finances, clothing and equipment makes focusing on performing well so much easier."*

Jan never experienced trouble finding training facilities. He could train at any track, at any time. It was also possible to go to the gymnasium at any time because the gym at the university was open 24 hours a day and he could complete workouts at the Performance Gymnasium as well. He shared that training kit and shoes had been sponsored once a season since 2009. The sponsors who made this possible, like Nike, also made the transition from school to senior athletics easier because knowing that they believed in him gave him confidence. His greatest challenge was gaining perspective. Being ranked second in the world while in his final year at school required calm and patience, but he was too hard on himself, wanting everything to be perfect within a short time. At the time, no one advised him that athletes generally perform their best at the age of 26 or 27. Rather, he was left and all of a sudden he was a senior athlete and in the depths of elite competition; he thought that he was a poor athlete. He was convinced that junior athletes would transition more successfully to senior athletics if they were 'guided' by successful, experienced senior athletes. Communication between a mentor and a junior would give perspective to junior athletes and allow them to build confidence gradually while understanding that dedication is necessary to achieve success. A good sport psychologist could also help when 'past successes' suddenly felt out of reach.

Jan's dream was shattered barely two weeks before the 2012 Olympics. Another athlete ran a faster time than his seasons best of roughly 46 seconds. Consequently, he was left out of the relay team for the Olympics. He perceived that he took this too seriously. He was only 19 years old at the time and still had

the potential to run the 400m in 45 seconds if he stayed committed. He could still have realised his dream of going to the Olympics and running in the Diamond League in the years to come. For the next five years he continued to participate in athletics, privileged to have good support systems, plenty of personal drive, and Nike as a loyal sponsor. His dream was still not impossible.

Jan was a diligent student, but the number of hours he committed to studying, which was his other dream, took its toll at the time. His life consisted of little rest and long hours of hard work in an effort to pursue his dreams in athletics and academics. He expressed the view that if the South African athletics season was managed better or even moved to a little later in the year, unbelievably talented young local athletes would perform much better. He added that the long season endured by South African athletes, as they compete locally and abroad, often caused athletes to 'burn out' and quit when they produced sub-par performances as a result of competing in a state of exhaustion.

The greatest challenge Jan faced when transitioning from school to senior level athletics was maintaining perspective because qualification standards are very different. He explained:

> *"Coming from school level, being ranked second in the world, having to improve your 400m time from 46 seconds to 44 seconds is incredibly difficult. A 2 second difference may not seem like a lot, but in the world of 400m running they are worlds apart. I was very hard on myself and found that there was no one who would tell me that my times are still way above average for someone of my age. It was very difficult for me to come to terms with the fact that I was the best at school/junior level, but on a senior level I was average."*

When asked how he would describe the perfect transitioning process from school to senior level, Jan responded:

> *"I would want to gain comfort and mentorship from more established and experienced athletes; for example, by meeting up for coffee every two months for discussions and to ask questions I might have. Learning various things from them, asking for advice, especially about how more experienced athletes handle certain situations. By conversing with senior athletes about experiences these athletes may also have encountered, many of the situations encountered throughout the transitioning period from school athlete to senior level athletics would be made*

easier - because of having a mentor who puts things into perspective when it is difficult to find perspective on your own."

4.3.4 Janey Eksteen

Janey had competed since a young age and dreamt of participating at the 2020 Olympic Games. She was a versatile athlete who believed that she still had much to learn and plenty of hard work ahead of her before she would be able to perform at the highest level. However, she was convinced that her goal was achievable. She grew up in the northern part of South Africa and trained intensely for several years, but she did not believe that she ever overexerted herself at junior level. Even though she did gruelling speed, distance and basic training, she perceived she could have worked even harder. She had never experienced any difficulties accessing good training facilities.

During her school years, Janey suffered no injuries, but she started sustaining rather serious injuries after school. Her biggest challenge during her transition from junior to senior athletics was overcoming the common decline in performances that female athletes experience at that age. She felt that, even without her injuries, it was necessary to work much harder to stay on the same level that had been so easy to maintain in the preceding years. Consequently, she started to train too much on a regular basis. As a result, she suffered more injuries until her frequent injuries meant she barely had an athletics season at all. Despite her setbacks, she did not change the training programme, which she had been following since school. Moreover, her training programme did not include any gym work. In hindsight she believed this was a mistake. Consequently, another transitional challenge was changing to new training programme; one that would allow her to do well on a senior level. She could not rely solely on her talent.

Janey acknowledged her biggest challenge was battling with injuries during the transition from school to senior level athletics:

"I would get injured every season and not only did these injuries affect the time I had for preparation in terms of training, they often led me to having to end my season earlier than I would have liked to. This was a major setback for me. At school level, you can still perform well purely on talent, but at a senior level, it takes much more work to be competitive."

The continued support of her parents who, without pressurising her, were always there for her, loved athletics and were always willing to help financially by paying for things like coaching fees motivated Janey to continue in her pursuit of success. Her brother, who was also an excellent athlete, also supported and motivated her a great deal. At the time of the interview, she perceived that she had not yet reached her full potential because she has not utilised her opportunities fully. For three years she had been undergoing treatment for her injuries and had been restricted from training at the level that is necessary to succeed at senior athletics. She was currently with a new coach and intended to do everything possible to realise her goal.

In 2012, before the World Juniors in Barcelona, Janey received no financial or emotional support from any external parties to help her prepare for the event. Only one local South African competition was held as preparation and there were no training camps; furthermore, there were three months between the last local competition and the World Junior Championships. She explained that only a few athletes could afford to go abroad to gain experience in European or US competitions and it was difficult to build race fitness in time trials in training. Janey had never communicated with ASA and they had never made enquiries about her needs. She believed that it would make a significant difference if South African athletics organisations became more involved with athletes' careers like in the USA, where talented athletes were identified at a young age and supplied with age appropriate training programmes and monitored by well-qualified coaches. Athletes abroad were also supplied with financial and medical support and could make a good living without being otherwise qualified. Janey expressed the view that if ASA could show our athletes that there was a viable future for them in the sport and follow through on promises, which had been made in the past, it would help in making the transition from junior to senior athletics easier for promising athletes.

Janey believed that in South Africa, many talented athletes choose to prioritise studying towards a degree, which will enable them to live comfortably; consequently, their time available to train is minimised. She added that there is a lack of incentives in South African athletics. Many athletes felt that there was nothing to be gained by competing and feel demotivated as a result. Janey could only spend two hours a day

training and if it had not been for her love of the sport and its community as well as her support structure she might have also given up. Janey expressed the view that ASA and SASCOC could have played a more active role when she moved from school to senior level athletics. She perceived that a lack of support led to athletes preferring to focus on their studies full time:

> *"There is not enough incentive or motivation for us to keep pursuing athletics once we reach a senior level because Athletics South Africa is not supporting us."*

4.3.5 Johan Eksteen

At the time of the interviews, Johan Eksteen who was born in Northern City and had never lived elsewhere was 22 years of age. He believed that this stability had played a part in him becoming a good athlete because of the excellent opportunities the city offered. Johan had been coached by specialist coaches during his primary and high school years, and later at university. He had had access to various training facilities and believed that he still had access to the best facilities in the country. Johan participated in the 200m at the 2010 World Junior Championships in Barcelona. He initially qualified for the 400m as well, but was excluded because two boys ran faster during the final race of the qualification period. He enjoyed running the 200m though and was happy with his time.

Johan's training programme was enhanced as he got older. In primary school, his coach only worked on his speed twice a week and he did very little other training; he believed it was good amount of training for him at the time. When Johan was asked to describe his school coach, he noted that she helped him improve significantly:

> *"She was a very good coach. My training programmes were well-balanced, and I never felt as though I was overtraining."*

In high school, during the off-season, he did a lot more distance and power training. He always concentrated on speed later in the season. The volume of training increased as he got older and it became challenging during the last few years, especially in the off-season when the workload increased to roughly 11 sessions per week. After high school he registered at university and competed at senior level. He

experienced it as an immense difference because, apart from the physical training, he was also suddenly exposed to the professional and psychological factors inherent in athletics.

Johan did not sustain any serious injury during his athletics career, but on occasion he experienced a mechanical muscle twinge when he ran faster later in the season. When this happened, he was helped by a physiotherapist. He never had any assistance externally to overcome this recurring grievance because athletic organisations in South Africa did not have the systems in place to help. At the time of the interview, his parents had paid for everything. When speaking about his recurring injuries, Johan shared:

> *"I didn't receive any financial support from Athletics South Africa, SASCOC, or the HPC when trying to resolve this issue. My parents paid for all my bills because there is no system currently in place to assist athletes in this regard."*

He said that his parents played a huge role in supporting him and helped to provide him with all the things he needed to further his athletic career.

Except for the usual sponsorship of national clothing, flight tickets, lodging and participation fees, no other support was forthcoming from SASCOC , ASA or the SRSA. The training camp, which the national governing body always promised had never materialised, not even before the World Junior Championships. Besides broken promises in relation to development, he perceived that they were not even complying with the rules when they selected national teams. While some athletes were not selected even though they had qualified, others were selected despite not qualifying. He had spoken with ASA, but only to get information about rules and necessities for competitions. He had never asked for additional support.

Johan expressed the view that an organisation like ASA could have made a difference in making the transition from junior to senior level athletics easier for young athletes. He suggested that if there were still under-23 events, athletes who were not extraordinary and who could not compete with the best at a senior level, but who would achieve because of hard work, would stay motivated and not become so overly discouraged by the intense competition. Athletes needed more mid-level competitions to gain experience. He added that the two competitions available

exclusively to students every year were not enough to assist in making the transition. Even at this age, people need recognition to stay motivated. Without recognition, many promising athletes decided to quit because they felt inadequate. Johan thus explained:

> *"Their needs to be more events, not just for senior athletes, but for school level athletes too. There are just not enough events being held. The Varsity Cup is an awesome idea and a great start, but there are only two Varsity Cup competitions per year and the timing of these events are also not favourable. I feel that these events should be prioritised on the competitive calendar and not just squeezed wherever space is found. You cannot build towards something effectively without a good solid foundation. Currently, in athletics, there is no foundation to build from. Only the athletes that perform extremely well have opportunities to continue competing and prolong their season. Other athletes are not catered for in any way. It's almost like an upside-down pyramid. The Varsity Cup Event must be one of the most important events in the racing calendar, and the student season must be substantial, so that it can be used for athletes to progress to the National Championships."*

Johan described his interactions with ASA as always being administrative in nature. He added that they never had any discussions pertaining to support:

> *"The athletes that qualify for the World Junior Championships should be sent on training camps by Athletics South Africa and SASCOC to prepare and train for these events, but this never happens."*

During his transition from school to senior athletics, Johan found the greatest challenge was that races were suddenly 'open' to runners of all ages and experience levels. It was a mental challenge to adjust to the fast qualification standards and not being competitive in so many races. Disheartened athletes quit because they lacked the motivation to work even harder. Johan shared the following:

> *"During school participation it was difficult to establish how well I would perform on a senior level and deciding whether to pursue competitive athletics on a senior level was not only a difficult decision to make, but a risky one. My experience was that I was performing well in the under 23 age group, which existed at the time, but suddenly having to compete against all athletes, from all age groups, with various experience levels was daunting. You suddenly begin to lose many races, which takes its toll mentally."*

Another challenge Johan experienced was maintaining a balance between running and studying; students tended to get more opportunities in terms of competitions and sponsorships. He added that ASA apparently did not have the funds available to assist its athletes.

Johan was able to continue with senior level athletics because he received wonderful support from his parents and the people around him. He was a talented athlete and enjoyed running; thus, it was an easy decision to make. He loved the sport and his competitive spirit also helped keep him motivated to continue. He believed that excellent athletes who qualified 'disappeared' from the athletics scene because of financial pressure. They needed to work for an income or succeed with their studies, but it is almost impossible to work on two things, which required so much time simultaneously. Johan expressed the view that if ASA was managed and audited like a business, under strong financial management with the necessary organisational skills, an income-and-sponsor system and more competitions would lead to much more raw talent being developed and people from lower income groups would receive more opportunities and medical assurances. He added that the Performance Athletics Centre was an excellent example of a system with a sufficient base, which developed sportsmen and women. Once athletes had been developed and could compete at the highest level and if they could really focus on international participation, it would help with the transition challenge.

4.3.6 Rohan Cronje

Rohan who was 25 years of age at the time of the interview participated in the 400m hurdles at the Junior World Championships in Canada in 2010. He was born, raised and schooled in a small town in the North West province and actively participated in athletics. During that time, he trained with the school's middle and long-distance athletes that is 800m and 1500m, which he found difficult because his event was 400m. However, he enjoyed being part of the training group. Fortunately, one of the coaches sometimes helped him to work on his speed. Apart from one shoulder injury that he sustained from a hostel rugby match during the off-season, he had never been injured. Although he believed that he was an average athlete until his final year at school, his parents always supported him, especially when he started performing

well over the shorter distances. Rohan received no support from any athletic organisation in South Africa before the World Championships. He did not even know that SASCOC, ASA and the Junior World Championships existed before he qualified at the South African Championships. He knew even less about athletic sponsorships.

During his school years, he only trained on the school track and the dirt road of a farm. He was unaware of the need for strength training in a gymnasium. In terms of preparation, there was only one competition in South Africa where he was required to qualify again approximately a month before the World Junior Championships. Although he ran close to his personal best time, he was eliminated in the heats of the World Juniors because at the time he just did not have the ability to progress further. He found it difficult to peak again for the World Junior Championships after the South African season had passed, but admitted the experience was valuable.

When Rohan qualified for the World Junior Championships in 2010, he received no support from ASA or SASCOC. The first time he heard from ASA again was in 2016, just before the Olympic Games, for a very brief relay team training session. He acknowledged:

> *"I wasn't even aware of an event such as the World Junior Championships or that one could get support from institutions like Athletics South Africa and SASCOC. I interacted with Athletics South Africa for the first time in 2016 prior to the Olympic Games."*

He experienced the transition from school to senior level athletics as challenging because he suddenly found himself among world-class hurdlers. He was expected to lower his time from 52 seconds to 47 seconds to be competitive. It was a shock to compete at such a high level. During his interview, Rohan said:

> *"A 400m hurdles race at senior level is a completely different race to one at school level. With me not being a top international athlete at school level and only just obtaining the qualifying times for international events, the level at which I needed to compete as a senior was a significant jump."*

Rohan believed that if he had been exposed to athletics at an earlier age or had gained more experience and knowledge about training methods, he may have benefitted. He would not have been able to pay for a tertiary education as well as

training; thus, financial support would have been very welcome. He had a study bursary from a university. If he had finished his studies in the required four years, he would have stopped competing in athletics at the age of 22 because he had no support at the time and his times were still slower than 50 seconds. But as long as he continued with his studies, he could continue running. At the time of the interview, he had a sponsor, which meant he did not have to pay gym fees and he could eat lunch for free.

Rohan believed that many athletes stop competing because they were impatient and wanted to achieve success too quickly. He expressed the view that athletes should persist if they continue to show improvement. It took him six years to make a breakthrough and to qualify for the Olympics. In his opinion,

> *"Sportsmen should not study full-time. Registering for a few subjects per semester will allow for enough training time and reward you with a degree at the end of it all, even if it takes seven years to complete a four-year degree."*

He believed that if South African athletics organisations and universities worked together, school athletes could be monitored in training squads throughout the transitional period. In this way, universities could help support these school athletes until they became competitive at a senior level. He also said that athletes should be supported financially. Athletes had little or no support from ASA. He thus expressed his view:

> *"The provinces could also take some responsibility. In this way, the support network will be broader, and more talent will be identified to be developed. Because there is so little support to athletes, few people know that you can make a living through competing – and then they run away to go and play rugby!"*

Rohan is an example of an athlete who successfully transitioned from school to senior level athletics. He advised other athletes to be patient:

> *"It took nearly two years for me to start seeing the results in terms of what I was attempting to achieve as a senior athlete. If you continue to show improvement you should not quit. I would also suggest that Athletics South Africa and universities work together to support athletes financially from a much earlier stage in their careers."*

4.3.7 Yolande Pienaar

The event for which the 26-year-old Yolande qualified to participate in the 2010 Junior World Championships was the long jump. She represented South Africa at the African Championships, World Championships, African Games, Olympic Games and Universiade. She grew up in the West Rand and started her career under a high school coach who did not train her intensively. By the time she reached senior level, she was training under her fourth coach. She perceived her biggest transitional challenge to be changing from school coaching to professional coaching because the training sessions were far more serious and intense. Yolande stated that she did not sustain any serious injuries during her school years, but as a senior athlete she experienced many injuries. Her parents played an important role in her career and they paid for her coaches as well as provided for all her needs. Her coach also motivated her. She knew nothing about ASA or SASCOC and she was never invited to a training camp prior to the World Juniors Championships. Her parents often had to transport her to venues where there were better training facilities. With regards to her early correspondence with ASA and SASCOC, Yolande said:

> *"I received no support from Athletics South Africa or SASCOC to assist in my attempt to qualify for the World Junior Championships in 2010. I was not even aware that these governing bodies existed."*

In 2013, as a senior athlete, Yolande was on the OPEX programme for a while, but was taken off the programme when she did not perform well enough. She did not feel that the programme helped much and even experienced more stress at the time. She was financed, but many of her till slips were questioned and not paid for. Each month, she endured a long and argumentative process to get her money. She shared:

> *"ASA and SASCOC should definitely take up a bigger role in school athletes' lives, by possibly paying for coaching, organising training camps, and sending junior athletes to foreign countries to gain experience. It would make the transition to senior athletics much easier because parents cannot afford to pay for the things necessary to further their childrens' athletics careers forever".*

She also said:

> *"If Athletics South Africa was more involved and visible from an athlete's perspective – especially early on in an athlete's career, it would make a big difference for athletes when transitioning from school to senior level athletics. This could be in the form of arranging training camps, providing coaches, and taking financial responsibilities away from parents. Universities are also able to provide support, possibly through making nutritious food available to athletes for aiding in recovery. Access to physiotherapists and biokineticists leads to healthy athletes who are ready to perform optimally to help with the transition challenge".*

Yolande's biggest challenge during her career occurred during her first year at university. As she was living on her own in a flat, she had to be completely self-sufficient and it was a major adjustment. When she decided, towards the end of her school career, that she wanted to continue with long jump, her mother took her for professional coaching in a neighbouring city. On Saturdays she would have two training sessions, but she was never the only athlete and thus, did not receive the coach's undivided attention during these sessions. She credited her parents for motivating her to continue when other juniors gave up as she did not want to let them down. It is with regards to the specific difficulties that athletes experience during this period that Yolande believed mentorship could have had a significant impact on athletes' future success. Yolande described her experience with regards to mentorship as follows:

> *"I had so many female athletes contacting me to arrange a social meeting to have a coffee during my time at school. I got the feeling that these young athletes are seeking inspiration and advice from senior athletes. There is definitively a need for guidance amongst school level athletes – a mentor, and a more senior athlete to look up to."*

She also perceived that sports bursaries from universities helped because they assisted with food and lodging, but athletes need specific food to recover and perform properly as well as physiotherapy sessions. Doctors were also needed at times. Although professional coaching was also expensive, she did not think ASA did enough to help develop athletes. She also believed that senior athletes should be more involved with school athletes and vice versa. This would inspire junior athletes and provide them with opportunities to gain important knowledge that was relevant to the professional sport. She would be willing to mentor school athletes

if they would be willing to be mentored. She remembered how she felt as a school athlete, and the respect and admiration she had for senior athletes.

4.3.8. Michelle Du Plessis

Michelle's family moved around frequently, but she spent most of her high school career living in the provinces of Gauteng and Limpopo. In 2012, she qualified to participate in the 800m at the World Junior Championships in Barcelona. During the off-season she competed in cross-country, which gave her the endurance to also participate in the 1500m during the track season. . During her high school career, she used to practice on a grass track six times a week. She gradually moved from distance training in the off-season to training on the track during the track season. She also completed road runs every morning: On Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, she ran six kilometres and on Sunday mornings, 10 kilometres. Fridays were her rest days. Her morning runs would be at a fast pace, about 4 minutes per kilometre. She was a committed athlete.

Michelle had suffered three stress fractures as well as other minor injuries for which she needed medical treatment and rest. She believed that the rest helped her and that every time she came back from a period of rest she was able to perform well. With regards to her injuries, Michelle shared:

> *"I went to see doctors and rested. I think resting helped me to recover from my injuries. In a way I think my body was telling me to slow down. Every time I returned to training after an injury I felt able to compete, regardless of the training I had missed. When I recovered I felt good, but it was a long process to recover fully. Although, in a way, I felt the off time that injuries gave me led to some much-needed rest."*

Her parents played an important role in her athletics career; they supported her without pressurising her. Their wish for her was always just to do the best she could.

Michelle moved to Delta, but because of an injury she only stayed there for six months. Yet, in the short time that she was there she experienced their wonderful facilities and support structures, which included coaching staff, and medical and

physiotherapy services. During the six months that Michelle studied and trained at the University of Oregon, she experienced a major difference in the support structures, facilities and coaching compared to what she had become accustomed to in South Africa:

> *"It is just completely different in America compared to here in South Africa. The facilities and coaching staff are just amazing."*

When comparing this to local support structures, Michelle said she never received any support from a South African organisation and that until a month before the World Junior Championships in 2012, she was not even aware that she was in the team to compete. At the time she was only 17 years old. She explained:

> *"Because I did not know about the upcoming participation the championships I had already started my annual cross-country training, leaving me with only a month to prepare on the track."*

She believed had she been given more preparation time, she would have been able to perform better in Barcelona. She added:

> *"I think a school athlete should have a long-term goal and that, during school, she should be made to realise that the South African Championships is just a step towards that goal. Other athletics experiences are just as important, and it is not necessary for athletes to pressurise themselves into pleasing their coaches or winning National medals for their schools."*

Michelle thought that some athletes could progress to senior athletics because their dreams of becoming successful motivated them to continue while others quit. Those who were willing to work hard looked for support structures to guide them with the management aspects of athletics so that they could focus on following their coach's instructions and taking care of themselves. Unfortunately, many school athletes dropped out because of a lack of support and the consequences of ending up in harmful environments. Michelle acknowledged that since retiring she had thought about running again because she missed the sport. However, she had chosen to keep active by cycling for the moment.

4.3.9 Herman De Villiers

He was born and raised in the Free State. His father was his coach and thus, supported him in the dual role of coach and parent. As a young athlete, he mainly ran the 1500m. He only really began to focus on the 800m during his final year at school. He never sustained any serious injuries. During his matric year in 2010, Herman qualified to run the 800m at the World Junior Championships in Canada, but because of a misunderstanding he was left behind and never participated. During the qualification period, between the National Junior Championships and the World Junior Championships, he chose to run in the 1500m event at competitions to build fitness. He had already qualified for the 800m, but did not know he needed to run another qualifying time for that event.

While Herman was preparing for the World Junior Championships, he did not receive substantial support from ASA, SASCOC and Mid Province Athletics. These bodies left him and his father to take care of his preparation on their own; in other words, they had to pay for everything. Fortunately, he had access to sufficient training facilities. As a school athlete he never personally interacted with ASA; he only knew about them because he qualified to get into various athletic teams. Herman never received support in the form of training camps, medical support and flight tickets to participate at other locations. His biggest challenge when transitioning from junior to senior athletics was adjusting to the level of competition:

> *"As junior I was accustomed to winning and was confident. As a senior one must be patient for a few years to get used to the higher-level competition. I think that if there were a system, which supported juniors during the transitional time, it would make it much easier for athletes. I considered going to America after school because it was an option for me, but eventually I decided to stay in South Africa"*.

Herman believed that if junior athletes were placed into training squads, like those of the Germans and Americans, it would prevent many talented athletes from quitting athletics. He explained that, South African universities played the most important role in supporting athletes and if it had not been for the support provided by these institutions, even more athletes would have stopped competing. He

added if athletics organisations could provide support in the same way that the universities do, for instance, by offering bursaries of R20, 000 or R30, 000 per year and assist with medical and/or physiotherapy costs, it would benefit South African athletes in the long run. He perceived ASA appeared to do the absolute minimum to help junior athletes adjust during the transition period. He thought that the lack of a support system was the key reason for top class junior athletes quitting athletics. Competing at an elite level was time and labour intensive and athletes realised that if they could not earn an income from athletics they would need to spend their time on something, which was going to help them make a living. They were demotivated by the idea of an athletics career without worthwhile rewards.

Furthermore, Herman expressed the view that it was illogical for SASCOC to only begin supporting athletes when they were successful enough to be considered amongst the top athletes in the world because such athletes did not really need the support as they already had external sponsors. Upcoming athletes needed the financial backing so that they too could develop into successful senior athletes. He also believed that the qualifying standards set by ASA were too stringent and this demotivated athletes. Junior athletes were under the impression that qualifying was unattainable. When the IAAF's standards were used in 2015 and 2016, they were attainable by more athletes and athletes worked diligently because they felt they had a fair chance of qualifying. If qualifying standards were not adjusted to an attainable level, this could result in another period of underperforming athletes in South African athletics. Herman thus voiced his opinion about ASA's rigid qualifying standards:

> *"There is definitely a huge jump from competing at school to competing at a senior level in terms of qualification standards. This gap needs to be minimised by organisations such as Athletics South Africa, not made bigger."*

4.3.10 Petronelle Botha

At the time of the interviews, Petronelle was 24 years old. She had been selected to be part of the 2010 squad to participate in the World Youth Championships, where she ran a personal best and to train for the 2010 World Junior

Championships. Unfortunately, she was forced to withdraw from the team three weeks prior to the World Junior Championships because of an injury.

She grew up in Gauteng and trained with coaches employed by her school until she started training with a professional coach in her penultimate school year. Her training programme at school was not intense, but when she started training professionally her workload increased dramatically. She was 17 years old when she sustained a serious hamstring injury. It took almost a year of rehabilitation, physiotherapy, plus strengthening and stability exercises for her to recover. She did not have any support from an athletics organisation at the time and was totally dependent on her parents. She was convinced that had her parents not been there to support her, she would have stopped competing in athletics after school. Even as a school athlete she was a paying member of the university's athletics club, which permitted her to make use of all their facilities. She did not know anyone involved with ASA and apart from one or two e-mails from them (ASA) in the previous year, she had had no interaction with them.

Petronelle's biggest challenge was the management aspect of being an athlete. She explained:

> *"There is so much more that happens than what happens on the track. The training, the coaching, the body maintenance, paying for physiotherapists and biokineticists are all necessary when preparing for competitions, and school athletes particularly don't have the resources to pay for those things. In fact, no South African athlete can continue without a support system."*

She also mentioned that rigid qualifying standards had affected her negatively.

> *"The qualifying standards are so high, they are almost unattainable - like a carrot being dangled in front of you the whole time without you being able to grab it. They do not motivate you and the organisations make no compromises. I remember a few years ago the B-standard was 13.15 seconds and in 2014 when I ran 13.16 seconds, they changed the qualifying time to 13.00 seconds. This really discouraged me. It is like the goal posts are being moved so frequently."*

Her passion for athletics, and loyalty towards her training group kept her in the sport. Petronella wanted to encourage young athletes and be a role model for

them. It was her dream to be competitive at an international level. Furthermore, she wanted to qualify for the Olympic Games.

It was difficult for Petronella to accept her dip in form during her first year as a senior athlete, especially as her times as a school athlete were better than what they were then. Her body had matured as a female and she was no longer in a school system with a set routine. Few athletes survived this. If it had not been for parental support at the time she would not have continued competing. At university, on her own, she had to scout for information related to getting involved in the athletics system and there were many distractions. She felt insignificant among the experienced athletes. When she felt insignificant, she found it easy to train too much.

Petronella expressed the view that ASA should play a role in making it easier for junior athletes to go through the transitional phase. If there was an efficient support system in relation to training groups, coaching, medical support and information, it would motivate athletes. Some were daunted by the stringent qualifying standards because they had not had the opportunity to compete progressively. She believed that the qualifying standards at a senior level had a negative effect on athletes because they seemed unobtainable. She believed that athletes needed stepping stones to improve. In addition, if the qualifying times were unrealistic, athletes would quit before they reached their full potential. More opportunities, like the World Student Games should be created for athletes to work towards and to allow them to set incremental goals over a period of six to eight years.

She regarded her support system that consisted of her parents, friends and the training club at her university as a blessing. She believed that this support system made all the difference in preventing her from dropping out. Although she did not compete at the Commonwealth Games or World Student Games, she was a gold medallist at the African Championships.

4.3.11 Kevin Vermaak

Kevin, who was 23 years old at the time of the interviews, participated in the 400m at the first Youth Olympic Games in Singapore in 2010, where he won a silver medal. He also competed at the 2012 World Junior Championships in Barcelona. He grew up in Gauteng and had the same coach for the duration of his school career. The coach was very strict and professional, but they parted ways when Kevin moved to another school. Kevin then trained under the supervision of a different coach and it was at this time that he sustained many injuries. He related that he had always trained hard, even as a school athlete, and when he was in a training group with other athletes who were in better shape than what he was, it felt ideal because he was able to push himself to a new level. He sustained several injuries. Just before the World Championships in 2012 he tore a groin muscle during his first year at university, which necessitated an operation. He struggled with this injury because he did not have a professional support structure that could help him to overcome the injury in a short time. Every time he started training with the group, he would encounter the same problem. During the 2014 season, he tore a hamstring on the same leg. Just as he began feeling strong again, he had to have an operation on his Achilles tendon because it had thickened. As a school athlete, his greatest frustration was dealing with injuries. Tuckers Athletics Club lacked the facilities to help athletes recover after intensive training sessions. If Kevin had been in a system where he could have received help from a professional athletics organisation, which treated good athletes as assets and which could help to get them back on the track after serious injuries, he might not have wasted five years on the side lines.

Kevin's parents played an important role to provide for the financial needs of his training and they were always there for him when he needed them. However, t he acknowledged that his coach had the greatest influence on his career, as it was from him he learned discipline and perseverance. His parents still supported him after school, but the reality was that they also wanted him to become independent. He also attributed much to his training group, who were all world-class athletes.
Kevin stated that SASCOC organised good training camps and team building events in 2010 before the Youth Olympic Games. The athletes were put on a

SASCOC programme: The ‘Road to London’. They also had an interview with him when he returned from Singapore and made a big display of him on TV, but in the following years he never really heard from them again, not even when he ran well during his final school year. He did not get support from them in any form after they had promised in 2010 to put the Singapore performers on a specific programme. The promise never became a reality.

At the time of the interview, Kevin had stopped competing, but he intended making a comeback shortly. He was looking forward to and dreaming of the Commonwealth Games, the 19th Athletics World Championships and the 2020 Olympic Games in Japan. The last time he had participated was in 2013!

Apart from many injuries, Kevin experienced the transitional phase from school to senior level athletics as challenging because he struggled to adapt to competing against runners of all age groups and experience levels. He said:

> *“I experienced school athletics as easy, but the transition to senior level was a major one. Competitions on a senior level are of a much higher standard.”*

He was fortunate that during that time all the top South African runners in his event were also in his age group so he did not feel overwhelmed by having to compete against even more experienced athletes. However, because of his injuries, he never really experienced serious competition at a senior level.

Kevin believed that school athletes would be motivated to continue competing if they were given the opportunities to attend international training sessions and run against other world-class athletes from a young age. He added that athletes’ willpower to persevere and succeed is another factor that, in conjunction with sufficient financial and managerial support, would prevent athletes from giving up. He believed that it may be expensive to maintain a world-class competitive body, but that is what prevented injuries. Kevin was doing an international diploma at an academy and worked on his family’s farm, but his goal was to get back on track – literally and figuratively!

4.3.12 Stella Davis

Stella won her first national title when she was in Grade 9. She decided to quit netball and hockey to train specifically for track and field. In 2012, she was awarded for her commitment by qualifying and participating in the World Junior Championships in Barcelona and the World Youth Games in France.

Stella's first coach was her mother. Stella shared that her mother was never overly strict, and she never had to run further than 150m. She enjoyed this because it gave her time to play more often. It was difficult for her mother to adapt to fulfilling the roles of a stringent coach and a caring parent at the same time. Consequently, Stella started training under different coaches. Her training programmes were never rigorous and she did more speed training than distance training. At times, when she was aware that a training session would be difficult, she was reluctant to go to training; however, this did not happen regularly. Her greatest challenge and biggest frustration as a school athlete was dealing with the injuries that she sustained. She believed a good physiotherapist could have minimised her injuries.

When Stella qualified for the World Junior Championships in Barcelona in 2012, she received almost no financial support or guidance from ASA or SASCOC. She explained:

> *"They paid for my trip, but not for anything else. I also did not attend, nor was I invited to attend any form of training camp. When competing at the Word Junior Championships I felt very nervous, as I was not used to competing at such a prestigious event. I did not perform well. I feel Athletics South Africa could have provided more support by giving me opportunities to participate in international events leading up to the World Junior Championships."*

She further explained:

> "*No other organisation sponsored me in any way either. We didn't even attend a training camp or any additional competitions to gain experience. There was a three-month gap between the South African Championships and the World Junior Championships. I really felt the pressure at the World Junior Championships because it was my first time running at such a high-level competition. I didn't run well at all."*

As a school athlete, she had access to training facilities in South Africa and as a college athlete, in the USA. She attended the University of Wyoming in the USA during her transitional years, which made it even more difficult for her to adjust. She trained under a new coach on a new training programme, which was completely different to anything she had done in South Africa. It felt as though they were preparing her for middle distance events. She did no speed training at all, but plenty of strength training in the gym. She was there for nearly a year and sustained many injuries. She hurt her feet and her knee. She believed this was the result of the way she was running and doing heavy weights and intense sessions in the gym.

Stella's parents, who were competent athletes, always kept her motivated. She wanted to follow in their footsteps. Her father had participated in the Olympic Games when he was younger and her mother was always very supportive, which solidified Stella's goal to become a professional athlete. She believed that she would have done better after school if she had stayed in South Africa. However, she added,

> *"It was difficult to know at the time and staying in South Africa may have become a decision I would regret as well. The South African facilities and support programmes cannot be compared to those in America, but we do have competent coaches who are knowledgeable enough. We have all the coaches necessary for different aspects of athletics – such as strength training and track training. However, Americans provide an entire system to support their athletes, and that is where they gain the advantage over us."*

Stella expressed the view that the athletes who did not retire during the difficult transitional years were those who were provided with adequate support or those who had agents. Unfortunately, there were very few athletes in South Africa provided with this kind of support. Consequently, many of them gave up or went overseas. Even when some athletes qualified to compete at major championships, they were not included in the national team because the budget in South African athletics was inadequate to provide for them.

Stella stated that she believed that a South Africa athletics system needed to be created that placed talented athletes in a team with an organisation like ASA or

SASCOC that would pay them a monthly allowance. Furthermore, she believed that their medical and physical needs had to be provided for and training camps had to be organised every six weeks. She perceived that such a system would have motivated her, allowed her to achieve more in the sport and helped her deal with frustrations. She would have gained the necessary experience and been ready for a higher level of competition at the age of 17 when she had to run her first international race. Other young athletes would also have experienced similar benefits, allowing them to remain relaxed and perform better. South African athletes needed to be exposed to international competitions before they participated at a World Championships or Olympic Games.

At the time of the interview, Stella was 23 years old and was completing her third year at university where she was studying towards a degree in Financial Management. She aimed to do her master's degree and become a chartered accountant; thus, it was important for her to focus on academics. If she could have turned back the clock and changed something during her athletics career, she would have chosen to stay with her mother as her coach.

4.4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.4.1 Support systems

During the interviews, it was evident that financial and emotional support played a significant role in how smoothly and successfully athletes advanced to the senior level. Parents were the athletes' primary and, in most cases, sole financial and motivating support. Although 11 parents supported their children financially and/or emotionally, one parent was hesitant to support her child's athletics career. Parents and coaches played the most significant role during school participation.

Junior athletes also wanted to receive guidance from more experienced athletes as a form of mentorship. Athletes at school level should be given the opportunity to interact with senior level athletes on a regular basis to gain guidance from mentorship-type figures.

What was particularly notable was how poorly athletes were supported by official structures such as governing bodies of national athletics. As noted in Chapter Two,

according to SASCOC, it supports athletes in the form of annual grants that cover the athletes' basic expenditures relating to training and preparation such as travelling expenses, coaching fees, equipment, medical and scientific testing, and training camps to aid potential future medal winners by means of Operation Excellence Programme (OPEX) (SASCOC 2014). Although there is intent to support athletes and the need for support has been acknowledged, the findings from the interviews revealed the processes that take place may not always concur with what SASCOC intends to achieve. Three themes pertaining to inadequate governing body involvement and support were identified during the interviews:

1) **Ignorance**: 8 of the 12 participants indicated that either they were not aware that governing bodies like ASA or SASCOC existed or they did not know what the role of these bodies was.
2) **Incentives**: The athletes reported that they received little to no financial or medical support from governing bodies like ASA and SASCOC once they had qualified for the World Junior Championships.
3) **Involvement**: There was little to no involvement from governing bodies during the period leading up to the World Junior Championships in relation to assisting athletes' preparation for these events by providing training camps.

Although there were cases where athletes received financial support from ASA and SASCOC, these cases were rare and the support was minimal; for example, while plane tickets were paid for, the athletes were left to cover all other expenses when travelling abroad. The athletes, however, expressed how significant even minimal support was, which indicates how much of an impact improved support systems could have.

It is thus evident that effective support systems are an essential element to ensure smooth transition from school to senior athletics.

4.4.2 Coaching, training programmes and facilities

During the interviews it became evident that the athletes experienced a variety of training programmes during their time at school. All the participants expressed

positive feedback in relation to their coaches and training programmes during school level track and field athletics.

All the participants confirmed that they had access to an athletics track. They also indicated that their coaches had played significant roles during the early years of their athletic careers. In one case, a participant mentioned that if it had not been for his coach, he would have quit a long time ago.

A negative point that a few athletes made in relation to their training programmes was the considerable difference between the programmes they followed during school and those they were asked to follow after finishing school. The athletes explained that they did not train too intensely during their school athletic careers and that there was a significant change from the training load at school compared to the more intensive training load at a senior level. When describing their training regimes during school and as senior athletes, many of the athletes also stated that the introduction of additional strength and gym sessions was a challenge.

4.4.3 Injuries and inadequate treatment

Injuries are inevitable in sport. However, when athletes get injured, they experience anxiety and frustration. If they then still have to worry about the costs involved in rehabilitation, it can become overwhelming. 11 of the 12 participant athletes did not have any financial backing to help them in situations like this.

The findings suggested that athletes did not give up because they got injured, but rather because these injuries were not treated and never healed. In the cases where the athletes were able to rehabilitate their injuries successfully, those athletes often went on to transition successfully to senior level athletics. Notably, not all athletes found injuries their greatest challenge during the transition from school to senior level participation in track and field in South Africa. However, the athletes who did not have access to facilities or professional services to rehabilitate and recover from the injuries indicated this as their main challenge.

4.4.4 Unfair local qualifying standards

The minimum criteria for junior and senior athletes to be selected for national teams as specified by ASA are presented in Tables 4.2 and 4.3. The criteria are listed with specific qualifying times and distances for the various track and field events. A detailed list of the criteria may be found in Addendum G.

It is noteworthy that ASA list both A standards (red) and B standards (blue). To guarantee their qualification for an international event, athletes are expected to achieve the A standard. The B standard is the same as the standard that the IAAF sets internationally. ASA has stated that athletes who achieve the B standard may be considered for selection, but very rarely do these athletes ever get selected to compete. ASA has explained that they decided to set more rigid qualifying standards than what is deemed appropriate because they only want to send athletes to major championships if they are going to be competing for medals.

Table 4.2: Minimum selection criteria for junior athletes: international events

ASA Men	IAAF	Event	ASA Women	IAAF
A-Standard	B-Standard		A-Standard	B-Standard
10.36	10.55*	100m	11.59	11.80*
20.77	21.35*	200m	23.48	24.20*
46.56	47.70*	400m	52.76	55.25*
01:46.77	1:49.50*	800m	02:05.12	2:09.20*
03:43.40	3:48.00*	1500m	04:11.66	4:28.20*
-	-	3000m	09:03.80	9:35.00*
13:38.75	14:15.00*	5000m	15.51.30	16:40.00*
28:52.80	31:10.00*	10000m	-	-
08:37.33	9:10.00*	3000m SC	09:53.70	10:45.00*
13.54	14.20*	110m H / 100 H	13.38	14.20*
50.90	53.20*	400m H	57.97	60.75*
2.21	2.16*	High jump	1.84	1.83*
5.40	5.10*	Pole Vault	4.20	4.05*
7.63	7.55*	Long Jump	6.20	6.20*
16.12	15.60*	Triple Jump	13.54	13.00*
19.71	18.25*	Shot Put	16.24	15.50*
60.76	55.00*	Discus Throw	54.17	48.00*
75.62	68.00*	Hammer Throw	62.71	57.50*
73.52	68.70*	Javelin Throw	54.31	49.50*
77.29	7200*	Decathlon/Heptathlon	5665.00	5300*
40:48.43	44:20.00*	10000m Race Walk	45:59.92	51:00.00*

Table 4.3: Minimum selection criteria for senior athletes: international events

ASA Men	IAAF	Event	ASA Women	IAAF
A-Standard	B-Standard		A-Standard	B-Standard
10.03	10.16*	100m	11.10	11.32*
20.31	20.50*	200m	22.65	23.20*
44.91	45.40*	400m	50.69	52.20*
01:44.84	01:46.00*	800m	01:58.81	01:01.50*
03.36.20	03:36.20*	1500m	04:05.99	04:07.00*
13:24.59	13:25.00*	5000m	15:09.82	15:24.00
27:30.10	28:00.00*	10000m	31:12.49	32:15.00*
02:12.03	02:19.00*	Marathon	02:28.48	02:45.00*
08:21.20	8:30.00*	3000m SC	09:30.06	09:45.00
13.38	13.47*	110m H / 100 H	12.77	13.00*
48.50	49.40*	400m H	54.77	56.20*
2.29	2.29*	High jump	1.93	1.93*
5.70	5.70*	Pole Vault	4.53	4.50*
8.15	8.15*	Long Jump	5.70	6.70*
16.90	16.85*	Triple Jump	14.17	14.15*
20.53	20.50*	Shot Put	18.30	17.75*
65.00	65.00*	Discus Throw	61.00	61.00*
77.00	77.00*	Hammer Throw	71.00	71.00*
83.00	83.99*	Javelin Throw	62.00	62.00*
8227	8100*	Decathlon/Heptathlon	6306	6200*
01:20.31	01:24.99*	20km Race Walk	01:30.14	01:36.00*
03:46.47	04:06.00*	50km Race Walk	*	*
38.47		4 x 100m	42.81	
02:59.73		4 x 400m	03:24.99	

* Subject to IAAF/IOC Changes

2017 - 2020 ASA team selection criteria (ASA 2018)[8]

When viewed on their own, these standards do not reveal much. However, when comparing the qualifying standards, it immediately becomes evident that there is a large gap between the junior qualification standards and senior qualification standards. Furthermore, the local qualifying standard (A-standard) has been arbitrarily and non-scientifically determined by ASA and is far more stringent than the IAAF's standard (B-standard). To select their athletes, all competing countries worldwide use the international IAAF standard.

Consider the Male 400m Hurdles:

As juniors, athletes are expected to run faster than 50.90 seconds to represent South Africa internationally. This would have been fast enough to finish in the top six

[8] *To be updated annually after the international season concluded.*

at the 2018 World Junior Championships in Tampere and is 2.30 seconds faster than the time expected by the IAAF. Subsequently, as seniors, athletes are expected to run a time less than 48.50 seconds to represent South Africa. This is 2.40 seconds faster than that needed to run as juniors and 0.90 seconds faster than the qualification standard set by the IAAF. Athletes running 48.50 seconds in 2017 would have been ranked amongst the top 15 athletes in the world, and this is the standard expected by ASA just to be selected to compete at a major championship.

It is blatantly evident that this works against athletes who would qualify to compete internationally and is a demotivating factor. Rather than enabling athletes, national organisations have placed more hurdles on the track.

4.5 INTERPRETATION OF MAIN FINDINGS

The findings of this chapter are interpreted in accordance with the four major themes that were identified.

First, athletes shared much in relation to the support systems that are associated with athletics. A consideration of the stories the athletes shared about the challenges that they faced when transitioning from school to senior level track and field athletics, significant changes, especially for elite athletes, need to be considered within the structures that governing bodies use to support and interact with athletes. The quality and consistency of familial support at all levels, that is, emotional and financial is unquestionable. Rather, the role that governing bodies play in the preparation of athletes leading up to major events like the World Junior Championships is problematic. Apart from poor communication, insufficient funding and a general lack of interest, athletes are treated like commodities. They ought rather to be included at all levels of decision-making and have their needs and opinions valorised. Although the athletes identified various differing and unique challenges that they faced while transitioning to senior level competition, it was apparent that the majority of these problems involved a lack of support from governing bodies and could be significantly reduced through increased financial support.

Second, intermediary competitions could serve as a support structure for young

aspiring athletes. An attempt at a competitive developmental circuit for athletics in the South Africa has been started through the Varsity Athletics challenge. The only problem with this effort is that it targets athletes registered at universities who only make up about half of the population of elite young athletes in South Africa. However, these competitions could be a springboard for an internationally competitive circuit, which South Africa had in the past. SASCOC also started LTPD (SASCOC 2014) as noted in Chapter Two. Both the Varsity Cup and LTPD are in their initial stages, but hopefully over the long-term, they will provide the framework for arranging the complex array of training processes into a logical, and observational and scientific based schedule to bring about optimal improvements in performance.

The second theme was coaching and training plans. The athletes seemed to be generally satisfied with coaches in South Africa. Furthermore, many had excellent relationships with their coaches. Although they perceived the general standard of South African coaching to be high, improvements can be made to government-aided coaching education, national training camps and educating athletes on what training programmes they should be following.

Third, a few athletes stated they had problems with overcoming injuries and some even said that injuries were the biggest challenge they had faced while transitioning. Interestingly, athletes who had adequate resources to get the correct treatment overcame their injuries with greater ease than the athletes who did not have access to appropriate medical and rehabilitation services. Very little support is provided to athletes for medical expenses and injury rehabilitation, but rather athletes are left mostly to fend for themselves when suffering from serious injuries. This is obviously an area that can be significantly improved by governing bodies; however, the underlying problem remains financial support. With adequate financial support, athletes would be able to obtain the correct medical care.

4.6. CONCLUSION

The experiences of athletes who were faced with the transition from school to senior athletics have been narrated in this chapter. Four themes emerged from the analysis of the data:

- support systems
- coaching and training plans
- injuries
- qualification standards.

These themes encapsulate some of the challenges that our elite athletes experience on their path to success at the highest level. In order to minimise these challenges and foster future talent, changes are needed specifically at an organisational level, particularly in relation to adequate financial support.

CHAPTER FIVE

SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the significance of the study and possible implications of the findings are discussed. The aim of this study was to establish an in-depth understanding of post-school athlete dropout in South African track and field athletics in view of the immense loss of potential when South African athletes transition from school to senior level athletics.

Accordingly, the study was guided by the central research question: What is the etiology of the loss of athletic potential from school to senior athletic level? The question was addressed through the formulation of four sub-questions. First, what challenges are experienced by school track and field athletes after competing internationally and wanting to continue participation at this level? Second, why do junior athletes stop participating in athletics after competing at international level? Third, what type of sustainable support is provided by governing bodies such as SRSA to school track and field athletes after competing internationally? Finally, how can support for track and field athletes be improved once they start competing internationally as juniors? In answering the central research question, the research findings were compared with those found in the relevant literature. Based on what was gleaned from this method, the findings presented in Chapter Four are elaborated, conclusions are drawn, the significance and implications of these findings are discussed, and recommendations are made.

5.2 CONTEXTUALISATION OF THE RESEARCH

Before the findings are discussed, it is important to reiterate the main aspects of the literature provided in Chapters One and Two.

According to the literature, post-school dropouts in track and field athletics are not a problem unique to South Africa or to the sport of track and field (see section 3.2.1).

In many countries, most children seem to stop competing in sports between the ages of 12 and 17. The literature also identified important transitions throughout the careers of athletes, including the transition from school to adult sports and the numerous challenges, which arise during these transitions. Although these challenges were unique to the environment and context of specific athletes, they included inadequate support systems, psychological challenges such as a lack of self-belief, challenges arising from early specialisation, physical challenges like injuries, physiological challenges, financial challenges and personal obligations.

From an international perspective, the literature suggested parental support, structured athletics programmes and improved talent identification to combat dropout in sports. The literature also recommended promoting fun and intrinsic interest in the sport so as to prevent dropouts. This has been specifically adopted in Great Britain where the concept of Fun-in- Athletics has been promoted significantly.

In relation to the prevention of athlete dropout in South Africa specifically, there are a a host of documents and systems in the literature, which are intended to support athletes and prevent them from quitting sports. SRSA is the main authority for all sports in South Africa, SASCOC is primarily responsible for the development, implementation and monitoring of a high-performance programme for national athletes, and ASA is the governing body of track and field in South Africa (Athletics South Africa 2008). The literature noted that attempts have been made by the relevant authorities to prevent the problem of dropout in athletics: SASCOC's Operation Excellence Programme and ASA's strategic turnaround plan document these attempts, but the research does not suggest any conclusions about how effective these attempts have been (Sport and Recreation South Africa, 2011).

5.3 BRIEF OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.3.1. The challenges experienced by school track and field athletes after competing internationally and wanting to continue participating at this level.

The literature revealed that transitional challenges are common throughout the world in a variety of sports. It appeared from the interviews that the dominant challenge

faced by athletes as they transitioned to senior level athletics was financial constraints including medical necessities, coaching fees, travelling expenses, entry fees and equipment fees. At junior level athletics, all major costs involved with competing were catered for by schools or parents. However, at a senior level, the financial burden of competing became the athlete's responsibility. Adult athletes begin to feel guilty when their parents pay for their performance needs and they are unable to reciprocate.

Athletes also noted that they found it difficult to harmonise their continued participation in athletics with their higher education or further studies. The competition season in South Africa often coincides with semester tests or examinations. Long and intensive hours are needed for thorough preparation for competitions, which leaves very little time for studies and/or other employment.

At a psychological level, transition from school level, where athletes have become accustomed to winning races constantly and producing outstanding performances within their age groups, to senior level where the competition is more difficult, requires personal adjustment and a refocus on the self. The athletes shared that at a senior level, they were surrounded by professional athletes who were much older than they were. Therefore, it was exponentially more difficult to produce impressive performances as constantly as they had done at school. The psychological effect of not winning races and not receiving the same amount of credit was an immense challenge, which resulted in some athletes giving up. Simultaneously, the physiological effects that athletes encountered compounded their psychological challenges. This was especially true in relation to the menstruation cycles and hormonal imbalances of r the female athletes that were interviewed.

Furthermore, athletes transitioning from school level to senior level are confronted with the rigid qualifying standards set at senior level athletics. The interviews showed that these standards can be very demoralising for junior athletes coming into senior athletics. Like the increased levels of competitions, the qualifying standards had negative psychological effects on athletes. At a senior level, the qualification standards are far more rigid than at junior level. Consequently, most of the junior athletes initially found it difficult to achieve these qualification standards. Not being

able to qualify for international events or, more importantly, feeling as though the qualifying standards were completely unattainable, discouraged athletes and caused a major decrease in their motivation.

Furthermore, the training programmes at school leveland senior level differ tremendously. The participants shared that athletes faced a drastic change in training regimes when transitioning from junior level athletics to senior level athletics. Many athletes made remarks about the differing coaching approaches of junior and senior level coaches. The training programmes were often much more intense than they had previously experienced and included certain training aspects such as weight training that they were not familiar with. Most of the athletes who suffered more frequent injuries at a senior level blamed the sudden change of their training regimes for their increased injuries.

The challenges identified by athletes during the interviews included many of the challenges identified in the literature. The interviews also identified financial challenges, other obligations, psychological challenges and physical challenges as reasons for athletes dropping out. However, the interviews added to the literature by identifying rigid qualifying standards and changes in training programmes as further challenges faced by athletes.

5.3.2. Why school athletes stop participating in athletics after competing international.

It is noteworthy that although the reasons for athletes dropping out are closely related to the challenges they face and the challenges are presented as reasons in some cases, the reasons and challenges are not necessarily the same. For example, an athlete may encounter the challenge of competing against stronger competition, but the reason for them stopping the sport may be because they did not have the psychological support to deal with the challenge.

The literature indicated many reasons for dropping out including I work or study-related stress and strain, missing leisure time and conflict within the athletic environment, for example, with coaches, clubs, the training group and/or officials. Some athletes experience a lack of familial support, inadequate motivation, low

social mobility, a critical attitude toward competitive sport and injuries (Sabato, Walch & Caine 2016).

The athletes who were interviewed faced these challenges and in some instances, advanced them as specific reasons for quitting.

The interviews revealed that four of the participants who were no longer competing in track and field did not stop because of the challenges they faced, but rather because they lacked the means to overcome those challenges. Five of the participants singled out challenges such as a lack of motivation caused by qualifying standards, training programme changes, tougher competition and physiological changes as reasons for dropping out. . Furthermore, they specifically noted that the lack of financial support as a reason for dropping out. Only one of the participants received external financial assistance immediately after school. Even in cases where the athletes identified injuries or a lack of time because of studies as the reasons for dropping out, it is possible that those reasons may not have existed had they had adequate financial support to compete full-time with adequate medical assistance.

The reasons given in the interviews did not concur with those in the literature in relation to why athletes stopped competing in track and field athletics. The participants rarely stated missing free time, enduring conflicts in their athletic environments and lacking support from their family. The athletes who had dropped out would not have ended their careers if they had had adequate financial support. This is one reason not stated in the literature. Athletes in South Africa do not receive the same financial support as athletes in other countries. Financial constraints and lack of sponsorships are the overarching reasons elite athletes fail to continue seemingly successful athletic careers at senior level.

5.3.3. How support for track and field athletes can be improved after they compete internationally as school athletes.

A consideration of the literature reveals that there are policies and systems in place to support track and field athletes. Internationally, these support systems make specific provision for the challenges athletes face when transitioning between different phases of their careers. However, in South Africa, the support systems are

aimed at elite athletes and do not make specific provisions for developing athletes or athletes transitioning between stages. There is a scarcity of literature on the effectiveness and sustainability of these systems from the perspective of local athletes.

The participants revealed that governing bodies provided insufficient support to them after having competed at an international level during their school careers. The majority of athletes explained that they received very little or no financial support from governing bodies; this included support in the form of medical, coaching, travelling and other performance related expenses. Although there were infrequent cases of financial assistance provided, the support was minimal and did not last for extended periods of time.

A consideration of the reason for dropping out (section 5.3.2), more specifically, not been provided with the means to overcome challenges, suggests it is evident that the necessary support systems are not in place or are not being implemented successfully.

The participants also noted that there were almost no intermediate competitions to help support their transition to senior level athletics; some argued that intermediate level competitions would have helped them to deal with the psychological difficulty of competing at a higher level. They also commented that it was difficult to find people they could talk to about the challenges they were facing. In essence, governing bodies did not put systems into place to give them access to people who had experience of their situation and accordingly, could mentor or counsel them. In relation to guidance, the athletes were also left to struggle on their own to find new coaches or seek support with their training programmes. Governing bodies did not assist in this regard.

Furthermore, there is a discrepancy between what is stated in policy documents in relation to the support that is supposedly provided to South African athletes and the actual type and amount of support that athletes receive in reality.

Literature on the international context has suggested parental support, talent identification, structured programmes and introducing the ‘fun factor’ in athletics are

ways to increase support for track and field athletes. Furthermore, Drew (2018) recommended educating athletes on the transition process, developing a positive balance and creating a support network. There is a scarcity of literature on the enhancement of support for South African athletes; hence, the significance of this study.

The findings of the interviews indicate that there is an urgent need for improved support systems from ASA. The participants, however, recommended better training programme guidance, stronger moral support from past athletes and aligning the local qualifying standards to the IAAF's qualifying standards. Furthermore, they stressed that increased financial assistance was imperative. This reason was the golden thread throughout all the interviews and is the one variable with which athletes abroad do not struggle. Without money, local athletes cannot afford good training gear or facilities, medical assistance, supplements and high quality coaches. By implication, without money, other lesser challenges cannot be addressed and thus, result in athletes dropping out. In-depth research needs to be done in a South African context to gain insight into how the funding that has been budgeted can be filtered down to those for whom it is meant.

5.3 IMPLICATIONS OF STUDY FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

The simplest policy change to implement following this study is the change of qualification standards. It is important to reiterate the words of Wayde van Niekerk[9] (2017): "Not everyone can bring you a medal, not everyone can be a Wayde. You never know when an athlete might surprise you." Changing the team selection policies and qualification standards to include young developing athletes is an obvious and simple policy change with few ramifications, but major implications.

The support systems need to focus on developing athletes who have not yet achieved at a level, which will afford them access to external funding. Simply restructuring the support systems to cater for junior athletes, rather than professionals, could enhance the transition from school to senior level athletics

[9] ***Wade van Niekerk*** *became the 2015 IAAF World Champion and 2016 the Olympic Games Champion. He also participated at the 2010 IAAF World Juniors in Canada (IAAF 2018).*

significantly. An important change that should be made with regard to the policies and procedures of support provided by governing bodies is that these bodies should provide for elite school athletes starting with their participation in junior athletics and throughout their transition to senior level athletics. The SASCOC OPEX programme provides a framework of policies, which attempts to implement this change, but greater efforts need to be made when implementing these policies because developing athletes have not explicitly experienced the benefits.

5.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Specific challenges that South African athletes face when transitioning from school to senior level athletics were revealed in the study. Furthermore, these challenges were explored to establish why athletes who performed at an international level as juniors stop competing in senior level athletics. The study has differentiated itself by attempting to understand the perspective of young athletes when they face certain challenges rather than studying challenges from an external perspective. This is particularly significant for any support systems that are to be put in place to support athletes.

The key finding of the study is the disparity between existing policies and the current reality in terms of the financial and other support governing bodies are able to offer track and field athletes. In rare cases, certain policies and practices have been put in place to support athletes, for example, the OPEX programme. Although these policies emphasize the importance of developing athletes, in most cases, the systems put in place do very little to provide tangible or measurable support to the athletes. In the study, light has been shed on the challenges athletes face. Unfortunately, the very governing bodies created to provide support do not recognise these challenges. Decision-making bodies ought to re-evaluate their role and redraft criteria and possible support measures in order to assist the next generation of junior athletes to enable them to succeed at a senior level.

5.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The scope of this study was limited to the stories of the participants. Other role players such as coaches and development managers of ASA or SASCOC may also

be able to provide a more holistic view of the transition from school to senior level in athletics. Since a small sample of 12 athletes, which comprised mainly middle-class and mostly Afrikaans speaking individuals, the findings are limited. A more accurate perspective would be obtained if the sample was larger and included a more diverse sample of young South African track and field athletes.

An aspect not explored in depth is why three of the participants who were awarded scholarships in the USA after school returned to South Africa less than a year after departing. The reasons for giving up such a prestigious opportunity ought to be followed up. Finally, the study focused on athletes who had already performed internationally at a junior level. This possibly led to the exclusion of opinions of athletes who had only started performing well at a senior level. If the study were to be conducted again, it would be necessary to have a much broader research base.

5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The present study was limited in in terms of the specific research group that was selected; consequently, further research should be conducted to identify the challenges and support systems of the broader population. This could lead to a better understanding of the challenges faced by talented young individuals who grow up in rural or less urbanised areas, without the school support systems to which the participants of this study had access.

Furthermore, research into the implementation of support policies needs to be conducted to identify whether the policies are being put into practice as intended. The fact that policies are in place to support athletes, but not experienced by the athletes suggests that there is a discrepancy during policy implementation. Corruption in sport support systems could be one focus of such a study.

The attrition of athletes as a result of their migration to other countries should also be investigated. If we lose athletes to other countries, it implies not only a loss of athletic potential to overseas countries, but it also impacts on the competitions in the country where a degree of competition is lost.

5.7 MY JOURNEY

As has been evident throughout this study, the transition from school to senior level athletics is a difficult. However, as a world junior champion and three-time Olympian, I can assure top junior athletes that it is not impossible to make that transition successfully.

From the interviews that I conducted, I recognised so many of the challenges and hurdles that I had to overcome in my own career, but I also realised how blessed I was to have had the support that I had. As I have shown in this study, this type of support is not always readily available to junior athletes. It is thus unfortunate to witness the loss of much potential as young athletes end their athletic careers prematurely. I can summarise my advice to young athletes briefly from what I learned from this study.

My advice to junior athletes is for them to maintain balance in their lives after school. It is important to stay focused on performance as an aspiring young athlete, but it is also important not to place unnecessary pressure on oneself. I have seen too many athletes who focus exclusively on athletics after school and become reliant on athletics as their sole source of income. Acquiring a higher education qualification at a tertiary institution not only prepares athletes for life after athletics, but also provides access to systems where experienced coaches and well-organised competitions assist with the transition to senior level athletics.

Furthermore, I would advise athletes, especially those who have the ability to compete professionally immediately after school, to handle newfound freedom after school with caution. It is easy to become overwhelmed or carried away with sporting success when you are no longer living under the jurisdiction and care of parents or guardians. Keep in mind that athletics success is fleeting: It takes one injury or one bad season to be stripped of one's next achievement.

A professional career in sport should be pursued in such a manner that one is able to prepare for a life after sport. Without such foresight and advanced planning, the future is an unsustainable and unreliable lifestyle. To the athletes: Use your talent

wisely – enjoy it, and make the most of it, but make sure when it begins to fade that you are not too reliant on it.

5.8 CONCLUSION

The study set out to answer four research questions with regard to the challenges in the transition from school to senior level South African track and field athletics. The challenges that athletes face included, amongst others, financial challenges, psychological challenges associated with high level competitions, rigid qualify standards and drastic changes in training regimes.

The results revealed immense improvements should be made in the support structures in place to help young athletes. Furthermore, there is disparity between the challenges for which structures provide support and the actual challenges athletes face.

As someone who competed at an international level for 17 years, it is my hope that this study will minimise the challenges faced by future South African track and field athletes by offering some guidance to officialdom and support systems on how to overcome these challenges.

May the medal count in the next Olympic Games be a true reflection of the talent that could be nurtured among the top performing South African track and field athletes. May their performances be attributed not only to their commitment and perseverance, but also be ascribed to quality, unwavering provision from government support systems and funded development programmes.

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Addendum A: Interview schedule for athletes

The purpose of this schedule is to investigate the challenges of the transition from school to senior level athletics in South Africa. These questions will serve as a guide in gaining in-depth and insightful information surrounding this topic.

1. What's your name and how old are you?
2. What event did you participate in at the World Junior Track and Field Championships?
3. Where did you grow up and who was your coach?
4. Tell me about your training programme.
5. Have you ever had any major injuries?
6. What role did your parents and coach play in your athletic career?
7. What type of support did you get as an athlete before and after the World Junior Track and Field Championships?
8. How accessible were training facilities to you? (Gymnasiums tracks etc.)
9. At the 2010/2012 World Junior Track & Field Championships how did you perform?
10. Have you ever interacted with Athletics South Africa?
11. Did you get any support from Athletics South Africa before the World Juniors?
12. What challenges did you experience when you competed?
13. What do you think would have motivated you to keep you in athletics?
14. What where your athletics dreams/goals for your career?

15. How did you experience the transition from junior to senior level in your career?

16. What do you think will help junior athletes in their transition to senior level?

17. What is your occupation now? Student?

18. Why do you think some athletes succeed from junior to senior level and others not?

Addendum B: Field notes schedule

Title: The challenges of the transition from school to senior level athletics in South Africa.

Research site:_____ Date:_____

Time of day: _____ Athlete:_____

Description of what took place	My Interpretation of events

Important aspects to take note of:

- Athletes' reasons for dropping out
- Was there support?
- Challenges experienced
- The role of the coach and parents
- Training facilities

Addendum C: Request for permission from athletes that participated at the 2010 and 2012 World Junior Championships for the research study

9 Carla Close Street
Six Fountains Estate
Silver Lakes
Pretoria
0054

Dear Sir/Madam

LETTER OF CONSENT: ATHLETES

I am currently enrolled for a Master's degree in Education at the University of Pretoria. As part of my post-graduate studies I am investigating the challenges of the transition from school to senior level athletics in South Africa. My study will focus on the 2010 and 2012 World Junior Championships where you participated.

Title: The challenges of the transition from school to senior level athletics in South Africa.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the study is to determine what the reasons are for discontinuation after competing at the highest school/junior level and not progression to the senior level.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What are the reasons of the loss of sport potential from school/junior to senior athletic level?

1. What are the experiences of athletes after participating at a junior track and

field international level?

2. What type of support was provided to school athletes in the transition to senior athletics level?
3. How could support for track and field athletes be improved when they finish school, according to the athletes?

Procedure

Data will be collected by means of an interview and field notes. The interview will be guided by 18 questions. Athletes will be required to answer these semi-structured interview questions by reflecting on their experience of being a school athlete and the reasons they are not competing at the senior level.

Interview sessions will be a duration of 30 - 45 minutes each. Each interview will also be audio recorded so it can later be referred to for transcribing and clarification purposes. The time and place of the interview will be arranged in accordance with the convenience of the athlete.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance will be obtained from the University of Pretoria and all relevant letters of consent will be issued to parties affected before commencing with the data collection phase of this study. It is important that athletes understand that participation is voluntary and they will not be forced or pressurised to participate. An information session will be held prior to the research study to explain what this research study will entail by using simple terminology. This will participants to ask questions that pose further explanation or clarity. Athletes will be kept updated on the findings and conclusions obtained from this study, which will be presented as a group observation and not individually. Athletes will not be placed in a situation where they are at risk, be it emotional or physical.

The information gathered will only be used for academic purposes. Data that is collected through the research study will be in my possession and will be safely

stored for confidentiality purposes. After completion of this study, material will be stored at the University of Pretoria. The findings of this study will be presented in a master's dissertation as well as via online articles. The dissertation will, however, be in the public domain for analysis by examiners and other academics.

Your participation in this study will be highly appreciated; I look forward to obtaining a positive response with regard to your participation in this research study.

LJ van Zyl - 0828166001
ljoudeklip@gmail.com

Addendum D: Letter of consent from athletes

CONSENT FORM AGREEING TO BE PART OF THIS RESEARCH STUDY

This is to consent that I, _____ a former World Junior Athlete have been informed about the process and procedure pertaining to this research study and fully understand what this study will entail. I provide full consent and voluntarily agree to participate in this research study as stated above.

Name of a member at the Department of Education:

_____

Signature: _____

Contact number(s):_____+

E-mail address: _____

Although you have acknowledged this agreement by signing, please provide any information that you would like to recommend or require regarding this study:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Addendum E: Table of roles and responsibilities

Member	Role	Responsibilities
LJ van Zyl	Primary researcher	• Selection of the research site • Ethical clearance to be obtained before commencing with fieldwork • Selection of participants • Arranging of interviews (date, time convenient to the participant) • Coding/interpreting findings obtained in the study

Primary researchers contact details
LJ van Zyl Mobile number: 0828166001 E-mail: ljoudeklip@gmail.com

Addendum F: Personal declaration for assistants used during the research study

Title: The challenges of the transition from school to senior level athletics in South Africa

I declare that I am aware of what this research study will entail and acknowledge the ethical considerations that needs to be abided to as stipulated by the University of Pretoria and Research Ethics Committee:

☐ Protecting the safety of human participants so they are not placed at risk or harm of any kind.

☐ Privacy, confidentiality and anonymity of human participants should be protected at all times.

☐ Trust maintained towards human participants by not committing any acts of deception or betrayal in the research process or during any publications.

☐ Researchers need to respect the human rights and dignity of human respondents in the research process.

_____ _____

Transcriber Signature Date

Addendum G: General criteria for youth and junior teams (ASA 2018).

Below the various general criteria for different teams are listed. The specific qualifying times/distances for the various track and field events are shown in Table 4.2 and Table 4.3 in Chapter Four.

JUNIOR ATHLETES IN JUNIOR TEAMS

- Only athletes aged 16, 17, 18 or 19 in the year of competition may compete.
- The maximum number of events in which a youth athlete can compete in a junior completion is two individual events plus one of the relays.
- If the two individual events are Track Events, only one of these may be longer than 200m.

YOUTH ATHLETES IN JUNIOR TEAMS

- Athletes aged 16 or 17 years in the year of competition may compete in any event except the throwing events, the combined events, 10,000m, and the race walks.

ATHLETES YOUNGER THAN 16

- No athlete younger than 16 years of age in the year of competition may be selected.
- A maximum of two athletes in each event (with the exception of the Relays) may be selected.
- Only one team for each relay race, composed of a maximum of six athletes may be selected.
- All performances must be achieved during the qualifying period.
- All performances must be achieved during an official competition organised in conformity with IAAF Rules.
- All performances must be achieved during competitions organised or sanctioned by ASA.

- Performances achieved in mixed competitions in track events will not be accepted. Exceptionally, in accordance with IAAF Rule 147, performances achieved in events of 5000m and 10,000m may be accepted in circumstances where there were insufficient athletes of one or both genders competing to justify the conduct of separate races and there was no pacing or assistance given by an athlete(s) of one gender to an athlete(s) of the other gender. For Race Walks the results will always be accepted.
- Wind assisted performances (over 2m/sec) will not be accepted.
- Indoor performances will be accepted.
- Hand-timed performances for events up to and including 800m will not be accepted.

For Race Walks:

- Road performances will be accepted.
- Results of races conducted using the pit lane will be accepted.
- For the running events of 200m and over, performances achieved on over-sized tracks will not be accepted.
- For relays, no qualifications as in the case for senior athletics are required.

Addendum H: Ethical clearance certificate

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA
Faculty of Education

RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	CLEARANCE NUMBER: **HU 17/03/04**
DEGREE AND PROJECT	M.Ed Challenges of transition from school to senior level athletics in South Africa
INVESTIGATOR	Mr Louis van Zyl
DEPARTMENT	Humanities
APPROVAL TO COMMENCE STUDY	17 May 2017
DATE OF CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	18 July 2018

CHAIRPERSON OF ETHICS COMMITTEE: Prof Liesel Ebersöhn

CC
Ms Bronwynne Swarts
Prof Jan Nieuwenhuis

This Ethics Clearance Certificate should be read in conjunction with the Integrated Declaration Form (D08) which specifies details regarding:

- Compliance with approved research protocol,
- No significant changes,
- Informed consent/assent,
- Adverse experience or undue risk,
- Registered title, and
- Data storage requirements.

Addendum I: Language editor

Professional EDITORS Guild

P.O. Box 730
Wingate Park
Pretoria
0153
Email: rinelle.evans@up.ac.za
Cell: 083 732 0099

16 August 2018

DECLARATION

Document: M Ed dissertation

Title: *Challenges of transitioning from school to senior level athletics in South Africa*

Requested by: Louis Jacobus van Zyl (#25303938)

Institution: Faculty of Education; University of Pretoria

I declare that I have edited and proofread this dissertation in terms of language usage using *Track Changes* mode in MSWord. The edited manuscript was returned electronically with comments for the writer's consideration. He has the right to reject my suggested changes, but has the final responsibility to ensure a close reading of the dissertation before submission.

The copy editing included checking for completeness and consistency. I suggested changes to sentence structure, spelling (UK English) and standardising on the form -ise-, appropriate vocabulary and word usage, punctuation and hyphenation (double vowel prefixes e.g. co-operate). I have endeavoured to retain the meaning of the original text.

Only the main body of the text has been edited, and no front or back matter.
The edit excluded paying attention to correctness or truth of information, spelling of specific technical terms, unfamiliar names and proper nouns, specific formulae, symbols, illustrations or references. Limited technical changes have been effected.

Rinelle Evans