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Canadian Women Sprint Racing Canoeists'

Retirement from the National Team

by

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ABSTRACT

In numbers higher than ever before, Canadian women athletes are representing their country and attaining success in international competition. Yet, the athletic experiences of National Team female amateur athletes generally, and their retirement specifically, have received limited research attention. Research has focused primarily on male professional athletes and in amateur sport predominantly on athletes who have achieved world class status. Through extracting accurate formalized versions of the subject's actions, motive, and experiences to describe and explain their retirement phenomenon, this study attempted to capture the substance and nuance of the opinions of women athletes now retired who competed in the Olympic canoeing discipline of sprint racing as members of the Canadian National Canoe Team between 1984 to 1998.

Whether smooth or problematic, retirement necessitates a degree of adjustment which is thought to be dependent on the individual's perception of retirement itself. In this regard, the qualitative methodology, borrowing from phenomenology and free from predetermined theories, concentrated on the subject-experience and assumed the importance of understanding the retirement experience, as it is known to, and in the words of the women who lived the experience. In addition, the choice of focusing on only one National Team permitted a fuller contextualization of the retirement phenomenon within a specific sport environment.

A short demographic questionnaire was initially given to the study participants to ascertain basic information. This was followed by an open-ended in-depth interview, using a semi-structured format, to obtain information pertaining to the specific reasons and circumstances

affecting their retirement, as well as the manner in which they reacted to, and deal with their retirement from the National Canoe Team.

Data collection and analysis were undertaken simultaneously which ensured a systematic effort to verify and refine existing themes. Data were submitted to a systematic process which enabled the reduction of the vast quantity of data into manageable segments. Coding of the data served to separate, compile, and organize the data, while comparing the events, experiences, actions, and interactions for similarities and differences. Through content analysis, both inference and interpretation were used to give meaning to the transcripts. The end result was the emergence of themes from the data, each theme internally consistent but distinct and separate from all other themes identified. The inductive examination of the relationships present within and among the identified themes allowed for developing interpretations and explanations of the phenomenon under study.

In an effort to capture and understand the essence of the retirement experience, a schematic representation was drawn which encapsulates the major patterns found in the women's narratives regarding their retirement experiences. The patterns are located on a continuum which reflects the inter-relationships of the experiences and reactions.

Those few athletes who prepared for retirement and who voluntarily retired following achievement of their performance goals fared the best. When faced with retirement, the majority of women experienced negative reactions, reactions which continued for many, beyond those first few months following retirement. The results of this study further indicate that the circumstances, those events and situations which triggered the reason(s) for retirement and the ultimate decision, are a major aspect of the reactions of retirement of these women canoeists. In essence these were

predetermining factors which had effects through the transition process and which affected the finality and acceptance of the end of their National Canoe Team career.

The sport of sprint racing canoeing and the years dedicated to being an athlete within the sport, are considered to have been a positive and worthwhile experience by the majority of athletes. These women currently view their sport and their years competing in a positive manner regardless of their retirement experience, its circumstances, or their reactions.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the early years of athletic retirement research, studies focused mainly on professional male sports such as hockey, baseball, football, and soccer (Haerle, 1975; Howe, Howe & Wilkins, 1989; Mihovilovic, 1968; Reynolds, 1981; Svoboda & Vanek, 1982). It is only in the last 20 years that researchers have begun to investigate the domain of amateur sport and center their research attention on athletes participating in scholastic programs or at the international level (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985; Blinde & Stratta, 1991; Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985, 1986). Of those studies involving international amateur participation, the majority have focused on those athletes who attained Olympic Games or World Championship medal status or were highly ranked at the international level (Orlick & Werthner, 1987; Pawlak, 1984; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Werthner & Orlick, 1986). Several studies have focused on the retirement of a broad base of high performance athletes (Kirby, 1986; Sinclair, 1990), but few studies have addressed the phenomenon of retirement specific to female athletes. (Alison & Meyer, 1988; Kirby, 1986; McGown & Rail, 1996; Schell, 1995).

Initial research has shown that more often than not, athletes face various problems when exiting from their competitive sport careers (Botterill, 1982; Werthner & Orlick, 1986). The process of athletic career termination has been associated to a major life crisis resulting in the individual facing a period of adjustment accompanied by shock, denial, anger, confusion and often a lack of purpose (Ogilvie & Howe, 1982). Disengagement from sport has also been likened to processes studied in social gerontology (Rosenberg, 1981), to social death (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985; Rosenberg, 1984), to occupational retirement (Ball, 1976), and to transition

from one phase of life to another (Werthner & Orlick, 1982). More recently, however, Sinclair found that “though most athletes experienced a somewhat non-eventful adjustment from elite sport, they did appear to progress through an adjustment phase during their transition as many generally encountered a great change in their lives, a moderate degree of stress, and moderate difficulties with specific issues as a result of retirement” (1990, p.78).

Adding to the complexity of the sport retirement process, is the fact that it often occurs at a relatively early age, that is, late teens to late twenties. Although a process that all athletes must eventually undergo, sport retirement is a multidimensional, interactive process involving biological, psychological, social, and cultural aspects. Age is but one of the variables impacting on the retirement process. Individuals bring to the transition process varied behavioural patterns, their own perceptions of stress, coping strategies, personal resources and socialization experiences (George, 1948; Charner & Schlossberg, 1986; Schlossberg, 1981). It is well documented that not all athletes respond in an identical manner when faced with the inevitable (Blinde & Stratta, 1991; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998).

Efforts have been made to conceptualize the process of athletic retirement. Researchers have to develop explanatory models with concepts borrowed from disciplines not necessarily interested in the sports world: thanatology, social gerontology, and psychology (Ogilvie & Taylor, 1994). One model thought to be suited to the study of athletic retirement is the transitional analysis model proposed by Schlossberg (1981, 1984) and Charner and Schlossberg (1986), as it acts as a guide in discovering those factors affecting both the smooth and traumatic transitions to retirement. Sinclair (1990) has modified Charner and Schlossberg's model by reassigning “specific characteristics to alternate categories in order to establish a more precise [sport] model” (p. 39) and attempted to theoretically determine the patterns of adaptation through which individuals

progress during high performance athletic transition to retirement. The termination of the athletic career is thus viewed as a phase of transition determined by the characteristics of three interacting factors: the transition itself, the individual, and the environment. Overall, Sinclair's results support Charner and Schlossberg's model and their postulate that the type of transition an individual experiences influences the way in which this individual moves through the transition process (Sinclair, 1990). More recently, Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) have offered a conceptualization of athletic retirement that locates it within the entire developmental course. Their five-step model incorporates prior considerations within and outside the sports domain, and allows to determine "whether the athlete undergoes a healthy transition following retirement or experiences distress in response to end of the competitive career" (p. 12).

Although further research is needed and many questions remain to be answered, Sport Canada, the federal department responsible for amateur sport in Canada, has recognized that problems do exist prior to, during, and following the sport retirement process. Accordingly, under the Athlete Assistance Program, the Extended Assistance for Student Athletes policy was introduced in 1982. The Canadian Olympic Association has also acknowledged some of the retirement difficulties and in 1985 introduced the Olympic Athlete Career Centres. These centres are designed for National Team athletes and are available to those athletes requesting assistance in such areas as resume writing, career planning, aptitude or interest testing, and interview preparation. Such assistance programs are important since the presence of institutional support along with the type of retirement (voluntary or involuntary, planned or unplanned) have been shown to influence the psychological reactions to, and adjustments resulting from retirement (Gorbett, 1985; Sinclair, 1990). While these programs are at least partly based on information coming from the literature in the sociology, psychology, history, pedagogy, and management of

sport, most of this information has been gender blind and "a very small percentage of this large body of literature actually has female athletes as its main subjects" (Barnett & Wright, 1994). There is thus a need to shed further light on the various aspects of the retirement process for athletes, particularly for women athletes.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the phenomenon of retirement from sport among Canadian women athletes. More specifically, this study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of sport retirement, as experienced by women athletes on one National Team. In addition, the study is intended to document: (a) specific reasons and circumstances affecting these athletes' retirement from the National Team; and (b) the manner in which these athletes reacted to, and dealt with their retirement from the National Team.

Methodology

Through a qualitative methodology borrowing from phenomenology, this study attempted to capture the substance and nuance of the retirement experiences of former Canadian women high performance athletes who competed in the sprint racing discipline of Olympic canoeing. The study focused specifically on women athletes now retired from elite level competition who were members of the Canadian National Canoe Team between 1984 to 1998. The time frame is representative of a period wherein athletes had been competing in a very structured and organized sport system and which ranged over a period of several Olympic quadrennial cycles. A total of 28 women athletes were thus identified, 26 athletes were located and contacted, and 21 athletes consented to participate in the study. The semi-structured and in-depth interview was the instrument chosen to allow for the full expression of each individual participant. A short

questionnaire was also presented to participants prior to the audio-recorded interview in order to obtain basic demographic information. Data collection and analysis were undertaken simultaneously which ensured a systematic effort to verify and refine existing themes. Immediately upon the transcription of the first interview, data were submitted to a systematic process which enabled the reduction of the vast quantity of data into manageable segments. Coding of the data served to separate, compile, and organize the data, while comparing events, experiences, actions, and interactions for similarities and differences. Through content analysis, both inference and interpretation were used to give meaning to the transcripts. The end result was the emergence of themes from the data, each theme internally consistent but distinct and separate from all other themes identified. The inductive examination of the relationships present within and among the identified themes allowed for developing interpretations and explanations of the phenomenon under study.

Significance of the Study

As the demands associated with competitive sport have increased over the years, so too has the interest in assisting the athletes to make successful transitions to post-athletic careers. In the early years, research focused mainly on retirement from professional male sports. Then followed investigations of sport retirement for athletes participating in (mostly U.S.) scholastic programs or competing at the international level. Of these latter studies, the majority focused on athletes who attained Olympic Games or World Championship medal status or who were highly ranked at the international level. Few studies have addressed the situation of Canadian athletes and even fewer have addressed the phenomenon of retirement specific to the female athlete. There

is thus a need to shed further light on the various aspects of the retirement process for Canadian women athletes.

A normal outcome of elite athletic participation is the eventual transition to retirement. Whether smooth or problematic, this transition necessitates a degree of adjustment which is thought to be dependent on the individual's perception of retirement itself. Unfortunately, most of the retirement studies conducted so far have relied on a quantitative method that has not allowed to understand fully the phenomenon of retirement. In this regard, the present study is significant since it favours a methodology that allows for an in-depth understanding of the retirement experiences. In addition, the choice of focusing on only one National Team permits a fuller contextualization of the retirement phenomenon within a specific sport environment.

Finally, granted the importance of educational pursuits for amateur athletes, it is crucial that both the sport institution and the educational institution increase their understandings of the educational needs of a high performance athlete and the demands of a high performance sport career. The present study is significant in that respect since it could assist coaches and administrators in comprehending educational pursuits as crucially important factors helping the transition to retirement. As well, it could assist educators in the preparation of women high performance athletes for their post-retirement endeavours.

Delimitations and Limitations

The study was delimited in the following way: first, only amateur athletes were included in the study. Second, the Olympic sport of sprint racing canoeing was the sole sport represented. Third, only female athletes from the sprint racing discipline were included as subjects. Fourth, only former female canoeists who were members of the Canadian National Canoe Team between

1984 to 1998, and who were now retired from international competition were selected. Fifth, although a short questionnaire was presented to participants in order to obtain basic demographic information, the main instrument of data collection was the in-depth interview. Finally, the study focused on the retirement experiences of former women members of the Canadian National Canoe Team and the specific reasons and circumstances affecting their retirement, as well as the manner in which they reacted to, and dealt with their retirement from the National Canoe Team.

Granted the delimitation of the study and because of organizational, structural, cultural, racial, gender, and other factors, it is understood that the results of this study are limited to the women members of the National Canoe Team and should not be extrapolated to other sports or other countries, nor should they be generalized to other female athletes who have not reached the international level, or to male athletes at any performance level in any sport. As for any qualitative inquiry of this sort, it is understood that the goal is not generalization as much as in-depth understanding and “thick” interpretation of the specific phenomenon at hand.

CHAPTER I I

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The phenomenon of retirement from sport has been a topic of interest to researchers in the past 20 years. A number of theoretical frameworks have emerged and an important number of studies have focused on the retirement of professional athletes, mostly from sports such as baseball, hockey, and soccer. The retirement research conducted by sport educators, psychologists and sociologists provides interesting but limited data specific to amateur athletes and very few studies have addressed the phenomenon of retirement specific to amateur women athletes.

Gerontologists have greatly advanced our knowledge of retirement but they have considered it mostly from the more traditional aspect of a chronological as opposed to a functional context and, therefore, have not looked at younger retirees such as athletes (Rosenberg, 1981). Nevertheless, interesting theories are available in studies regarding social gerontological issues and occupational retirement. This literature on aging and retirement encompasses the economic, sociological, psychological and social psychological perspectives (Carp, 1972; Havighurst, 1968; Miller, 1965). The knowledge garnered and theories proposed within this literature certainly further our understanding of some of the issues confronting retired professional or elite amateur athletes.

Efforts have been made over the past decade or so to conceptualize the process of athletic retirement and researchers have sought foundations for developing explanatory models from concepts outside the sports world. Several earlier models have been modified to suit athletic retirement. The most recent application of theories to professional sport has been undertaken by

Tremaine Drahota and Eitzen (1998). Using Ebaugh's (1988) role exit theory, these researchers found that not all paths taken by the athletes were accounted for by the four-stage model originally proposed. However, they felt that with some modification, the theory could be applied to professional athletes and their retirement. Another model thought to be suited for the study of elite athletic retirement is the transitional analysis model proposed by Schlossberg (1981, 1984) and by Charner and Schlossberg (1986). This model acts as a guide in discovering those factors affecting both the smooth and traumatic transitions to retirement. Using this model, Sinclair (1990) attempted to determine the patterns of adaptation through which individuals progress during their transition from high performance sport to retirement.

High performance athletes are gifted individuals and a link can be made between research addressing issues important to athletically gifted individuals and research focusing on academically gifted individuals. As is the case in the sport literature, the education literature has focused more on the skills and experiences of the gifted male than the gifted female. Nevertheless, educators have conducted research on gifted adolescent girls and women and this research indicates a similarity with the literature on gifted female athletes, particularly in areas of self-esteem, self-actualization, self-knowledge, and the pursuit of excellence.

In the following pages an in-depth review of the retirement literature is presented. The concept of retirement is discussed, then theories of retirement, retirement and the professional athlete, retirement and the amateur athlete, gifted girls and women, and gifted female athletes.

Retirement

Retirement is a social process, one that has traditionally meant the relinquishing of the employment position held during one's major working years. In North America, it is also a 20th century phenomenon that came into being during the development of economic programs to support the elderly outside the work force. According to Atchley, "retirement is a modern institution that primarily centers around the goal of providing an orderly means of shifting older workers, or allowing them to shift, out of the labour force with a minimum of financial hardship in consideration of their past contributions" (1982, p. 264).

Retirement was first declared an officially sanctioned event in 1891 by German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck with the legislated Old Age and Survivors Pension Act, which established retirement at 70 years of age. Prior to this, individuals continued to work not only because their labour was needed but also because they simply could not afford not to work. The drive to industrialization in the mid-19th century often made obsolete the knowledge and skill of older workers. It is this surplus labour force (which reached its peak in the Depression of the 1930s), combined with the growth of private pensions and Social Security, and a rising standard of living, that contributed to the establishment of the institution of retirement in North America (McConnell, 1983).

Traditionally, workers withdrew from the labour force at 65 years of age, an age made mandatory in the 1930s when life expectancy was much lower and when few women were employed (McPherson, 1998). In retirement, the worker is arbitrarily removed from his or her employment, a role viewed as one which he or she is "no longer capable of playing," and where the major part of his or her time is no longer required (Miller, 1965). According to McConnell

(1983), a positive retirement experience is more likely if: (a) retirement is voluntary, (b) the retiree's income and health allow a comfortable life, (c) work is not the most important thing in one's life, and (d) preparation and planning for retirement was undertaken. In return for this voluntary withdrawal, the worker is eligible to receive some financial support from the government and may also receive a pension from the private sector. In Canada, the idea of a mandatory retirement age has been the topic of extensive debate. However, in 1990, the Supreme Court of Canada, ruling in the case of a group of professors and physicians who argued that mandatory retirement violated their rights under the Canadian Charter of Rights, upheld mandatory retirement at age 65 years.

Retirement heralds a critical period in the life span and has both positive and negative connotations. Early studies, more often than not, were influenced by the assumption that the transition to retirement is stressful, that it is a crisis period, and that it signifies a change in daily commitments and social status (McPherson, 1998; Shanas, 1972). Mandatory retirement has been a major topic of interest among gerontologists. This type of retirement has been viewed as having the potential to cause adjustment problems for the retiree and as such, has been seen less positively than voluntary retirement (McConnell, 1983, McPherson, 1998). In today's workplace, there has been an increase in flexible, retirement policies and options available to those workers who wish to consider early retirement. When the retirement is voluntary, the individual feels that he or she has more control over the decision. The voluntary retiree "often engages in more planning for retirement; has a higher retirement income; reports better health; reports a higher level of satisfaction with retirement; and, in general, has more favourable attitudes toward retirement" (McPherson, 1998, p. 245). Nevertheless, retirement has the potential to alter one's lifestyle and life opportunities and it may involve adjustments to the loss of job and friends, to a

perceived loss of job prestige and identity, to loss of income, to increased free time, to declining health, and to increased interaction with the spouse (McPherson, 1998).

McPherson (1998) notes that attitudes toward retirement can be assessed at three stages: before retirement, on the day of retirement, and after retirement. The attitudes expressed during the first two stages may be based on one's expectations, fears, or planning, while those expressed in the post-retirement stage are based on actual experiences. In general, high levels of health, income, education, and a high degree of support from significant others in the family and at work are associated with positive attitudes during the pre-retirement stage. In contrast, negative attitudes are related to a fear of post-retirement financial difficulties, a high commitment or satisfaction with work, and a positioning of work as the only major life interest. All this being said, we must note that most studies have been based on samples of white urban males, and information on the pre- or post-retirement attitudes of women, rural residents, or members of visible minorities is not readily available (McPherson, 1998).

Indeed, much of the research has had an inherent male bias, focusing on white, middle-class males. The male bias was not necessarily deliberate but can be rather seen as an indication of the then demographic fact that fewer women held permanent, full-time employment positions. Although an increase in women's participation in the labour force has been one of the significant social changes following World War II and a result of the women's movement in the 1970s, the presence of women in the labour force is still marginalized today.

The history of women and employment is indicative of society's view that a woman's primary commitment is to reproductive functions and to the family. These views reflect the influence of the dominant patriarchal order (Keddy, Cable, Quinn, Melanson, 1993). Early research did not usually focus on the women's own retirement from the role of "worker" but

investigated the women's reaction to the retirement of their spouse. Studies were primarily concerned with how a wife reacted to her husband's retirement, how her husband's retirement affected the marital relationship, and how the wife could assist the husband through his adjustment to retirement. Research further argued that entering retirement was less stressful for women, due in part to their ongoing role of housewife and in part because work had been viewed as a less important factor in their lives (McPherson, 1998; Phillipson, 1990). More recently, in their study of women from Nova Scotia, Keddy and her colleagues recognized that knowledge of women's work histories and their retirement "must be constructed from the words of women who have lived through the experiences" (1993, p. 438).

At present, there are more women in the work force than ever before. More women, however, are employed in low-paying positions and a large fraction of them are the head-of-household. This situation is further exasperated by inflation and a lack of information and support. As a result, millions of women are at risk as they face retirement in the next few decades (Hayes & Deren, 1990). Planning for retirement is especially crucial for women as they, more often than not, have relatively low earnings and their ultimate retirement benefits are based on those earnings. Women also often lack private pension benefits and cannot be assured of the support of a spouse (Hayes & Deren, 1990). According to McPherson (1998) women may have less choice in the timing of and the manner in which they retire, and these choices may encompass a change in marital status, retirement of the spouse, an unexpected need to care for an elderly parent, or moving to another location. Phillipson (1990) further notes that various studies from the 1970s found women less likely than men to be positively oriented to retirement. Women were found to be more apprehensive than men about the effects of retirement, less likely than men to adapt well, and, in the case of involuntary retirement, in need of a larger adaptation period than that of men.

Richardson, when examining the effects of marriage, caregiving, and other family obligations on women's retirement, notes that the traditional economic-based definition of retirement is questionable when we consider women and individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds. According to this author, the definition "fails to consider the multidimensional nature of retirement culturally and personally" (1999, p. 51). The author recognizes the need to consider multiple roles and life events and to identify how and why women experience retirement in ways that are different from men's. Further, researchers must determine how women define their retirement, what it symbolizes, what it means to them, and how it affects their feelings about themselves and their family. Existing studies of female retirement have been based on limited samples, with contradictory results. Szinovacz notes that "these investigations demonstrate beyond doubt that retirement constitutes an important life event for women that deserves careful study, that women's retirement needs differ from those of men, and that pre-retirement programs and agencies dealing with retirees will have to take these differences into consideration" (1983, p. 113).

Women are apparently more vulnerable to the accumulation of life changes than are men. Szinovacz and Washo (1992) compared the effects of multiple life transitions on retirement adjustment and found that as the number of life events increased, women's adaptation to retirement declined. A woman's retirement options may differ from a man's because of societal, social-psychological and/or institutional variables. Further to this, Richardson (1993, 1999) notes that women's retirement expectations to their actual retirement is problematic. Those who retire involuntarily have more problems adjusting to their new status and tend to have lower morale, less life satisfaction and more and unhappiness than do those who retire voluntarily.

Current research, however, indicates that there are no significant gender differences in the importance of work to the individual, and that the majority of men and women experience minimal stress and adjust successfully to retirement. As a “major transitional passage in later life,” McPherson notes that retirement “represents the end of a working life, and the possible beginning of a leisure career” (1998, p. 228). According to 1994 Statistics Canada numbers, the end of a working life occurs on average at age 61.4 years.

While retirement was once relatively easy to define, McPherson (1998) notes that current definitions are becoming increasingly complex and variable. Work time and retirement time have become blurred. How and when working life ends, if ever, now offers considerable variation. Retirement life is constantly changing and “will continue to be shaped by the political, economic, and social forces operating throughout our life course” (McPherson, 1998, p. 230).

In general, it was assumed that sport retirement was similar to occupational retirement in that athletes experienced adjustment difficulties similar to those of labour force retirees (Ball, 1976). An individual undergoes many changes his or her life span and for an individual involved in high performance sport, retirement is but one of the many transitions that he or she must face. Athletic retirement is similar to occupational retirement in that it is the withdrawing from active participation in a specific area of social life, and yet it is often dissimilar in that the retiring athlete is usually a young adult (Hill & Lowe, 1974; Mihovilovic, 1968).

Only recently has sport retirement research recognized the uniqueness of the sport retirement experience and the dissimilarities with the traditional definition of occupational retirement. Sinclair has noted that athletic retirement initiates a “dynamic process of transitional adaptation,” a transition that must be understood in its own terms and in the context of the individual's life course (1990, p. 10). Considered a process rather than an event, the transition is a

“period in which athletes review their identity, roles, and motivation to participate in sport” (Danish et al., 1997, p. 155). A normal consequence of elite athletic participation, this retirement transition necessitates a degree of adjustment that is thought to be dependent on the individual's perception of the retirement itself (Coakley, 1983; George, 1980; Schlossberg, 1984; Sinclair, 1990).

Some researchers (e.g., Broom, 1982) have suggested that the athlete experiences an identity crisis more traumatic than that faced by the occupational retiree, and is likely to be beleaguered by educational, financial, personal, psychological, and social problems. Although the length of the athletic career varies from sport to sport, the majority of athletes face retirement from high performance sport at a time when their same-age fellow workers are established in their occupational careers (Murphy, 1995; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990).

Retirement may affect more than just the individual athlete. If involved in team sport, an athlete's retirement not only impact on teammates but may also affect the cohesiveness and functioning ability of the overall team unit (Lerch, 1984; Danish et al., 1997; Rosenberg, 1984). A team may experience some feelings of loss, with this sense of loss based on the perception of the retired athlete's contribution to the team. Further, the retirement of one athlete is an important factor on small-sized teams and “affects team goals, tasks, and most importantly, team performance” (Danish et al., 1997, p. 162).

Overall, retirement from sport is thought to involve a variety of unique experiences that sets it apart from occupational retirement (Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993). Retirement marks the first time in an athlete's life that he or she is deprived of the satisfaction that sport has always given (Hill & Lowe, 1974). As such, Werthner and Orlick (1982) suggest that sport retirement should not be viewed as an end but rather as the loss of an intense and very important relationship.

Retirement Theories

Theories of retirement have been extensively documented in the literature, with each theory having its merits in accounting for the experience of retirement. Retirement, as a social event, was first given serious consideration by Friedmann and Havighurst (1954, 1968) in the 1940s through their studies of the 'older' generation. The concept of leaving one's occupation for retirement insurance payments was, at that time, becoming widespread throughout the American population (Shanas, 1972). Based on the concept of "substitution," Friedmann and Havighurst proposed that work has different meanings for different individuals, that withdrawal from an occupation brings a loss of satisfaction which the individual will then attempt to replace, and that success in finding replacement activities will reflect positively on an individual's adjustment in retirement. Friedman and Havighurst (1954) further theorized that many of the values of play and work are interchangeable, that those values of play can be achieved through work and, correspondingly, that those values of work can be achieved through play.

Research undertaken by Shanas (1972) 20 years later indicated that the relevance of substitution theory seemed limited within contemporary society. It was noted that the original meaning of work was closely linked to money, activity and routine, but that it now reflected the importance of the economic aspect. Over half of the individuals studied mentioned that income would be the major item missed during retirement. Shanas (1972) concluded that these findings possibly reflected a changing American attitude towards work.

The theory of disengagement, as developed by Cumming and Henry, states that the individual is ready to disengage as a result of aging, regardless of the social system. Connected to issues of health, this theory notes that the older person's gradual but inevitable voluntary withdrawal from their social context is in preparation for the ultimate disengagement from society,

that of death. In this sense, “disengagement is an inevitable process in which many relationships between a person and other members of society are severed, and those remaining are altered in quality” (1961, p. 211). Essentially social and psychological in nature, the theory postulates that the disengagement, initiated by the individual or by society or by both simultaneously, leads to social isolation, illness, and a decline in happiness. A mutual severing of ties will take place between a person and others in society and this disengagement will occur at different times for different individuals. Disengagement will differ between men, whose central role in North American society is viewed as instrumental, and women, whose central role is viewed as social-emotional. Complete disengagement occurs when both the individual and society are receptive and once begun, disengagement becomes a circular, self-perpetuating process. A disjunction occurs when the individual is ready but society is not; in this case engagement usually continues. Conversely, when society is ready but the individual is not, disengagement usually occurs. Although this theory offers interesting elements to theorize retirement, it seems rather limited by its deficit-base perspective on aging (aging equals ill-health) and its stereotypical view of men and women.

The accommodation theory, viewed as a process in adjustment to retirement, considers the differences between those factors that influence retirement and those factors which are influenced by retirement (Shanas, 1972). Social-psychological in nature, this theory presumes that: (a) factors that influence retirement are different from factors influenced by retirement; (b) adjustment to retirement is dependent upon the nature of the life changes resulting from the retirement; and (c) adjustment to retirement may vary at different times within the retirement period (Shanas, 1972). Adjustment then, is considered dependent on an individual’s accommodation to demographic, social-psychological, as well as social-structural factors. The scheduling and often

routine patterns of work, leisure, and activities change throughout the “process of retirement,” which commences when withdrawal from an occupation is first considered, and ceases when the individual has achieved a new distribution of self energy and behaviour. Through these changes, occurring at different rates and instances in time, the individual experiencing retirement “seeks to adapt to a new social role, to a new rhythm of activity, to a new body awareness, and often to a different level of living” (Shanas, 1972, p. 235).

Havighurst (1968) noted that throughout the on-going process of retirement, an individual is continually adapting to the conditions of life, and that this “process of adaptation” is ruled by the ego. The one-directional continuum of aging means an adaptation to changes in the structure and function of the human body, and to changes in the social environment (Friedmann & Havighurst, 1954; Havighurst, 1968). Physical health, interpersonal relations, work status, self-perception of success or failure in the occupational role, projected retirement income, and emotional pathology are all relevant variables and issues in this complex adaptation. Both the extent to which an individual anticipates and plans for retirement are related to that individual’s attitude and adaptation to this major life change (Eisdorfer, 1972).

Three models (i.e., crisis, reinforcement, and motivational style) have been presented by Eisdorfer (1972), each describing and predicting an individual’s adaptation to his or her environment. The crisis model is concerned with an individual’s ability to respond effectively to acute traumatic events in life and the consequences of certain responses. This model is a psychosocial event system, not necessarily an age-related phenomenon, and suggests a period of heightened risk and emotional disequilibrium. A successful solution appears to bring feelings of self-confidence, while unsuccessful solutions appear to bring feelings of defeat (Eisdorfer, 1972). The reinforcement model is an examination of potential reinforcers for the individual’s work, the

continuity of reinforcement in the individual's life, and the changes immediately before and after retirement. Reward systems vary among individuals and Eisdorfer has noted that: "it may be easier to determine from what the worker is retiring than to determine to what he [or she] will retire" (1972, p. 261). The motivational style model is based upon a subjective interpretation of feedback from the environment. Apart from basic needs such as food and shelter, certain overriding motivational styles may have special significance for the elderly. Fear of failure and the conservation of energy may emerge as defensive-adaptive motivating forces in order to protect the integrity of the individual (Eisdorfer, 1972).

The theory of continuity (Atchley, 1977) is quite similar to the theory of adaptation in the basic premise that the individual who thrives in the post-retirement period is an individual who is able to relinquish primary values and roles and continue with ones previously viewed as secondary. The individual continually adapts to the conditions of his or her life, and is predisposed towards maintaining a continuity with his or her own commitments, habits, personality, and preferences (Werthner, 1985). Adaptation to the present depends on past history as well as the ability to make sense of the present in terms of the past and, conversely, to make sense of the past in terms of the present. Continuity will exist and stress will be lessened if the retiring individual can continue to occupy roles similar to the ones experienced prior to retirement.

The process of identity crisis refers to the confusion and lack of direction that individuals experience when their self-definition has collapsed and their role and purpose in life is unclear. A redefining of direction and goals is required to function effectively within society. Although this theory can be applied throughout life for anyone who faces a loss of identity, the identity crisis faced by the prospective retiree can be minimized when there is adequate preparation afforded the process of retirement (Erikson, 1968; Stevenson, 1981). Miller (1965) stated that through work,

an individual is provided a social and meaningful group situation in which to develop an acceptable self-concept and identity. This occupational identity establishes a position in the social system for the individual and allows others to interpret and evaluate his or her status, role, and social activity. The retired individual must then establish and rationalize a new social identity and concept of self. The post-retirement activities or leisure pursuits must be appropriate in terms of the values of the general population. Often, aspects of previous work are introduced into such activities and pursuits (Miller, 1965). Melges and DeMaso (1980) have suggested that the loss of an occupation, a loved one, or a primary life activity will have an effect on all individuals. No matter how tragic or trivial, almost everyone experiencing loss will go through specific stages of coping with that loss. The intensity and/or duration of these stages may vary with the severity of the experience and depending on whether the loss was expected or not (Melges & DeMaso, 1980).

Kubler-Ross (1969) delineated five stages involved in the process of coping with a loss: denial/isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Other researchers such as Colgrove, Broomfield and McWilliams (1976) have postulated abbreviated but similar stages: shock and denial, anger and depression, and understanding and acceptance. These various stages have been used and adapted, not only in reference to death and dying, but to reflect occupational retirement and physical dismemberment.

Della Cava (1975) has explored the process of leaving a high commitment status, which is defined as a permanent status demanding exclusive commitment, supported by a heavy emotional investment, and which is central to one's identity. Della Cava found that leaving such a status involves a process of resocialization. The dismantling of an individual's past self-identity and the establishment of new identity within a second career is positively assisted by the formation of new

primary relationships. The difficulties faced when departing from one career to enter another are related to the intensity and duration of the initial commitment. Individuals experiencing a second career will generally be older than individuals embarking on their first and, thus, the necessity to adjust to retirement from one occupational field and entrance into a second one is viewed as atypical of the younger age group.

Third Age, a theory recently introduced offers the possibility of conceptualizing old age as a “new condition of a freely chosen healthy retirement leading to a life of self-realization and fulfillment” (Mein et al., 1998, p. 536). Third Age theory considers “old age” to be the “crown of life” rather than a negative social category. This view of aging and retirement proposed in 1989 by Laslett is based on the premise that affluence, physical well-being and a desire to expand one’s horizons should be considered to counter the many negative assessments of the nature of post-retirement life according to previously developed theories.

In their study of retirement, Hayes and Vandenheuvel (1994) have noted that adjustment to mandatory retirement is vastly different than adjustment to optional retirement. Adjustment to retirement is more successful when the individual makes the decision to retire and decides when to retire. Mandatory retirement removes these decisions from the person facing retirement and, according to Mein and colleagues (1998), this may have profound repercussions as many retirees do not prepare for their retirement. Further, these last researchers noted that adjustment to retirement was more successful for retirees who had developed interests outside of work. Finally, they concluded that what was needed was “a multifaceted theory of aging which can accommodate the continually changing experience and age of retirement” (Mein et al., 1998, p. 535).

Reitzes, Mutran and Fernandez (1998) utilized a career perspective inspired by symbolic interaction theory when investigating the decision to retire. While a career perspective provides “a framework for connecting some of the diverse factors that may influence the decision to retire,” the symbolic interaction theory focuses on “how individuals create shared social meanings, including roles and self-concepts, that influence human behaviour” (1998, p. 608). Reitzes and colleagues confirmed that retirement entails more than just the decision to leave full-time employment; it highlights the convergence of past and present states, the pre-retirement and post-retirement, as well as the objective and subjective characteristics of work, gender, and family. These authors also noted that the relative importance of a role to an individual is positively related to that individual’s willingness to continue in the role. Essentially, the more importance an individual attributes to the “worker” role, the less likely that individual will be to retire. Individuals who undertook retirement planning were more likely to retire successfully, as compared to those who expected that they were going to retire for positive rather than negative reasons. In essence, the career perspective suggests that objective characteristics of the work role, such as occupation, work conditions, and work content, influence the decision to retire. It is further recognized that retirement is an increasingly common personal experience, a stage in one’s life cycle, and something experienced for a longer period of time than ever before.

Retirement has been shown to be a period of profound change to many aspects of one’s life and, of course, one’s lifestyle. Early theorists conceptualized retirees as a homogeneous group of individuals responding in a similar manner to retirement (Jensen-Scott, 1993). Traditionally, theories have viewed retirement as a period of “rest” following years of employment, while more recent research has indicated that retirement is being regarded as an evolving process rather than as a single event. In the late 20th and early 21st century, retirement has been recognized as a

complex state only partially explained by available theories. Mein and colleagues have noted that “with the increasing length of time spent in retirement, the growth of early retirement and changing culture of retirement within an evolving society, no one model is capable of capturing all the dynamics of modern aging” (1998, p. 544). Although these theories may have been pertinent at the time of their development, they are not necessarily applicable today. Some researchers have concluded that “there is no one all-embracing approach” but rather “a number of different [theories] that produce the overall experience of retirement for individuals” (e.g., Mein et al., 1998, p. 544).

Sport Retirement

Although specific factors have been identified regarding the termination of the high performance athletic career, there still seems to be a lack of models that adequately conceptualize sport retirement. This theoretical void is due, according to Crook and Robertson, to the fact that “the literature in this area is dominated by anecdotal accounts with a concomitant lack of empirical research” (1991, p.121). Efforts have been made over the past decade or so to conceptualize this process of athletic retirement and researchers have sought foundations for developing explanatory models from concepts outside the sports world such as thanatology, social gerontology and psychology (Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993). However, a review of these provides only a limited conceptual perspective for the examination of athletic retirement as they deny the possibility of the development of a second career following the high performance athletic career (Wylleman et al., 1993).

Hill and Lowe (1974) applied.. to sport an analytical model of the sociological study of retirement. That model stressed the roles that personal, social, and environmental factors have in the retirement process. In their examination of the professional athlete and retirement, the process

of retirement was thought, as with occupational retirement, to have a negative connotation. Similar to their older counterparts, the retired athletes faced a crisis involving their personal and social identity. On retirement, typical athletes were thought to find themselves unprepared to start a new career.

One model thought to be suited for the study of elite athletic retirement is the transitional analysis model proposed by Schlossberg (1981, 1984) and by Charner and Schlossberg (1986). This model acts as a guide to discover those factors affecting both the smooth and traumatic transitions to retirement. Using this model, Sinclair (1990) studies of high performance athletes and their transition to retirement. Sinclair (1990) modified Charner and Schlossberg's model and ended-up with a sport model wherein the termination of the athletic career is viewed as a phase of transition determined by three interacting factors: the transition itself, the individual, and the environment. The transition is a matter of the individual's perception of change. It is identified as such only by the individual experiencing it and both positive and negative aspects may be associated to the same transition. Sinclair tested the new sports model and her results provided partial support for Charner and Schlossberg's model and their postulate that the type of transition an individual experiences influences the way that individual moves through the transition process. Her results did not, however, support their postulate that the three interacting factors determine the phase of transition. In fact, in her study of 199 high performance athletes, she found no interaction between the three factors although she did find that transition characteristics influenced adjustment. Sinclair attributed this departure from previous research results to the broader base of National Team members which the study represented.

More recently, Taylor and Ogilvie noted that "there appears to be a need for a new conceptualization specific to sports that incorporates previous theoretical and conceptual

explanations and also draws on prior empirical findings within and outside of sport” (1994, p. 2). These researchers have offered a conceptualization of athletic retirement that examines adaptation to retirement through its entire developmental course. Their five-step model incorporates prior considerations within and outside the sports domain. The model attempts to: (a) identify the causal factors that initiate the retirement process; (b) specify the factors related to adaptation to retirement; (c) describe the available resources that will affect the response to retirement; (d) indicate the quality of the adaptation to retirement; and (e) discuss the treatment issues for distressful reactions to retirement. All steps are interrelated and the quality of the adaptation to retirement will depend upon the previous steps of the process. It is here, at the quality of the adaptation to retirement, that the athlete’s reaction to retirement will become evident, as will “whether the athlete undergoes a healthy transition following retirement or experiences distress in response to end of the competitive career” (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994, p. 12).

Retirement and the Professional Athlete

The dynamics of professional athletes withdrawing from active participation have been well documented in both qualitative and quantitative writings. From biographies, poetry, interviews and journalistic articles to studies by sport psychologists and sociologists, success or failure in post-retirement pursuits have been presented and analyzed (Howe, Howe & Wilkins, 1989; McPherson, 1980; Mihovilovic, 1968). Leunes and Nation are quite critical in their analysis of the popular literature when they state that it is “rife with reports of brain-damaged boxers, football players who cannot get out of bed without assistance, and athletes from all sport persuasions who are wife-battering, drug-addicted, alcoholic deadbeats Little, of course, is made of the ex-athlete who quietly goes to work and becomes an adjusted and contributing citizen” (1996, p. 552).

The adjustment to career termination is perhaps more complex at the professional than at the amateur level. For professional athletes, retirement can be a difficult process as “they lose what has been the focus of their being for most of their lives, the primary source of their identities, the physical prowess, the adulation bordering on worship from others, the money and the perquisites of fame, the camaraderie with teammates, and the intense ‘highs’ of competition” (Tremaine Drahota & Eitzen, 1998, p. 263). For these athletes, who are in their twenties and thirties, retirement often has more negative repercussions than positive effects, but both of these are usually related to financial considerations. For the majority of professional athletes, the salary and cheering is over in a matter of years. For the National Basketball Association (NBA), the average 1995 salary was \$1.9 million U.S., and in the National Football League (NFL), the average 1995 salary was \$737,000 U.S. Although this is clearly substantial money, the career expectancy to earn these figures in the NBA is rather grim, lasting only 3.4 seasons, while that of the NFL is slightly less grim at 4.2 years (Leunes & Nation, 1996).

Most frequently, the causes of athletic career termination are found to be a function of chronological age, deselection, the effects of injury, and free choice (Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993). In contributing to career termination, age has both physiological and psychological implications. Once past the time of physical development and a period of continued maintenance of the body, the athlete goes through a natural maturation process. The result is the slow deterioration of the body’s ability to maintain the physical level necessary for elite competition (Fisher & Conlee, 1979). For the majority of professional athletes, retirement is usually forced upon them when their physical prowess begins to wane. This harsh deselection process occurs at every level of competitive sports, but professional sports rely on what Ogilvie and Howe (1982) identify as the Darwinian philosophy of the “survival of the fittest.” This philosophy, which prevails in

competitive sport, places great value on the individuals who survive, but virtually ignores those who are deselected. In the NFL, where over 60% of players retire with permanent injury, statistics do not show the extent of physical infirmity or “how many ex-pros can no longer tie their shoe laces, or curl their fingers about a golf club. Statistics do not show how many can’t sleep without narcotics and have to call their wives for help to get out of bed” (Leunes & Nation, 1996, p. 554).

Research on Yugoslavian professional soccer players by Mihovilovic (1968) and on female tennis professionals by Allison and Meyer (1988) has further shown that injuries are a significant cause of career termination. Even the smallest of injuries may affect athletic performance at such a high level. In addition, the time and effort required for rehabilitation of an injury will continue to detract from the performance and ultimately from the overall athletic career (Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993).

Studies that have examined the adjustment to retirement have shown a distinction between those athletes who retire voluntarily and those who retire involuntarily. Tremaine Drahota and Eitzen (1998) focused on retirement among male professional athletes from various sports and found voluntary retirement to be favoured by these athletes, although most of them recognized the temporary nature and tenuous character of their profession. These researchers indicated that there were two types of involuntary retirement: when an athlete was cut or released from the team and when there was a career-ending injury. While the first type of involuntary retirement may be humiliating and have negative consequences on the athlete’s self-esteem, the second may be perceived by others as heroic and have a positive impact on the athlete (Treamine Drahota & Eitzen, 1998). In an earlier examination of the retirement of National Football League players, Reynolds (1981) found that although the second career status or satisfaction was not affected, the type of retirement was related to lower self-esteem for the retirees.

Mihovilovic (1968), in his classic retirement study of 44 former Yugoslavian professional soccer players, found that 95% of the athletes felt that retirement was imposed upon them. Deselection was a significant issue for these elite athletes. Whether through replacement by a younger player, deterioration of abilities, injury or other factors, the involuntary retirement was marked by a delay in its acceptance, a diminished circle of friends, and an increase in neglect and abuse of the physical self. Many players felt that retirement would have been less painful if an alternative capacity or role within the sport club had been available to them (Mihovilovic, 1968). In a similar study, Haerle (1975) examined the adjustment to retirement among 335 former professional baseball players. While 25% of the athletes reported a tendency to orient themselves and their life to the future, over half indicated an orientation to the past and 75% reported awareness that they were in the final stage of their competitive career. Despite this awareness the athletes mentioned that feelings of shock and regret would be felt when facing an involuntary retirement (Haerle, 1975).

The consequences of voluntary retirement, although still traumatic for many, are thought to be far less severe. The athlete is seen to be “retaining control over his [or her] own fate rather than having another’s will imposed upon him [or her]” (Lerch, 1984, p. 271). Studies have shown that voluntary withdrawal is associated with a greater number of options for moving into other societal occupations, and it enables new roles to be assumed more smoothly and with less stress (Gorbett, 1985; Lerch, 1984). Athletes who make a deliberate decision to retire, however, are clearly the minority (Hill & Lowe, 1974; Rosenberg, 1980).

Whether the retirement process is voluntary or involuntary, early research on professional athletes has revealed that the majority of athletes were handicapped by a failure or inability to plan for their retirement, by a lack of education or training suitable for a second occupation, or by a

desire to remain within the sport for the satisfactions and benefits it offered (McPherson, 1980). Occurring well beyond the time at which the average individual moves into a field of employment, the professional athlete's retirement has been shown by McPherson to be a traumatic experience characterized by personal conflict and frustration, especially for those who had no profession to move into or towards.

Despite the intensive and lengthy preparation for an athletic career preparation which often exceeds that for non-athletic occupations, there are usually few sport specific skills to transfer outside the sport arena. In that respect, Haerle's (1975) study has shown that if athletic fame was a significant factor in the first post-retirement employment, educational attainment was more important in predicting an ex-athlete's occupational status. Tremaine Drahota and Eitzen (1998) have noted that more recently some athletes undertake a realistic assessment of the odds of not only becoming a professional athlete but of the temporary nature of their professional athletic career. Some of their study participants indicated that they had doubts before they entered the professional ranks, and began planning for an alternate career at that early stage. Other athletes had doubts within their rookie year and they too began to seek alternatives to their role of professional athlete before the termination of that role. And finally, there were those athletes who thought about their future but never quite began the planning for life after their athletic career, and "unless they were stars and opportunities came to them, this choice tended to lead to unfortunate consequences" (Tremaine Drahota & Eitzen, 1998, p. 271). Rosenberg had earlier summarized this same situation by suggesting that "with the exception of former stars whose very names have value, the retired athlete especially the retired minority athlete finds himself in a business world for which he is often ill-prepared and which could hardly care less about his former meal-ticket and door-opener, the status of professional athlete" (1981, p. 7).

Ogilvie and Taylor (1993) have shown that the difference between professional athletes and other workers has grown noticeably wider over the past 20 years. The professional athlete currently enjoys a high level of media scrutiny, unimagined financial rewards, and an affluent lifestyle. These, however, may change dramatically upon their career termination if pre-retirement planning is not exercised. In many instances, the reaction to the retirement decision depends on age, the alternative lifestyles available, the availability of support from significant others, and the amount of planning for an alternative career (Gorbett, 1985; McPherson, 1980).

The loss of status and prestige may also be psychologically traumatic to those athletes whose self-identity is based on their role of “athlete” (McPherson, 1980). In their study of professional boxers, Weinberg and Arond (1952) concluded that adjustment difficulties were experienced due to the emotional problems and the dramatic decrease in status, prestige, and income brought on by retirement.

In their study of 27 former professional football, basketball, baseball and alpine skiing athletes, Tremaine Drahota and Eitzen (1998) found that the role of professional athlete is never exited completely, and that many of these athletes took a number of years to accept that they were no longer professional athletes. In their study, “role residual is the most significant characteristic for former athletes” and was followed closely by the “societal reaction to their role exit and the impact the role exit has on significant others” (Tremaine Drahota & Eitzen, 1998, p. 273). The coping mechanisms cited by the athletes varied considerably and lead the researchers to conclude that there is no one way to meld one’s previous identity into the newly undertaken role. The researchers further noted that athletes face unique adjustments when addressing their “addiction” and “withdrawal” from being “part of the game.” Many factors combine to establish the player’s dependency to the game: (a) the physical withdrawal from conditioning, playing, running,

weightlifting, hitting and being hit; (b) the emotional and social withdrawal from the camaraderie, the interaction with the fans, and the hero worship; (c) the financial withdrawal from making a salary that affords a lifestyle that is very difficult to maintain; (d) the chemical withdrawal from the adrenaline rush of which so many athletes speak; and (e) the mental withdrawal from the intensity of focus and commitment required of professional athletes (Tremaine Drahoté & Eitzen, 1998).

In a departure from the multiple studies of professional male athletes, Allison and Meyer (1988) sought to analyze the experiences of 20 female tennis professionals and their perceptions of their competitive years and subsequent retirement from sport. Their results differed significantly from studies of male professional athletes. For the women, the process of retirement was not nearly as traumatic, with 50% of them indicating that their first psychological response to retirement was one of relief and only 30% indicating that they had feelings of isolation and loss of identity. In terms of reasons for retirement, frustration on and with the tennis tour was cited by 40% of the participants. Travel was cited by 25% and injury, cited by 15%. Many of the athletes perceived the end of their competitive careers as “an opportunity to pursue a new set of roles and experiences that had not been as open or available to them while on the circuit” (Allison & Meyer, 1988, p. 219). These unique results may be partly explained by the fact that “one of the most interesting characteristics of these female tennis professionals is that over half (60%) never had any intention of becoming career tennis players” (Allison & Meyer, 1988, p. 215). Further to this, it must be remembered that the women’s professional tennis tour was quite different in the 1980s from what it is today. The tour was still in its infancy and according to these women, provided frustration in its growing pains, unwarranted pressure as well as loneliness since the women athletes could not afford to bring supportive others along on the tour.

The professional athlete has, over the past two decades, begun to show an interest for his or her own welfare in the post-retirement phase. Because of this, many athletes may now be able to undergo a more satisfying and smoother transition. With more information and opportunities available, athletes are increasingly aware of the importance of planning for their retirement. The completion of an education, the initiation of skill training for an alternate career, and the investment of earnings have also been recognized as steps to building a secure future. In addition, various leagues and players' associations have begun to offer services towards the preparation of an athlete for his or her post-retirement life. Overall, the timing and nature of athletic retirement appear to be more disorganized than for occupational retirement in that although athletes know withdrawal is inevitable because of injury, decline of ability or other factors, retirement still comes with "shocking suddenness" for many (Rosenberg, 1980).

Retirement and the Amateur Athlete

Amateur sport has undergone substantial changes over the past 20 years. Participation in an organized sport and training for elite performance are now very time consuming. As well, relatively high expectations are now present for all levels of performance (Coakley, 1983). However, whether amateur or professional, all athletes must consider the prospect of ending their competitive athletic careers. It has now been almost a quarter century since the issue of career transition among athletes gained the attention of sport psychologists and sociologists (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998). While over these past years significant concerns associated with the transition to retirement have been presented and discussed, the concerns were more focused on professional male sports than on amateur sport. Only over the past decade have inroads been made regarding amateur sport retirement.

Most amateur athletes who aspire to high performance levels now focus primarily, if not exclusively, on their chosen sport. More often than not, a sense of commitment to sport is established in childhood and is encouraged by parents, coaches, and teachers. The pattern of involvement is sanctioned with the successful child-athlete receiving additional attention and prestige (McPherson, 1980). As progress is made through the various levels of competition, the typical athletic experience requires an increasingly narrower focus towards sport specialization. The centering of attention on the fun aspects of sport during the formative years moves to a more serious task-centered view of the sport (Bloom, 1985). Salmela (1994) notes that fun becomes commitment, and play is replaced by work. The word "obsession" is used by Salmela (1994, p. 22) to describe the relationship to an activity that comes to dominate the athlete's life and that relegates all other activities to a secondary importance. In amateur sport, the coach and the sport association have traditionally been at the center of the elite athlete's world. This results in a centralization of the power over the athlete, a centralization founded on the often sincere and altruistic belief that the athlete needs to direct his or her full attention to the quest for athletic excellence and that "retaining the knowledge, control, and ultimate responsibility for the athlete's world is often justified in order to achieve outcome objectives" (Thomas & Ermler, 1988, p. 138).

The commitment required during the early years and the ever increasing investment of energies make it easy to neglect other aspects considered "normal" during these years (McPherson, 1980). Education and career planning, although acknowledged as important, are often relegated to a distant secondary position (Broom, 1982). The intense focus on athletics may also inhibit the development of life skills and experiences important in personal and career planning (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990; Thomas & Ermler, 1988). Further, many elite athletes do not engage in exploratory behaviour that would extend their personal and social identities (Pearson &

Petitpas, 1990). Kirby has noted that the sport system was “routinized, insulating and separating” (1986, p. 272), and according to Ungerleider, while excelling in sport, these athletes have precluded “all other stages of socialization and rites of passage” (1997, p. 1294).

Many elite amateur athletes, like their professional counterparts, are ill-prepared for a life outside of the sport milieu (Botterill, 1982; Werthner & Orlick, 1986). Athletes who retire in their twenties or thirties do not have the normal years ahead of them to plan their next move. Pursuing excellence in sport without sacrificing a future in other areas, however, should be possible. For the high performance amateur athlete, education has started to be recognized as a crucial factor. Alfermann and Gross (1997) reported in their study that the educational level of German national and international level athletes was quite high. In their study of Swiss elite athletes, Schmid and Schilling (1998) concluded that “in order to prevent adjustment difficulties, particularly loss of and disruption of self-identify, athletes should be offered help to explore ways of broadening their social identity and role repertoire, thus taking on new non-athletic identities and experiencing feelings of value and self-worth in this new personal conception” (1998, p. 610).

According to the research, retiring scholastic and collegiate athletes face traumatic career termination less often than elite amateur and professional athletes. For most of these athletes, termination may still be within the normal developmental and academic process (Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985; Werthner & Orlick, 1986). Sands (1978), who studied 153 former U.S. high school basketball and football players, found that they handled their loss realistically and did not appear to undergo an identity crisis or trauma. Similarly, Snyder and Baber (1979) found that there was no evidence of a problematic transition for 233 U.S. male athletes at the intercollegiate level and that the former athletes adjusted successfully to their postcollege interests and activities. Greendorfer and Blinde (1985), in a later study of 123 former U.S. intercollegiate male and

female athletes, also indicated that athletes experienced minimal adjustment difficulties. Further, the retirement from the active role of “athlete” did not terminate the individual’s overall involvement with sport. More recently, Schell (1995) in her study of U.S. university women athletes reported that nearly half of the athletes endured a difficult transition and that the mode of retirement and support systems available to the women during and after their sport retirement influenced their adaptability to a life beyond intercollegiate sport. Further, conflicts with coaches and a lack of institutional support were cited as the two main reasons for the negative transition from college sport to retirement.

Although a transition to retirement with minimal adjustment difficulties has been found overall for the U.S. scholastic athlete, these findings are not generalizable across sport settings to the professional and high performance environments. Sinclair and Orlick (1994) have suggested that this lack of generalizability across sport settings is due to the significant changes in expectations, demands, and level of expertise as one moves from the broad, more recreational base of the sport feeder system to the narrowing, high performance apex of the feeder system.

Although the high performance athlete knows that retirement is inevitable, there is still a hesitancy to face this major decision. In his study of 79 former Canadian Olympic athletes, Orlick (1980) reported that 61% indicated feelings of fear when faced with the final decision to leave elite amateur sport. A study of 117 Belgian Olympians found that approximately 33% of the athletes were reluctant participants in their sport career termination (Wylleman, DeKnop, Menkehorst, Theeboom & Annerel, 1993). Of significance is the researchers’ note that “almost all of the female athletes” were included in this group (Wylleman et al., 1993, p. 904). In her study of 33 female National Canoe Team members, McGown (1993) reported that 42% of the women admitted to not taking any action in preparation for their retirement from international

competition. Their retirement was not without difficulties, a result in line with Sinclair's (1990) results: high performance athletes who planned their retirement and received more support from their coaches had significantly fewer problems post-retirement.

Retirement from amateur sport occurs at many ages, at many stages of the athletic career, and for a variety of reasons. For many athletes, withdrawal involves one of four major reasons: the selection process, age-related physiological/psychological changes, athletic injury or free choice (Lavage, Grove & Gordon, 1997; Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993, Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998). A selection process is encountered at every competitive level and many athletes choose retirement when they face the failure to meet their main goal of being named to a specific competition or team. Deselection is thought to be one of the most significant contributors to the difficulties encountered in athletic career termination (Svoboda & Vanek, 1982). As with the professional sport situation, the Darwinian philosophy of the survival of the fittest prevails in amateur sport - a high value is placed on athletes who survive, while others are ignored (Ogilvie & Howe, 1982; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998). Physiological changes that occur with aging require additional hard work towards maintaining performance, and the on-going presence of younger and potentially stronger and faster athletes in the sport significantly increases the pressure for the aging competitor to perform. Unfortunately, as a natural aspect of the maturation process, the relevant physical attributes such as strength, endurance, coordination, flexibility, and physical composition undergo a slow deterioration (Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998). Age also has a psychological component that may influence the retirement decision. The older athlete may have a change in life values and may lose the motivation to train and compete at the required level (Werthner & Orlick, 1986). Ultimately, the older athlete realizes that retirement is beckoning. Chronological age and sport age were found by Kirby (1986) to be two conditions of retirement.

Elite athletes perform at such a high level of performance that even a minor injury may be sufficient to make the athlete no longer competitive. Any injury may have a dramatic impact, not only on the athlete's performance, but also on the athlete's career. Further, the considerable time and effort required for the rehabilitation of some injuries may be career threatening. According to Ogilvie and Taylor, the process of rehabilitation "not only affects the athlete's return to their previous level, but also inhibits the normal improvement that occurs during the course of an athletic career" (1993, p. 766). As such, athletic injury has been found a significant factor in the withdrawal from athletics (Hill & Lowe, 1974; Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993; Murphy, 1995). Research has also indicated that injuries may result in serious distress for the athlete, a distress which may be manifested in depression, suicide attempts or substance abuse (Ogilvie & Howe, 1982; Werthner & Orlick, 1982). Kirby (1986), however, found that for women, the majority did come back from acute injury to compete at least one more time at the national level.

The athlete's free choice in terminating his or her career may be a function of personal, social and/or sport related issues (Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993). In their study of 199 Canadian National Team athletes, Sinclair and Orlick (1993) cited three reasons for retirement: (a) athletes were tired of the circuit or the lifestyle and/or they felt it was time to move on; (b) they had achieved their goals; or (c) they had difficulties with the coaching staff. Stambulova (1997) reported these three reasons for the retirement of Russian athletes, and noted the additional reasons of psychological fatigue, and decreasing performance. When reviewing reasons by gender, Stambulova indicated that "males retired more often due to objective reasons (decreasing of sport results)" while "for females the main reason was the appearance of some new interests" (1997, p. 659). Similarly, in her study of former National Canoe Team women athletes, McGown (1993) noted that lack of commitment or interest, and lack of or poor coaching were the two main

reasons for these athletes to retire. In the Belgian study of 117 former Olympic athletes, another major reason for retirement was found: the difficulty in combining elite sport with study or work (Wylleman, 1993). Schaefer (1992) further reported that Israeli high performance athletes revealed no one single reason which characterized retirement, rather it was a combination of several reasons. Many of the athletes mentioned army service and the bureaucracy of sport officials, club managers, and sport institutions as important factors in their retirement. More recent research suggests that the reason for career termination mediates the quality of adjustment to athletic retirement (Grove et al., 1998; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994).

Voluntary retirements are considered by Danish his colleagues (1980) to be based on normative reasons; they are initiated by the athlete and are, therefore, expected. Athletes who terminated their career voluntarily experienced positive emotions more often than athletes who retired involuntarily (Alfermann & Gross, 1997; Danish et al., 1980). In addition, the athletes reported a more active coping process and life style following retirement. In their recent study of 48 former Australian elite athletes, Lavalle and his colleagues (1997) found that a very high proportion retired voluntarily. They indicated, however, that this higher than normal number of voluntary retirements may be due to the unique structural aspects of sport in Australia. Werthner and Orlick (1986), have suggested that the athlete who freely chooses to retire is simply no longer deriving enjoyment and fulfillment from the pursuit of the sport. Research has shown that voluntary retirement is often perceived as a way to take a new direction in life, to seek out new challenges and sources of satisfaction, or to develop a new social milieu (Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985; Svoboda & Vanek, 1982; Werthner & Orlick, 1986). McGown and Rail (1996) also noted that although a majority of athletes had envisioned voluntary retirement, many of them were

confronted with involuntary retirement and most of them encountered retirement in an abrupt manner.

Involuntary retirements are initiated by the team, the sport or circumstances outside the control of the athlete and so “the timing is incongruent with the individual’s expectation of when the event should occur” (Danish et al., 1997, p. 155). Premature endings are noted by Thomas and Ermler (1988) as perhaps the most devastating of athletic career endings. Unanticipated retirements are much more difficult to cope with and more often involve a crisis for the athlete as well as a higher degree of change (Pearlin, 1980). Murphy noted that “athletes who have been unexpectedly cut and whose performance goals were never met in the sport are most likely to have negative emotions toward the transition process and perhaps develop bitterness or frustration toward the sporting groups with which they were involved” (1995, p. 339). Similar negative repercussions were found in a study of retired football players by Reynolds (1981) who noted that involuntary retirement was negatively related to self esteem and perception of control. An athlete’s degree of control with respect to the end of his or her career may be perceived differently by different athletes and this perception may in turn affect how the athlete reacts in the transition process (Alfermann & Gross, 1997; McPherson, 1980). This distress can manifest itself psychologically, emotionally, behaviourally, and socially, and has been associated in the medical literature with a variety of pathologies, including depression and anxiety (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998). Kirby (1986) in her study of Canadian female Olympians, spoke of forced retirements whereby the choice was made by others. These choices became, essentially, “choices of one” (p. 274).

The retiring amateur athletes, like their professional counterparts, are confronted by a wide range of psychological, social, financial and occupational difficulties. The extent to which

such difficulties produce stress influences the degree of difficulty experienced in the transition to retirement (Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993). The length of time spent as an elite athlete has been noted to impact on the level of stress during the transition process: the longer an athlete remains in the high performance stream, the more likely is he or she to encounter difficulties throughout the transition to retirement (Broom, 1982). Wylleman and colleagues reported that female athletes had slightly more problems than male athletes and that they “felt a greater need for guidance and support to cope with their adaptation and social integration” (1993, p. 904). In their study of 77 retired elite Dutch athletes, Menkehorst and VanDerBerg (1997) noted that a majority experienced major problems, although 80% were able to cope with those problems successfully. The discouraging result was that the remaining 20% experienced ongoing mental and physical difficulties. Thomas & Ermler are not more encouraging when they state that most athletes are “just miserable in their retirement” (1988, p. 140). Baillie (1993) noted similarly that many athletes experience grief, disorientation, loneliness, and depression in their post-retirement time. Further, in a survey of 132 German elite athletes, Alfermann (1995) reported that 13% indicated feelings of depression, helplessness, and other psychological disturbances following their retirement. Schaeffer (1992) noted that the vast majority of retiring athletes expressed strong negative feelings toward the management, administration, organization, and planning of the elite sport system in Israel. A study of 57 former U.S. Olympians (Ungerleider, 1997) has indicated that only a minority of athletes (18%), reported no problems in their transition to retirement. A majority of athletes, however, reported the opposite: 42% expressed some minor difficulty in marking the transition, 21% had serious problems, and 19% had very serious problems and were not able to adjust to a full retirement from sports. Those athletes who reported having serious problems also indicated that they had not prepared adequately for the shift in lifestyle and goals. Athletes who reported very

serious problems mentioned that they “had not prepared emotionally, intellectually, or physically for a life after intensive sport” (Ungerleider, 1997, p. 1293). In brief, many studies indicate that a good number of athletes experience great difficulty in dealing with retirement (Grove, Lavalley, Gordon & Harvey, 1998).

Sinclair and Orlick (1993) note that it is a combination of the individual’s personality, circumstances, the type of transition encountered, the resources available to the individual, and the resources utilized by the individual that determines a successful transition. Thomas & Ermler (1988) note that those athletes who go smoothly through the transition process, also view “sport as a chapter” of their life story and look forward to moving onwards. These are also the athletes who have an education or marketable skills, positive self-esteem, good health, support from family and friends for the non-sport self and a lack of financial difficulties. A smooth transition is further thought to be dependent on past experience with other transitions. Being able to recognize that their retirement situation is comparable to a past event or situation enables the athlete to utilize transferable skills to address the transition at the cognitive, behavioural and psychological levels (Danish, Owens, Green & Brunell, 1997).

Werthner and Orlick (1986) found that a majority of the Canadian elite athletes in their study had encountered some degree of difficulty in their transition to retirement, but that there were factors which appeared to influence that transition positively: voluntary withdrawal, feeling a sense of accomplishment, possessing a new focus and an adequate financial situation, and having personal support resources in place. Similarly, Sinclair (1990) found that many athletes encountered a great change in their lives, a moderate degree of stress, and moderate difficulties as a result of their retirement. Furthermore, positive adjustment was found to be related to voluntary withdrawal, goal achievement, and personal sport-related satisfaction.

In a departure from previous findings, Sinclair's (1990) study of Canadian National Team athletes indicated that a majority of athletes felt that retirement had changed their lives in a positive direction and that they had made the adjustment to their new lives without major difficulties. They did, however, progress through a period of adjustment involving moderate stress and difficulties. Both Werthner and Orlick (1986) and Sinclair and Orlick (1994) have suggested that certain factors characterize a positive transition process. Athletes for whom there is a planned transition, a voluntary transition, the achievement of sport-related goals, balance and options, and/or a supportive environment are thought to be able to make the transition to retirement more successfully. In their exploration of transitional experiences, Sinclair and Orlick (1993) showed that athletes who retire after achieving their sport-related goals adjusted smoothly. It should be noted however, that 43% of the international caliber athletes who participated in their study felt that they had not achieved their goals.

Schlossberg (1981) has indicated that a period of disruption follows all transitions, whereby old expectations and relationships change, and new ones evolve. Elite athletic participation entails regular and familiar routines with well-defined obligations and relationships. Retirement from this participation, then, may mean days without a familiar schedule and with ill-defined lines of duty and relationships (Hill & Lowe, 1974). Reactions to these post-retirement experiences vary from individual to individual and depend on age, alternative lifestyles available, amount of planning for alternative roles, support from significant others, degree of sport involvement, and available mechanisms for desocialization from the role of athlete (McPherson, 1980).

Sinclair (1990) noted that approximately one-third of the athletes in her study took six months to one year to feel totally adapted to retirement; the remaining athletes were split evenly

between an adaptation of two months or less and a more prolonged adaptation of two years or longer. Similarly, Stambulova (1997) reported the length of the transitional period for most of the Russian athletes to be from 6 to 12 months. For these athletes, it was a “very emotional period” during which they needed but did not receive financial and psychological support.

Orlick and Werthner (1987) have suggested that the sport retirement adjustment process is established in a wave pattern. According to them, adjustment occurs with time and the period an athlete spends in the down part of the wave becomes shorter and less intense, which is a clear indication of progress and positive adaptation. Ogilvie and Howe (1982) have also argued that during the transition from athlete to ex-athlete, each individual faces a period of adjustment. They postulated that the transition process follows a predictable and identifiable course, and delineated four stages: (a) shock and numbness, (b) denial, (c) anger and resentment, and (d) depression. These are similar to the five stages proposed by Kubler-Ross (1969): (a) denial and isolation, (b) anger, (c) bargaining, (d) depression, and (e) acceptance. It is, however, the fifth stage of acceptance documented by Kubler-Ross (1969) that offers a difference between natural death and the social death of an athlete. Although there is an element of acceptance involved in athletic failure, if an athlete has not attained his or her goals or met the selection criteria, once resigned to that fact he or she will continue to live. A part of the athlete may die, but there is recovery from social death (Lerch, 1984).

Wylleman and colleagues (1993) reported that those athletes confronted with emotional problems (e.g., disruption of feelings of personal identity, a lower level of self-confidence, feelings of depression) experience a longer period of adaptation. According to Denison, such athletes are those who are unable “to replace the glory, excitement, camaraderie and sense of achievement they experienced on the sporting field, they lost their passion and excitement for life” (1997, p.

13). Retirement requires an almost complete redefinition of the person in his or her new social role as well as a re-formation of self-identity. In a retirement study of 25 Greek and 25 French male high performance athletes, Chamalidis (1997) reported that the masculine identity construction process often used to structure the gender identity of athletes may have an impact on the identity structure of males in their post-athletic life. The eventual success of a re-establishment of role and identity is, like the transition to retirement itself, dependent on the physical and mental preparedness of the athlete.

Within the sport context, situations and events (e.g., winning and losing, selection processes, career set-backs) have the potential for producing profound identity transformations (Stevenson, 1981). It appears that athletes begin early in life to base their self-esteem and identity on athletic performance (McPherson, 1980). The degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role has been linked to retirement behaviour (Baillie & Danish, 1992). According to Baillie, "the special issues posed by the retirement of athletes exist because of the intensity of involvement and commitment of identity that athletes often make to achieve success in their sports" (1993, p. 408). Identities built predominantly on successful performances are fragile and lend themselves to a life of incredible peaks and valleys where "self-esteem is high when they win and low when they lose" (Snyder, 1983, p. 101). These athletes experience a variety of emotional and social adjustment difficulties upon retirement (Baillie & Danish, 1992). A recent study of Australian national and/or state athletes indicated that the level of identification with the role of "athlete" was strongly related to both the degree of psychological adjustment needed and the time taken for the transition. In addition, "athletes who maintain a strong and exclusive athletic identity up to the point of retirement may be vulnerable to career transition difficulties" (Grove et al., 1997, p. 198). Denison (1996) found that all the New Zealand Olympic athletes which he

interviewed required a serious adjustment in their transition out of sport. Further, it was extremely difficult for these athletes to retire and find an alternative means to feel good about themselves. Attention given to other possible sources of identification seem to be indispensable for maintaining an inner balance during and after the transition to retirement (Chamalidis, 1997).

Many National Team athletes have felt a sense of isolation upon retirement; a feeling that they were no longer considered members of their sport organization (McGown, 1993; McGown & Rail; 1996, Sinclair & Orlick, 1993). Sinclair found that “many athletes felt ignored, used, forgotten, and discarded in retirement” (1990, p. 57) and Denison has deplored the fact that athletes are “hastily disposed of when the use-by date expires” (1996, p. 359). The transition from international sporting competition to retirement is often a lonesome experience, many athletes having very little contact with or support from team-or sport-related individuals. In addition, retirement and transition processes seem to have a profound effect on the athlete’s feelings regarding her sport career and the way in which that career ended (McGown, 1993).

The similarities and differences between male and female elite sport retirement have largely been ignored in the literature. Early studies have focused on male experiences and later studies have focused on both genders but have been gender blind in that they assumed that males and females had comparable experiences. In an initial study on 134 female athletes who had competed in the 1976 Olympic Games, Kirby noted that there is an “erroneous assumption that male and female sport experiences are identical. Ultimately, this assumption leads to a misrepresentation of women’s experiences as athletes and as women leaving high performance sport” (1988, p. 4). In order to examine the retirement process among these women, Kirby (1986) focused on their retirement experience as the athlete related to it, and within the context of their sport situation and their ongoing lives. Retirement was found to have occurred through one of

three paths: (a) voluntary, when the athlete made the decision for her own retirement, (b) mandatory, a form of compulsory leaving based upon the repetitive quadrennial cycle of amateur sport and its performance expectations and age ceiling; and (c) forced retirement, where the athlete has little control and generally considers the decision to be unfair. Further, a path of athletic retirement was determined as generally occurring sequentially and consisting of the decision-making, the pre-leaving interval, the act of leaving and the aftermath. Not all athletes in her study, however, experienced the retirement path in that manner (Kirby, 1986).

The priority of the sport system has historically centered on the recruitment, training, and performance outcomes of the athlete. The athlete's overall development has more often than not been neglected. Yet, athlete's inevitably retire and return to the reality of the non-sport society - a reality that necessitates more than just athletic development. In non-sport society, the skills that an athlete has perfected for so long may now seem useless (Thomas & Ermler, 1988). According to Thomas and Ermler (1988), the non-sport life requires a new set of skills such as critical thinking, decision making, social and verbal skills for nonsport interactions, independence, and self-sufficiency. If such life skills are developed while in the athletic world then a successful retirement from sport is more likely. In contrast, if the sport system does not allow for the development of the whole athlete, then the retired athlete may become a liability rather than an asset to the nonsport world.

Traditionally, organized sport has avoided sport termination and career guidance programs, perhaps based on the belief that such information would act as a distraction to the athletes and ultimately detract them from their performance focus (Baillie & Danish, 1992; Taylor, Ogilvie, Gould, & Gardner, 1990). On the contrary, Murphy (1995) argued that many athletes indicated that planning for a career after sport lessened their anxiety about retirement thereby

allowing them to concentrate more effectively on their sport performance and goals. The lack of planning and the absence of guidance during the pre-and post-retirement periods were reported by Belgian ex-Olympians to be the most important factors associated with their career termination adjustment and coping difficulties (Wylleman et al., 1993). Former elite Dutch athletes reported major dissatisfaction regarding the attitude and lack of attention to the issue of retirement by national sport organizations (Menkehorst & VanDenBerg, 1997). Currently, it seems that only limited retirement services are available to National Team members and that these services are being used by only a limited number of athletes (McGown & Rail, 1996; Sinclair, 1990; Stambulova, 1997). Sinclair and Orlick (1993) noted that only 27% of athletes in their study used the services offered by the Olympic Athlete Career Centre (OACC), and that the majority of athletes who did not use them either did not require them or were simply not aware of their existence.

Intervention recommendations have been offered by Sinclair (1990) and McGown (1993), and they include post-competition assistance through counseling, seminars, financial support, job search, coaching opportunities, and continued contact between the retired athletes and the national sport organizations. An “exit interview” to clarify retirement reasons and feelings was also recommended (McGown, 1993). Of significance are the recent studies which have shown that the athlete’s feelings of being “ignored, used, forgotten, or discarded” upon retirement could have been minimized had the national sport organizations recognized the athlete’s contributions and continued contact with them after retirement (McGown, 1993; McGown & Rail, 1996; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993). As Sinclair succinctly wrote, “in sport, it appears as though most organizations have not paid the same attention to helping athletes move out of the organizational structure as they have to helping them move in” (1990, pg. 78).

As the demands associated with competitive sport have increased over the years, so too has the interest regarding career transition issues among athletes (Lavallee, Wylleman & Sinclair, 1997). Botterill's (1982) study of "endings" in sport careers has suggested that many of the aspects could be addressed earlier and in a more effective way in the careers of young amateur athletes. Providing career guidance and termination counseling can contribute to the athletic success of the individual and of the overall sport program (Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993). Post-retirement counseling may be required in an on-going capacity (Grove et al., 1998). Ogilvie and Howe (1982) have argued that parents, coaches, and sport psychologists must be sensitive to the degree to which an athlete's identity is related to sport. Feelings of self-worth and esteem should not be solely dependent on winning or losing. Svoboda and Vanek (1982) have indicated that the responsibility for helping athletes to cope with retirement stresses rests with coaches, sport officials, and sport organizations. They have further mentioned that attention should be paid to the individual, and from the beginning of the sport career all the way up to the elite level. Researchers have also discussed specific strategies towards developing the whole individual, in particular, the life-skills and attitudes necessary for an athlete's successful transition to the "after-sport" life (Thomas & Ermler, 1988).

Gifted Girls and Women

Unprecedented changes and opportunities for girls and women have become available over the past decade, and there has been a heightened interest in research on women. Despite this explosion of opportunity and scholarship for and about women, "little research has focused on the development of female talent in such diverse fields as education, athletics, and the arts" (Arnold, Noble & Subotnik, 1996, p. 2). With the majority of talent research focusing on men, there is

much less information regarding talent development among girls and women. Few educators or psychologists have focused their research on gifted girls and even fewer have examined gifted adult women. Clearly, more research is needed on the experiences of gifted girls and women (Arnold, Noble & Subotnik, 1996; Kerr, 1994; Leroux, 1992). At the same time, there is a multitude of studies that have undertaken comparisons between gifted girls and gifted boys, or between average girls and average boys. Leroux (1992) has noted, unfortunately, that these studies often measure “female performance with a male yardstick.” Not surprisingly, then, results from a number of these studies suggest that gifted girls are more similar to gifted boys than to average girls (Kerr, 1994).

Giftedness has been defined by Arnold and colleagues as “outstanding (demonstrated or potential) intellectual, expressive, or practical ability in the domain compared to others of the same age and opportunity” (1996, p. 7). These domains of giftedness, as further noted by Arnold and colleagues (1996), include logical-mathematical, intrapersonal, interpersonal, kinesthetic, verbal, musical, artistic, spatial, and moral. Different categories researched include areas such as intellectually gifted, artistically gifted, and creatively gifted. Kerr, Colangelo and Gaeth have noted that students in their study “viewed the nature of giftedness as either a trait (i.e., an inherent ability or inborn talent) or a performance (i.e., behaviour or performance, giftedness is what you do) variable” (1988, p. 246). When viewed as a performance, giftedness requires effort and application. Unfortunately, many gifted adolescents, when confronted with a crisis or a critical incident are unable to cope and continue the effort. Many “retire” from the gifted life, some even do this by committing suicide (Leroux, 1986).

In the classic long-range study conducted by Terman (1925), cognitively gifted children were found to be healthier, taller, stronger, and to have more social knowledge than average

children. They were also found to be as or more happy and well-adjusted than the average child. Further findings from this study are that gifted girls displayed higher leadership ability, were more achieving, were strongly influenced by their mothers, and tended towards the same activities and school subjects as gifted boys. In short, gifted girls were found by Terman (1925) to be more similar to gifted boys than to average girls. Sex differences have also been documented, with gifted girls more likely to prefer the company of boys - not necessarily a "tomboy," the gifted girl is nevertheless more active and capable of enjoying the type of play that boys enjoy (Kerr, 1994). A number of studies subsequent to that of Terman have confirmed his findings (Rydzewski, 1982; Small, Teagno & Selz, 1980). Kerr (1994) concluded that "the characteristic now called androgyny is common among gifted girls" (p. 111).

One of the more commonly studied areas related to gifted girls is their superior academic performance and their need for self-esteem through their achievements. Gifted girls have been found to be similar to their male peers in a study by Kaufmann (1981), who also found that a high percentage of gifted girls were second-born females and that gifted girls were sometimes loners who did not need recognition. Although most of the parents of the gifted girls studied were in fact supportive, the researchers concluded that these gifted girls may also have had a very strong inner direction and sense of purpose.

Through documenting case studies, Leroux (1988, 1989) identified a variety of characteristics among academically gifted adolescents. With an intense drive to succeed, these young women are independent and assertive high achievers. They possess a self-directed, self-motivated, and committed perseverance while setting high standards for themselves. Striving for and attaining a personal best brings gratification and "achieving excellence is [the] ultimate high" (1989, p. 29). From her study of highly gifted girls, Kaufmann (1981) identified a composite of

adolescent scholars who seemed to be more concerned with self-actualization than with social acceptance, a concern with “being all they can be.” Developing giftedness has been felt by Csikszentmihalyi (1990) to be important to individual self-actualization, and whether it be intellectual, social, physical or artistic, this development is conceptualized as being intrinsically fulfilling and lending itself to the production of optimal experiences. Coping with high aspirations and success was found to be dependent on a positive self-concept. This pursuit of attainable excellence has been perceived by Adler (1973) as a healthy perfectionistic need, and viewed as “consistent with Maslow’s concept of the maximizing of unique potential through the process of self-actualization” (Parker & Mills, 1996, p. 198).

Many gifted girls, however, prefer to deny that they are gifted or special in any way. Often, the fear of being rejected leads to the denial of their giftedness and an attempt to hide their abilities. This vulnerability for gifted females usually occurs when they enter puberty. These actions are undertaken in order to conform to what they perceive as social acceptance by parents, teachers, and friends, or to diminish what they perceive as a conflict between their achievement and gender identity (Arnold, Noble & Subotnik, 1996; Hollinger & Fleming, 1988; Kaufmann, 1981; Kerr & Colangelo, 1987; Terman & Oden, 1935). Kerr and her colleagues (1988) reported that the majority of the gifted adolescent females in their study felt giftedness to be socially disadvantageous because it initiated potential negative reactions from other. Kramer (1991) indicated that gifted young women deliberately underestimated their abilities in order to avoid being seen as physically unattractive or lacking in social competence. Further to this, Kerr has noted that adolescence is remembered as a time of “betrayal” by many gifted women who refuse to conform to social norms. In that regard, it is a shock for most gifted girls when “the cheering for intellectual achievement [is] replaced by steady pressure to be feminine and popular” (1994, p.

126). In adolescence, this critical shift from intellectual achievement to achievement in social relationships is thought to be a result of the sexist values pervading North American societies. Indeed, gender training is the strongest in adolescent years and young women learn very quickly that intelligence, achievement, physical strength, power, independence and assertiveness are not associated to their gender and that anything that threatens their gender identity, any excursion beyond the line of demarcation between the sexes, must be vigorously resisted (Burke, 1996). In learning to be “feminine” in the traditional and stereotypical sense of the word, young girls and women are helped by the print and electronic media as well as other social institutions, most notably the educational system. In fact, much has been written about how schools short-change girls (Orenstein, 1994; Wellesley College, 1992) and favour a socialization according to sexist stereotypical models. Not surprisingly then, the self-esteem of adolescent girls, thought to be central to the achievement issue, has been shown to decrease significantly between the ages of 11 and 17 years (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Hollinger & Fleming, 1988; Orenstein, 1994). Of significant concern is the young women’s failure to realize their potential and their subsequent decreased level of life satisfaction (Hollinger & Fleming, 1988). Equally disturbing is the finding that above average ability has been identified as a high risk factor in youth suicide (Joffe & Offord, 1983).

The decline in confidence and aspirations for many gifted young women continues from high school into college, with shifts to less demanding career goals, lower educational aspirations, and for those in relationships, the subordination of personal goals in favour of the goals of a significant other (Arnold, 1994; Holland & Eisenhart, 1990). The conflict between social expectations and personal potential is very prominent for gifted women. Indeed, upon being identified as such, they are encouraged to achieve their full potential but are also encouraged to

adhere to society's definition of femininity (Kerr, 1994; Rodenstein & Glickhauf-Hughes, 1979). Silverman (1996) summarizes the historical context of a woman's life amid social expectations:

It takes only a cursory glance at herstory within history to realize that with no independence, no access to education, no property right, no opportunities for gainful employment in 'men's' fields, no birth control, no relief from 'women's work' and no support from society (not even from other women), it is nothing short of miraculous that any woman managed to get beyond her lot in life. (p. 23)

Several factors have been identified as significant for women who maintain and ultimately achieve their original life goals and aspirations. In a study of successful Canadian women, Leroux (1992) found that this group of women knew themselves and their personal values. They had a strong sense of their own abilities and displayed the typical determination and perseverance of the gifted individual. Further, when faced with stressful situations, they appeared to "tap into an inner strength, and transform adversity into life affirmation" thereby "using difficult experiences as springboards" (p. 113). The influence of the parents' attitudes and beliefs on their children's academic self-perceptions and achievement has been well established and in one study, the parents' beliefs had an even greater effect on children's self-perception than previous performance (Callahan & Reis, 1996). Successful women in that study had parental support throughout their development and the imparting of the knowledge that women can do anything. Although mother and father have both been found to contribute positive values, early relationship of females with their mothers has been identified as a key factor (Leroux, 1992, 1994; Raymond & Benbow, 1989). Friends, family and teachers have also been found to play significant supportive roles. In order to achieve the desired goals, most gifted women have been found to marry later than average women and to view the relationship as a partnership. It has been noted that the

achievement of gifted women either in a professional career or in an unpaid vocation is at times derailed by marriage and/or the early birth of children (Hertz, 1986; Kerr, 1994).

Further commonalities were found by Kerr (1985) in her analysis of eminent women in their girlhood, adolescence and adulthood: (a) an unusual amount of time was spent alone during childhood and this time was spent reading at an advanced level; (b) as girls there was a sense of being “different”; (c) in adolescence, there were conflicts between achieving and social acceptance or romantic love; and (d) as women, they all possessed a sense of mission or vocation, all had a commitment and were able to adhere to that commitment (Kerr, 1985). Researchers have also found significant the strong identification with a particular profession or area of interest as well as the need to follow “a powerful dream” (Daniels, 1985, p. 429). Leadership, maturity and the availability of a mentor who believed in the gifted female and her aspirations were identified as crucial for achieving life goals. The gender of the mentor was found to be important since, for a young woman, the presence of a woman mentor meant that there was a duality; the woman could be both a mentor and a role model. Extremely gifted women who realize their potential seem to persist towards achievement and ultimately gain recognition for their abilities (Card Steele, & Abeles, 1980; Holland & Eisenhart, 1990; Kaufmann, 1981; Leroux, 1986, 1992; Rose & Larwood, 1988). Kerr (1994) indicated that, at some point, these women decided to ignore potential limitations of traditional gender roles and aggressively moved forward. Gifted girls who become gifted women are the ones who “seem to survive with dreams intact” (Kerr, 1994, p. 134).

Gifted Female Athletes

Sport, both historically and traditionally, has been a male domain and females have been relegated to the sidelines through a combination of physiological and social myths. Murray and Matheson have noted that “the social, psychological, physiological, and biomechanical research and information in sport was all about males, related to males, and for the purpose of improving the performances of males” (1993, p. 217). Not surprisingly, the institution of sport is one of the strongest reinforcers of the male gender role. The playing of sports has been constructed as being essential to a boy’s development into a man, but has been traditionally viewed as counter to a girl’s development into a woman (Harris, 1987).

Horner (1968, 1971) and Harris (1971) have both lamented and documented the “problem” of the female involved in competitive sport. According to Greendorfer, “female participation in sport is related to core notions our society holds about gender, equality, hierarchy, and physicality” (1991, p. 13). Throughout the past century, women’s sporting participation has been constrained by the forces of a patriarchal society where “female athletes, coaches, fans, and sport reporters all tend to be treated as second-class citizens” (Wann, 1997, p. 66). The sexist gender role expectations are nowhere more evident than in sport where participation remains positively associated with masculinity (Duquin, 1978). Society’s inability to reconcile femininity with personal accomplishment and ambition is well-documented (Horner, 1968, 1971). In addition, Robinson has noted that “since sport is synonymous with masculinity, a female athlete becomes an oxymoron” (1997, p. 105).

Since the emergence of formal sporting competition in the 19th century, doctors have been highly interested in female sporting participation and have almost religiously disqualified them

from vigorous physical activity on the basis of their unique anatomy and physiology as well as their special “moral obligations” within society (Lenskyj, 1986). The medical profession has thus “attempted to classify as inappropriate any sporting activity which allegedly jeopardized female reproductive health” and in doing so assisted the media in perpetuating the myth and the dichotomy between “masculine” and “feminine” sports (Lenskyj, 1986, p. 55). With the medical profession viewing sportswomen as women first and athletes second, the theme remained constant decade after decade: women's anatomy and physiology could not stand the strain of sporting competition. Heated debate raged for over a century over the suitability of sports for women. Medical reasons (which have now been refuted) were cited to exclude women from participation in the 200m and 800m track events, as well as those longer than 1500m, the standing broad jump, and the shot put. Any sport leading to allegedly “strenuous” activity was discouraged by the medical experts and myths were slow to disappear. For instance, it was not until 1979 that the American College of Sports Medicine supported female participation in distance running events (Lenskyj, 1986). By that time there was a significant women’s lobby for inclusion and, in addition, 25 nations currently held women’s marathon events. These efforts paved the way for the inclusion of the women's marathon in the 1984 Olympic Games.

Women have long been excluded from certain sports by the male-dominated sports system, a system which has long dictated the quality and extent of any female involvement. In many countries, women are still today prevented from competing or do so at great peril to their physical being, all because participation in sport does not conform to the prevailing view of a woman's place in that society (Robinson, 1997). Rigid definitions of sex-appropriate behaviour have limited the lives of girls and women, and have assisted in maintaining sport as a male preserve. Although Lenskyj notes that the participation of women in sport has “threatened to blur

the natural boundaries between the sexes” (1986, p. 35), the effective channeling of males into traditionally masculine sports and females into stereotypically feminine sports continues in Western societies.

Media have barely started to acknowledge the existence of female athletes even though women have “revolutionized their performance records and developed incredible skill and expertise in competitive sports” (Cohen, 1993, p. 172). The recent increase in female athletic participation has not been reflected in the literary portrayal of girls and women. This lack of representation in the various media continues to send a message regarding the sanctioning of sport as a male domain and it deters female participation. Robinson, a journalist, does not mince words when she states that “our culture has such a problem with strong women” and when she notes that when media people “meet a great athlete who also looks like a normal woman, they are in such shock that they have to write about her as an anomaly” (1997, p. 152). As proof, Robinson offers descriptions of newspaper pictures of leading Canadian sportswomen from biathlon, rowing and hockey: all pictures show the athletes in feminine attire, outside of their sporting activities. Robinson (1997) further notes that mainstream media focus on superstar male athletes and give the impression that there is only one competition held every four years for women's sports. Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the modern Olympic Games, was not in favour of women participating in the Games or in sports in general.

Ironically, visibility at the Olympic Games contributed much to the development of women's sports. For instance, at the 1932 Olympic Games in Los Angeles, Mildred ‘Babe’ Didrikson won three track and field medals and became the darling of the Games. Later, she excelled in basketball, baseball, billiards, and swimming and was instrumental in developing the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA). Other role models emerged during World War II,

when women played in major league professional baseball. It is, however, only in the past two decades, that international competition has become available to women the less socially appropriate sports of basketball, handball, water polo, weight-lifting, rugby, pole vault and hockey (Festle, 1996).

While there has been a steady rise of scholarship regarding women over the past 20 years, research on the high achievement of women in sport continues to be relatively limited, as does information on athletically gifted women (Arnold et al., 1996; Balazs, 1975; Rowley, 1995; Wildenhaus, 1995, 1996). Those studies, however, which have delved into the realm of the high achieving female athlete have laid a foundation for on-going research. Wildenhaus (1996) noted that the dramatic increase in attention to women's sport has led to an increased development of talented female athletes, and that more females than at any other period in time are engaged in sport and physical activity. Opportunities for women athletes have grown considerably and as the number of females participating in amateur sport increases, so does the number of elite athletes (Festle, 1996). On the surface, at least, "it would seem that society finally has accepted women's physicality and athleticism" (Greendorfer, 1991, p. 3).

Societal definitions, images, and expectations of being an athlete, however, continue to collide with those of being a woman (Allison, 1991). The behavioural and psychological demands of competitive sport reinforce what is stereotypically considered to be masculine, and have been the antithesis of what is stereotypically considered to be feminine. In order to participate, girls and women have to display traits of competitiveness, determination, aggressiveness, competence, self-reliance, and risk taking. These traits, however, have been socially constructed to apply to men only (Balazs, 1975; Jackson & Marsh, 1986). The greatest barrier to the aspiring female athlete is, therefore, her own perception of traditional and sexist gender roles (Harris, 1987). As Boutilier

and SanGiovanni note, “to ask if a woman can remain a woman and still play sports means that one has in mind a view of women and of sport that accepts the socially constructed definitions of these two realities as contradictory and conflicting” (1983, p. 117).

With gender role stereotypes dominant in early childhood socialization, “the ultimate socialization outcomes are clear: most males become involved in sport, and most females do not” (Greendorfer, 1991, p. 6). Those girls and women who nevertheless become involved in physical activity are, more often than not, encouraged to play sports that develop grace, flexibility and balance while boys and men are encouraged to participate in sports that promote speed, strength, and power (Lenskyj, 1986). Traditional notions of masculinity are undermined when women participate in traditionally male sports while traditional notions of femininity are reinforced when females participate in activities such as figure skating or gymnastics, activities considered to be aesthetically pleasing (Robinson, 1997).

If not on a visually pleasing feminine form, muscles, strength, and sweat are still considered unfeminine today. Unlike male athletes for whom sporting achievements outweigh physical appearance, females involved in sports that do not conform to society's dominant notions of femininity are marginalized and often not considered by potential sponsors. Girls learn early on that engaging in contact sports or sports that involve strength and power can jeopardize their popularity and image (Weinberg & Gould, 1995). Looking good (according to traditional ideas of femininity and beauty) is important to all girls and it is even more important to girls involved in the “appearance sports.” Not surprisingly, eating disorders have been found to be rampant in sport such as gymnastics and figure skating (Festle, 1996). Similarly, in cross-country running, track and swimming, bulimia and anorexia have become associated with being an elite athlete. (Festle, 1996).

On the positive side, in their classic study regarding the psychological value of participation in sport, Snyder and Kivlin (1975) found that there is a strong relationship between a women's athletic involvement and her psychological well-being. These researchers noted a better body image, higher energy levels, and better perceptions of health compared with women not involved in sport. This positive relationship was also evident in an early study by Balazs (1975) where throughout their childhood years, females perceived themselves as tomboys, felt they could match and sometimes surpass the boys, and felt very comfortable in the company of boys. Other more recent studies of elite female athletes have also reported these findings and have further noted that the majority of women athletes report playing mostly with boys when younger (Gordon 1989; Mitchell & Dyer, 1985).

Some early studies of elite female athletes seem to have been designed to reassure people about the gender identity of athletes. For instance, Kane and Callaghan (1965) found that world-class female tennis players portrayed socially appropriate feminine traits. Other studies confirmed the same finding for elite swimmers (Ogilvie & Tutko, 1967) and for other female athletes (Ogilvie, 1968; Ogilvie, William, Hoepnew, & Moody, 1970). As was the case when discussing much of the literature on giftedness, the early literature on gifted female athletes is highly problematic because of its reliance on the concepts of masculinity, femininity and androgyny. That gifted female athletes were found to be masculine (e.g., Malumphy, 1971) or feminine (e.g., Kane & Callaghan, 1965) is not as interesting as the fact that sexist and traditionally stereotypical conceptions of masculinity and femininity were used, therefore reproducing the gender binary (Cole, 1993).

Gordon's (1988) study of elite Australian female athletes suggests that the parents of these females took an active interest in their daughter's activities and provided positive reinforcement.

At an early age, physical activity came easily for these females; they were fast learners and realized their higher abilities. Unlike for boys, there are no cultural demands for girls to be athletic and so positive social influences must be provided in early childhood in order for them to overcome traditional sexism in sport (Wildenhaus, 1996).

Balazs, in her study of 1972 U.S. Olympians, sought to identify variables in the psychological make-up and social development of outstanding female athletes. Balazs (1975) found a basic and identical pattern in the early development of these athletes: each displayed a strong desire to achieve and internalized this desire to excel in a sport. Even when challenged in adolescence, this desire to achieve remained intense and constant. After reviewing several studies, Weinberg and Gould (1995) concluded that athletes have higher levels of competitiveness which are unrelated to gender. A study of the Canadian Women's National Volleyball Team provided evidence of higher scores than the normative female population on measures of achievement, autonomy, endurance, and order (Gravelle, Searle & St-Jean, 1982). The work ethic, the importance of doing one's best, and the value of achievement are what may differentiate those talented females who pursue and excel in sport from those who do not (Bloom, 1985; Wildenhaus, 1996).

Recent research and reviews have supported the claim that international level performance is attained gradually and that approximately 10 years of preparation is necessary to attain a high level of excellence in a given domain, including vigorous sports (Bloom, 1985; Ericsson, 1996). However, this generalizability of the "10-year rule" does not guarantee that expert performance is attained within that time period, if ever. Within various sports, age has been found to correlate with peak performance: for vigorous sports, peak performance is attained about five years after the athlete's physical maturation. Bloom (1985) has identified a uniform progression through

several stages for the development of international level performance. He found that, as a child, a future elite performer was typically exposed to the activity under playful conditions. Over time, the child would show an interest and an aptitude for the activity. Parents would then arrange for further instruction by a qualified individual. During this stage, parents provided support and encouragement and assisted in the establishment of regular practice habits. According to Bloom (1985), future elite performers made a major commitment toward reaching the top level when they were in their early or mid-teenage years. This commitment often involved seeking out optimal training conditions and sometimes, even a change of geographical location. Of significance is the finding that nearly all international level performers who were studied had worked with coaches that had either themselves reached that same level of performance or had instructed other students who had previously attained that level (Bloom, 1985).

Analysis of the daily activities associated to the preparation of future elite performers has shown that older individuals spend increasingly more time and energy on “deliberate practice” designed to directly improve performance (Ericsson, 1996). While optimizing the benefits of training requires that an athlete remain fully focused on the training goals, the required concentration and effort limits the duration of effective practice sessions and their total daily duration. According to Ericsson, “individuals appear to be able to maintain only four or five hours of deliberate practice per day for extended periods without reaching exhaustion and burnout, even when they increase the duration and effectiveness of rest and sleep” (1996, p. 42).

A number of studies have identified the importance of the family influence and the home environment, as well as coaches and teachers, in the guidance and support of female athletic talent along their road to excellence (Allison, 1991; Bloom, 1985; Freeman, 1993; Gordon, 1989; Sheeran & Freuschlag, 1982; Watkins & Montgomery, 1989). Family played a crucial role in the

development of the 1972 U.S. Olympians, with parents identified as the main motivating force and as crucial in the setting of values and ideals. Support was both positive and consistent, especially on the part of the father. Clearly, these families believed that “sports are worthwhile endeavours and being outstanding in a sport is all right for girls” (Balazs, 1975, p. 270). A study by Sheeran and Freuschlag (1982) looking at the developmental variables associated with quality performance also found that parental influence was evident. Parental nurturance was recognized as having a substantial bearing on the athlete’s development and achievement. The parent’s appreciation of sport and the support and reinforcement shown to their daughter assisted toward developing leadership and excellence. An athlete’s mother was found more influential to females than to males, and overall females attributed more of their success to their parents than did their male counterparts (Sheeran & Freuschlag, 1982).

The coach has also been identified as having a significant impact on the female athlete and in developing her potential (Balazs, 1975; Rowley, 1995; Sheeran & Freuschlag, 1982; Wildenhaus, 1995). Coaches and parents, in providing positive influences, were found to strongly assist the female athlete to internalize feelings of self-worth and self-esteem: this in turn had a positive effect on goal attainment (Balazs, 1975). Furthermore, strong coaching was found essential to the imparting of the sport knowledge required for skill development (Rowley, 1995; Wildenhaus, 1995).

The question of whether or not siblings play a role in the development of the female athlete has been pondered in various studies. While Balazs (1975) found that most female athletes in her sample came from large families with both sisters and brothers engaged in various forms of competitive sports, Sheeran and Freuschlag (1982) felt that they “laid to rest” the common misconception that high level female athletes come from families which are predominantly male.

More recently, in an overview of studies conducted throughout the 1980s, Wildenhaus (1995) indicated that both parents and siblings served as athletic role models for elite female athletes.

When reviewing the motives for participation in high level competition, the main one cited by female athletes was the opportunity to compete at a high level. Other motives for involvement were pure enjoyment, increasing levels of satisfaction, association with other athletes, desirable rewards, Olympic aspirations, and exposure to college recruiters (McGown, 1993; Sheeran, & Freuschlag, 1982; Wildenhaus, 1995).

Talented female athletes who remain within the competitive milieu clearly show a high commitment to their chosen sport. Although Gordon (1989) reported that athletes were proficient in many sports in their early years and had difficulty in choosing a specialty, Sheeran and Freuschlag (1982) proposed the “athletic pipeline theory.” According to this theory, the most effective means of achieving a high degree of skill in one activity is to focus exclusively on that activity. In their study, subjects reported that the sport in which they were competing was the only one in which they participated on a regular basis. The interest and ability in a single activity has been found to appear relatively early in an athlete’s career and has been thought to be a prerequisite for developing high level athletes. In Gordon’s (1989) study, it was found that for such athletes, the amount of active learning time, practice, and effort had increased exponentially over time, and that sport had become less like play and more of an avocation.

Conclusions

Although there has been a rise in attention to women’s sports and the development of talented female athletes over the past decade or so, little is known regarding women athletes and athletic retirement. Research has traditionally focused on the sporting lives of male professional team sport athletes, and it is from this perspective, that most of our knowledge has been derived.

Some research of amateur athletes has been done with mixed gender participants, but it has been conducted with either the assumption that both males and females encounter identical life experiences or that as athletes they encounter identical sport experiences. Both assumptions are problematic given that the literature suggests that the majority of gifted women who seek to display their talent continue to face formidable challenges, and granted the unique social-cultural factors faced by women in competitive sport. The experience of the athletic woman is distinct not only from that of the non-athletic woman, but also from that of the athletic man (Barnett & Wright, 1994). Furthermore, retirement research results have often been generalized to include collegiate, elite amateur, and professional athletes.

Although the experience of the female athlete is considered to be unique, the retirement of women athletes has received limited research attention. The classic study of professional women tennis players by Allison and Meyer (1988) indicated a departure from the results of male professional retirement from sport. For these women, their retirement, due to either frustration or injury, was not nearly as traumatic and was viewed as an opportunity to pursue a previously unavailable new set of roles and experiences. On the other hand, those few studies which have focused specifically on women amateur athletes have indicated that these women were not without difficulties in their transition to retirement (Kirby, 1986; McGown, 1993; McGown & Rail, 1996; Schell, 1995). At the intercollegiate level, conflicts with coaches and a lack of institutional support were cited as the two main reasons for retirement, while at the international level, a lack of commitment or interest and a lack of, or poor coaching were indicated. The mode of retirement and support systems available to the women during and after their sport retirement influenced their adaptability to a life beyond sport.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In emphasizing the experience that is unique to the individual, qualitative research shows a “willingness to treat individuals as the heroes of their own drama, as valuable sources of particular information” (Brenner, Brown, & Canter, 1985). Using a qualitative methodology that borrows from phenomenology, this study attempted to capture the substance and nuance of the retirement experiences of former Canadian women high performance athletes in the amateur sport of sprint racing canoeing. The methodological approach involved a series of open-ended, in-depth interviews.

The phenomenological nature of the approach allowed the researcher to “go beneath the surface of causal explanation to achieve a deeper understanding” and interpretation of the meaning of retirement for women sprint racing canoeists (Dawson, 1984, p. 18). At its core, phenomenology represents an effort to describe human experience and to disclose the essential meaning of human endeavours (Bishop & Scudder, 1991; Ray, 1994; Psathas, 1973). Essentially, this study attempted to describe retirement in sport racing canoeing as it is known to and in the words of the women who lived the experience.

In the spirit of phenomenology, the lived world of experience “could be captured either at significant times of the transformation process or after the transformation through the recall experience of the study participants themselves” (Ray, 1994, p. 128). The phenomenological perspective favoured the setting aside or “bracketing” of any presuppositions about the event or activities being studied. Interview questions focused on experiences, perceptions, and meanings (Locke, 1989; Ray, 1994). The lived experience of the participants was the nature of the data, and

the inductive content analysis of such experience captured and explored as text, lead to a deeper understanding of this phenomenon.

The qualitative phenomenological approach, free from predetermined theories, concentrated on the subject-experience and assumed the importance of understanding the participants' perspective. The importance of understanding such perspective was identified as a result of a pilot survey of Canadian female sprint racing canoeists' reasons for retirement and return or non-return to high performance sport (McGown, 1993). That survey focused on 33 former female amateur athletes who had competed as sprint racers in the Olympic sport of canoeing and used a series of 6-point Likert scales, as well as a few open-ended questions. Although the survey results assisted towards a better understanding of the sprint racing canoeists' retirement, the answers to the open-ended questions raised many more questions, often indicating that the Likert scales were insufficient to capture the "whole story" regarding these athletes' retirement. Further, it was felt that the survey of all those female canoeists who had ever raced at the National Team level in Canada, in fact, also encompassed too many variables. Of significance was the time frame. The sport of sprint racing canoeing and the world of Canadian amateur sport changed substantially between 1968 to 1991, with those sports involved in the Olympic Games moving from a "kitchen table" operation to a Sport Canada-assisted office, full-time personnel, and athlete programs. It was suggested that a smaller time frame would be beneficial in a future study to ensure that the retirement of athletes who experienced Sport Canada funding, full-time coaching, training and competitive opportunities would be compared only to that of athletes who have had similar opportunities.

The Participants

The study focused specifically on women amateur athletes now retired from elite level competition who had participated in the Olympic canoeing discipline of sprint racing as members of the Canadian National Canoe Team between 1984 to 1998. This amateur sport selected mostly because of the familiarity of the researcher with the sport as a past National Team member and national level coach, familiarity with the structure of the sport as a past professional Provincial and National office staff member, and her familiarity the population of athletes.

A total of 28 women athletes were identified as members of the Canadian National Canoe Team between 1984 to 1998, and as now being retired. All identified athletes raced internationally, some as both juniors (less than 18 years old) and seniors. Identification was made through three means: (a) international canoe race results for sprint racing which identified athletes who competed at senior events for Canada from 1984 to 1998; (b) Canadian Olympic Association documentation which identified athletes named to the sprint racing team for the 1984, 1988, 1992, and 1996 Olympic Games; and (c) Canadian Canoe Association documentation which identified athletes named to the National Canoe Team from 1984 to 1998.

The commencement of this time frame was selected based on the results of the pilot project survey (McGown, 1993). That survey indicated a crucial distinction between athletes who competed in earlier versus later years with respect to various factors such as financial funding, full-time coaching, competition availability, overall training time commitment, and the 1980 Olympic Games boycott. The present study's 1984-1998 time frame is therefore representative of a period wherein athletes were competing in a very structured and organized sport system. Further, this time frame ranges over a period of several Olympic quadrennial cycles and allowed

those who were recently retired more time to contemplate their retirement prior to their participation in this research.

Of the 28 athletes identified as the population for this study, 26 athletes were located and contacted by letter introducing the present study and inviting their participation. Rather unconventional techniques were utilized to locate the athletes as no National Team alumni membership exists within the Canadian Canoe Association. The addresses for all of the athletes were obtained from either previous CCA National Team Handbook of Excellence publications, from the investigators personal network of National Team and canoeing contacts, and from word-of-mouth requests among known “friends of friends” within the canoeing community. In each questionable case of location, a telephone call was made to verify that the subject was indeed in residence. Reference was made to the present study when asked why a current address was required but no details were discussed. The CCA publication often lead to the subject’s parents, who then provided the subject’s current address. In a minor few instances, the parents were hesitant to divulge the subject’s current address and so a request was made by the investigator for the parent to pass a message on to the subject to contact the investigator by telephone. This reverse contact was subsequently made in all cases. Despite an exhaustive search, two athletes were not located, their whereabouts continuing to be unknown.

A total of 21 women athletes, responded positively to the invitation to participate in the present study. These athletes were considered to be representative of the population of women National Canoe Team athletes.

The Instrument

A short questionnaire was given to the study participants prior to the interview in order to obtain basic demographic information as well as information on such items as age of National Team attainment, age of retirement, and competitive participation (see Demographic Questionnaire in Appendix A). The main instrument was the Interview Guide (see Appendix B). A semi-structured interview format was chosen to allow for the full expression of each individual participant. The Interview Guide, based on Patton's (1980) premise that there is common information which should be obtained from each person interviewed, was designed to elicit responses regarding the women athletes' perceptions of their retirement experience. More specifically, the Interview Guide attempted to elicit information pertaining to the following questions: (a) the specific reasons and circumstances affecting these athletes' retirement from the National Team; and (b) the manner in which these athletes reacted to, and dealt with their retirement from the National Team. Based on the results of the previous study by McGown (1993), it was decided that these were important areas to explore. The reasons for retirement and the preparation for retirement were addressed in order to provide valuable background information regarding the status of the athlete. The retirement process was addressed as the focal point of the study, while the post-competitive years were addressed to elicit information regarding the outcome of the retirement process. In order to truly encapsulate the athlete's perspective, the Interview Guide was kept as open and as flexible as possible. Although the Interview Guide pointed to areas to be explored, any new aspect of the retirement experience which emerged from an interview was further explored. All open-ended questions were posed in such a manner as to be simple and unambiguous and yet to elucidate and illuminate a particular subject matter.

Data Collection

In order to refine the Interview Guide, pilot interviews were initiated with two retired athletes who had raced internationally in 'B' level competitions but who had never attained National Team status. These women were not included in the final sample of women athletes. It was clearly indicated to the two athletes that information gleaned from their interview was to be used exclusively for the Interview Guide refinement and that such data were not to be included in the study. Further, they were assured of the anonymity and confidentiality of their interview.

A letter introducing the present study, its reasons, and its relevancy was forwarded by mail to the 26 women athletes for whom addresses had been found (see letter in Appendix C). Accompanying this letter was a Consent Form (see Appendix D), the Demographic Questionnaire, and a pre-addressed stamped envelope for returning the completed documents. The letter discussed the methodology of the study and provided an indication of the time required to complete both the written questionnaire and the interview, as well as the researcher's telephone number for further information. The Consent Form was explained and the individual's signed agreement requested. The correspondence included a firm statement regarding the confidentiality of the participants' responses as well as a commitment to their anonymity.

Within the first five weeks, 12 positive responses had been received and 1 negative response, where the athlete returned the Consent Form unsigned, with a short written note including her apologies for declining to participate. By the sixth week, with only 1 more positive response having been received, a second letter was forwarded to those athletes who had not yet responded. That letter was identical to the first but with an introductory paragraph indicating that no response had been received and that the investigator had taken the liberty of forwarding a

second package of documents. A request was also made to return a response as soon as possible. Over the next five weeks an additional 6 positive responses were received. A telephone call was then made to the remaining 7 athletes who had not responded in order to ascertain any difficulties with the questionnaire or with their participation in the study. As a result of the telephone contact 3 more women indicated that a positive response would be forthcoming and indeed their Consent Forms were received over the next two months. Four women athletes, however, verbally declined to participate in the present study.

Through telephone contact, interviews were scheduled with those athletes who accepted to participate. The face to face interviews commenced almost immediately with those respondents who were geographically close to the researcher's current location. This easy access allowed for the interviews to be undertaken during the same time period that other potential subjects continued to contemplate a positive response for their inclusion in the study. Geography prevented a face to face interview for only 6 subjects and in those cases, a telephone interview was conducted. All face to face interviews were conducted prior to the telephone interviews.

The interviews were conducted as "a discovery procedure" (Brenner, 1985, p. 150), with an objective "to find out what kinds of things are happening, rather than to determine the frequency of predetermined kinds of things" (Lofland, 1971, p. 76). Through the participants' responses "an accurate formalized version of [their] actions, motives, interests, [was] used to describe and explain what is going on in some naturally occurring area of social life" (Potter & Mulkay, 1985, p. 247).

The style of interview used in this study was similar to the one described by Merton and Kendall (1946) as the "focused interview." Considerable flexibility, however, was taken by the interviewer. When a novel aspect was introduced by the participant and if this aspect was seen as

relevant to the athlete's retirement, the interviewer further explored this now-made-known avenue. When the interviewee was expansively elaborating on an area and interconnecting it with other areas, the interviewer allowed the subject to complete their point and interjected only to gently bring the thoughts back into focus if the expansion wandered off the topic at hand. Similarly, when an area was thought to need clarification, the interviewer again allowed the subject to complete their speech prior to any probe being made. This flexibility was necessary to avoid narrowing the scope of the interview. According to Lofland and Lofland, "you want interviewees to speak freely in their own terms about a set of concerns you bring to the interaction, plus whatever else they might introduce" (1995, p. 85). Of primary importance during the interviews was the effort made to ensure that the open-ended questions created a clear picture of the subject matter to be discussed while offering no guidance as to the form or content of the answer (Brenner, 1985; Maccoby & Maccoby, 1954).

The familiarity of the researcher to the sample population and to the topic under discussion greatly assisted during the interviews. According to Maccoby and Maccoby (1954), the more intense the material of the interview, the more familiar the interviewer should be with the emotional involvement that may appear with communication of such material. The interviewer, through the initial telephone contact, "used preexisting relations of trust to remove barriers to entrance" (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 38), and then within the interview itself established a socially effective interaction, the role of a friendly, trustworthy individual with a curiosity about the subject's retirement experience from sprint racing canoeing (Brenner et al., 1985; Locke, 1989). This role was enhanced by the prior involvement of the researcher herself as a National Canoe Team athlete, and someone who had also experienced retirement from the sport of sprint racing canoeing. The researcher's affiliation with the sport itself also provided the perception of a

shared history and common experiences. Further, the publication of research results pertaining to female National Canoe Team athletes and its dissemination within the sport while respecting anonymity and confidentiality seem to have reinforced the issue of trust between the interviewer and the study participants.

Due to the very personal nature of the interview, the face-to-face interview was preferred over the telephone interview. Every effort was made towards ensuring a maximum number of face-to-face interviews. All opportunities associated with canoeing events, competitions, meetings, and other gatherings were explored to meet with the participants living very far away from the researcher. In order to establish an environment that was conducive to the in-depth interview, the choice of interview location was made carefully. During each initial telephone contact, when trying to establish an interview location, the interviewer made an offer to secure an outside meeting room and showed understanding of the participant's schedule as well as family situation (e.g., having small children). In all but two instances, the subjects countered with an offer of meeting in their home. Therefore, 13 face to face interviews were conducted in the privacy and comfort of the participant's own home and in a room set aside specifically for this purpose. The remaining 2 face to face interviews were conducted in a small meeting room at a local community centre and in a small conference room at a business company. Arrangements for telephone interviews were made keeping in mind the participant's schedule and privacy needs. As many factors as possible were, therefore, considered to ensure a discreet and non-threatening interview with all participants. Interviews ranged in length from 50 minutes to approximately 2 hours.

All interviews were audio-recorded. A state-of-the-art machine with a wide range built-in microphone was utilized to ensure a high quality of recording and playback sound. For those

interviews conducted by telephone, the recording machine had a direct connection into the telephone, again ensuring excellence of the recorded interview. The audio recording of each interview allowed the researcher to give total attention to the social management of the interview itself, to keep to the context of the interview guide, and to ascertain whether information provided was in line with the areas to be probed (Brown, & Sime, 1981; Lofland, & Lofland, 1995). Since extensive note-taking may have been distracting to the subject as well as for the investigator, the audio-recording ensured that the interview data were as close as possible to the interview itself and allowed for the preparation of a verbatim transcription (Jacob, 1987). Patton noted that “direct quotations are a basic source of raw data in qualitative measurement, revealing a respondent’s level of emotion, the way in which they have organized their world, their thoughts about what is happening, their experiences, and their basic perceptions” (1980, p. 28). Minor note-taking, however, was undertaken by the researcher from time to time to ensure that all areas of the Interview Guide were addressed, as well as to remind the researcher of any leads noted by the interviewee and which warranted pursuing further.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was an ongoing process that commenced immediately upon the transcription of the first interview. This enabled “the research process to capture all potentially relevant aspects of the topic as soon as they are perceived” (Corbin, & Strauss, 1990, p. 6). Further, there was a continual overlap of data collection and analysis. The simultaneous time period of data collection and data analysis not only ensured a systematic effort to verify and refine existing themes but also secured the identification of additional concepts of importance as well as salient cues which were

then incorporated into the next scheduled interviews (Kirby & McKenna, 1989; Lofland & Lofland, 1995).

Qualitative data were submitted to a comprehensive and inductive content analysis. The methodological process used followed these guidelines: (a) data analysis is concurrent with data collection (Tesch, 1990, p. 95); (b) processes and products of the research are shaped from the data rather than from an existing theoretical framework (Charmaz, 1983, p. 110); (c) data are segmented into relevant and meaningful units (Tesch, 1990, p. 95); (d) the analysis tool is comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Tesch, 1990); (e) themes generated from the data are tentative in the beginning and remain flexible throughout the analysis (Charmaz, 1983; Tesch, 1990); and (f) the analysis process is systematic and comprehensive, but not rigid (Tesch, 1990, p. 95).

Each interview, once commenced, was given an identification number based on the timing of the interview in relation to other interviews. The identity of the interviewee, therefore, became confidential and each taped interview, anonymous with only a number for future reference. The list referencing the number assigned to specific subjects was secured by the researcher, as were the tape(s) of each interview once transcribed.

Following each interview, the researcher replayed the interview in private as soon as was possible. This was done not only to ensure that the entire interview was recorded properly, but to gain a familiarity with the interview and to note if any further questions needed to be asked of the subject or of other subjects. A verbatim transcription was then undertaken from the recorded tape. Initially an individual was hired to transcribe the interviews, however, following the transcription of the first two interviews it became evident that the nature of the topic, the language of the sport world used in the interviews, and the required quick turn-around time-frame made the

transcription too difficult for this non-sport individual. The researcher, therefore, undertook the transcription to allow for the continuation of the simultaneous data analysis and interviewing. The transcribing of the interviews allowed for a further closeness, an intimacy with the data which enabled the researcher to become that much more familiar with each interview and its richness.

Minor editing on each interview transcript was done prior to the actual data analysis, thereby allowing for the deletion of any names and blatant references within the text which threatened the anonymity of the interviewee. Corresponding information was substituted within brackets in order to ensure the continuity of the text and to clarify any ambiguities which may have been caused as a result of the deleted information. Each new transcription was then subjected to a systematic process which enabled the reduction of the vast quantity of data into manageable segments, as well as affording an interpretation of that data, bringing both meaning and insight to the transcripts (Lofland & Lofland, 1995; Marshall & Rossman, 1989).

Coding of the data, a fundamental analytic process generated inductively, served to separate, compile, and organize the data while comparing the events, experiences, actions, and interactions for similarities and differences. Through content analysis, both inference and interpretation were used to give meaning to the transcripts (Locke, 1989; Mostyn, 1985). Each meaningful segment, a sentence, a part of a sentence, or several sentences together, was coded. This coding consisted in giving a name (a keyword or a few keywords) to the segment. The questions, in some instances, led to the multiple coding of a single meaning unit. The provisional coding utilized those terms specific to the interviewee and to the sport. The data were thus reduced through this coding of meaningful segments and identifying of patterns, regularities, and like-ideas within each interview. This reduction entailed a creative process that required "making carefully considered judgments about what is really significant and meaningful in the data"

(Patton, 1980, p. 313). The naming of like-phenomena with the same code followed a procedure which, according to Tesch (1990), divided the text of the interviews into segments, each segment or “meaning unit” representing a “segment of text that is comprehensible by itself and contains one idea, episode or piece of information” (p. 16).

Throughout the process of coding an interview transcript, each segment was examined in terms of its underlying relationship with other coded segments. Some codes emerged with greater frequency than others. A closer inspection was made as to whether the meaning units allowed for the identification of further subdivisions (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). For example, two separate segments of text were coded as “poor coaching.” However, through closer examination, it was noted that the first segment was a specific reference to the athlete retiring because of poor coaching, while the second segment referred to the poor language used by the coach. Such reevaluation was important to ensure that each segment was ultimately grouped with other like-meaning segments. Also of importance was that valuable information was not overlooked and thus excluded from the analysis. Each interview was once again reread following its initially coding, this time to review those areas of the interview which were not coded as meaning units. In the end, only non-specific, superfluous, general conversation was left uncoded.

Upon completion of the analysis of each interview transcript, the coded text was merged with the coded text of previously analyzed interview transcripts. This ongoing process led to the amalgamation of several meaning units into a larger “theme” and also allowed for the breakdown of meaning units into smaller meaning units. These working interpretations, which spoke to the experiences of the women being interviewed, were continuously modified and refined on the basis of subsequent data analyses (Goetz & LeCompte, 1981; Jacob, 1988; Locke, 1989; Mostyn, 1985). For example, a meaning unit initially coded as “size a negative factor,” when merged with

other meaning units similarly coded, led all to be included under the theme referring to “an attitude towards coaching women.”

The end result was the emergence of themes from the data. Each theme was internally consistent but distinct and separate from all other themes identified (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Each theme was analyzed with respect to the phenomenon which it represented, its properties and dimensions, as well as its conditions of emergence, the manner by which it is expressed, and its final consequences (Charmaz, 1983; Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The inductive examination of the relationships present within and among the identified themes allowed for developing interpretations and explanations of the phenomenon under study. The data analysis, in a stepwise progression from part to whole, provided total meaning to the phenomenon at hand: the retirement of women athletes from the National Canoe Team.

Participant Feedback

Source Checking

A comprehensive story enveloping the “hypothetical” retirement experience of the women athletes, “The Woman Sprint Racing Canoeist” (see The Woman Sprint Racing Canoeist on page 95), was compiled and presented, along with the first draft of the Results Chapter, to four participants brought together to reflect on, comment on, and verify the preliminary results. Each woman was provided with the written material one week prior to the meeting date in order to allow for ample reading and reflecting. A lively discussion followed the brief presentation of the narrative and the results chapter draft. Three of the women were immediate in their confirmation of the narrative and the preliminary results while the fourth requested clarification on several minor aspects before she too agreed. This source checking session, therefore, saw all participants confer credibility and trustworthiness to the comprehensive story and the first results draft,

thereby ensuring that the evidence presented was in fact a reasonable reconstruction of their retirement experience (Locke, 1989).

Final Results

A copy of the completed thesis will be forwarded to those individuals within the CCA who currently hold positions on the CCA Executive, the CCA Sprint Racing Council, and the HPC and staff. The document will also be forwarded to all participants, along with a letter indicating the above distribution.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

In this chapter, the retirement experiences of the respondents are examined within the context of their sport world. To fully understand the retirement experiences as the athletes relate them, these experiences are presented as their subjective versions of reality and through the use of their own language. Recollections of information in the form of anecdotes, stories, and explanations are offered within the results text. Although not all athletes are equally represented in the quotations, the latter were selected for their representativeness of the athletes' experiences.

The chapter has been divided into five sections for presentation. The first section provides information that addresses the history and general background of the sport of sprint racing canoeing in Canada; this illuminates the context within which the participants spent their canoeing lives. The next section offers an overview of the demographic characteristics of the respondents and their canoeing history. The third section focuses on the various reasons indicated by the respondents for their retirement from the National Canoe Team. The fourth and last section, delves more into the retirement process, as experienced by the women sprint racing canoeists': an empirical model is offered to better visualize and understand the nature of the whole retirement experience for these athletes.

Contextualizing Sprint Racing Canoeing

In order to facilitate an understanding of the retirement of women sprint racing canoeists, it is necessary to provide a frame of reference within the Canadian amateur sport system and the sport of sprint racing canoeing itself. The following two sections, "Sprint Racing Canoeing and the Female Athlete" and "Sprint Racing Canoeing and the Athlete Assistance Program" provide the essential background for the results of this study.

Sprint Racing Canoeing and the Female Athlete

While the most ancient craft in the world - the log canoe of the primitive peoples - must be regarded as the ancestor of our modern recreational canoes, it is the Native canoe and the Eskimo kayak that are the prototypes of our modern competitive craft. The birch bark canoe of the Indian and the kayak of the Eskimo have occupied an important place in Canadian history as an essential prominence in the lives of Canada's Native people, with the boats used for hunting, fishing, and as a mode of transportation. When their importance as a means of transportation decreased with the advent of the railway, canoes and kayaks then became popular recreational vehicles, ideal for the exploration of Canada's waterways. While the earliest beginnings of canoe racing were the canoe "contests" of the Natives and Voyageurs, the modern sport of canoe racing evolved in Canada around the waterfront communities, those in close proximity to Native settlements (Johnston, 1988).

The first club for canoeing, the Royal Canoe Club, was established in England in 1866 and its first racing regatta was held the following year. By 1871, the New York Canoe Club had been founded and canoe racing became established in North America. The Canadian Canoe Association (CCA) was formed at Brockville in 1900 by eastern Ontario and Montreal area clubs and race categories were quickly established for male competitors. For the next 20 years canoeing developed within individual countries with little official communication between the different national associations. Finally, in January 1924, the representatives of several national canoe associations convened an international conference with the object of arranging dates for future international regattas and of establishing uniform regulations for construction of boats which would end the chaos caused until then by the different developments in the individual countries. From this meeting, the forerunner of the present International Canoe Federation (ICF) and their

World Championship races were born. Ten nations, comprised of male competitors, participated in singles canoe and kayak races over distances of 1,500m and 10,000m (Johnston, 1988).

During the summer of 1924, demonstration races in kayaks and canoes were staged at the VIII Olympiad in Paris, with male competitors from two canoeing associations: the United States and Canada. These demonstration races were paddled over a course of 2,000m and included singles, pairs, and fours for both single blade and double blade. The Americans won all the events for double-blade and Canada won all the single-blade events. Unfortunately, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) rejected admission of canoeing to the next three Olympic Games because not more than six nations were participating in canoeing. Canoeing was finally included in the programme of the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin. Canoeing, an umbrella term including both canoe and kayak races, had nine events approved for distances of 1,000m and 10,000m. Once again, the competitors of the 19 participating nations were men, as it had been agreed at the previous year's ICF Congress that all women's events would be excluded from these Games but that races would be organized in a nearby town immediately after the closing of the Games. Canada had a distinguished entry into Olympic canoeing with Canadian men winning one gold in kayak singles and two silver medals in the canoe doubles (Johnston, 1988).

Eventually, women were accepted into international competition. The year 1934 became a milestone in the history of canoe racing when women raced kayak singles over 600m at the first European Championships. This preceded the inclusion of a 600m. kayak singles race for women in the 1937 World Canoe Championship programme. The most important inclusion was that of the women's singles kayak race in the first post-war Olympic Games hosted by London in 1948. At these Games, there were four kayak races for men, two in singles and two in doubles over two distances of 1000m and 10,000m. There were also four canoe races for men split between singles

and doubles and over the same two distances. For women, there was one kayak singles race. Canadian women, however, were nowhere to be seen. In fact, the CCA had only in 1949 allowed “Ladies” to compete at the Canadian Championships. Their introduction into competitive canoeing at the national level was an exhibition-only event for war canoe, an event not raced internationally even today (Johnston, 1988).

Over the next few decades, the events and the distances raced changed and a significant inclusion for women was that of the kayak doubles event in the 1960 Olympic Games in Rome. The ICF and the IOC were slow to accept women into their ranks and were equally slow to expand the women’s program. Although a majority of nations already had women competing in canoeing and at the Olympic Games racing in kayak singles and kayak doubles, it was not until 1980 at the Moscow Olympics that the women’s kayak four-boat became a medal event. The women’s kayak team list for a competition had thus grown to a possible four bodies plus spare. During this time frame the Olympic men’s team fielded boats in kayak and canoe singles, double, and fours at two distances (the 10,000m race had been dropped from the Olympic program).

The CCA was even slower than the IOC and the ICF in accepting women into its ranks. It was not until 1963 that Ladies K-1 and K-2 events were added to the National Championships schedule and, again, only as exhibition events. All three women’s events on the program (K-1, K-2, and war canoe) were finally welcomed as “official” events at the National Championships in 1965. The K-4 event was not long behind, entering in 1967. Women continued, however, to race within only one category (Senior), while men had a wide range of race categories based on both age (i.e., Bantams under 14 years) and ability (i.e., Senior, Open).

While women were competing in the sport internationally and were included in the Olympic Games in both the single and double kayak events at the 500m distance, Canadian

women continued until 1970 to race at only 250m. The year 1970 was a hallmark year with the introduction of the 500m and a second age class (Junior) at the National Championships for the three kayak events. Women raced kayak events within these two competitive classifications until 1975 when they were again expanded to include an under-18 years of age category (Johnston, 1988).

Since that time, great strides have been made within the CCA with respect to the women's racing program. In the late 1980s and early 1990s women's kayak distances were expanded to include the 1,000m distance for all kayak events, and the women's C-4 was officially added to the National Championship program. The mid-1990s produced yet another major change. Following the inclusion into the international program of "spectator pleasing" races at 200m, the CCA, taking their cue from the international lead this time, also included these events for both men and women, canoe and kayak alike. As well, women's competition in canoe singles, doubles, and fours have all now been included. Currently, both male and female participants competing in Canada race in singles, doubles, and fours in both canoe and kayak at distances of 200m, 500m, 1,000m, as well as the occasional 6,000m for women and 10,000m for men, all across numerous age groups and ability classifications.

Women, however, still continue to compete officially only in the three kayak events at the international level and in the Olympic Games. The opportunity for women to race in canoe continues to be a controversial subject within Canadian canoeing circles and has certainly provided a topic for discussion, if not laughter, within other countries and the IOC. Since women's canoe is not raced internationally, few other nations allow women to compete at their local clubs in the canoe events. Women are working hard within Canada and with their friends throughout the world of canoeing to change that situation among the current 107 member

countries of the International Canoe Federation. "Power and Grace for 2008" is a program initiated by a Canadian woman canoe competitor. This is actively pursuing the goal of a complete and gender equitable program for canoe competition.

Although today's sport of sprint racing canoeing continues to favour males with respect to the number of races and the distances offered in international competitions, the size of the National Team, and the coaching situation, it is the women athletes who, more often than not, outshine the men as they step to the medal podium. Currently, sprint racing boasts one of Canada's most prolific athletes. Caroline Brunet has been named Canadian Female Amateur Athlete of the Year for the past two years. Although winning a silver medal in the K-1 500m at the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney was not her dream goal, these Olympics concluded an amazing quadrennial for Brunet. At the 1999 World Canoe Championships, Brunet won gold in the K-1 200m, in the K-1 500m, and in the K-1 1,000m. As well, the Canadian women won a silver medal in the K-2 500m. Brunet, was also a silver medal winner in K-1 four years earlier at the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games and this performance was followed by a string of medals at World Canoe Championships. In all, Caroline Brunet has stood on the podium twelve times in five years and heard the Canadian anthem six of those times.

For the third consecutive year, in 1999, the women's kayak athletes led the Canadian Canoe Team's overall performance at the World Championships and also for the third time in five years the women won the overall Women's World Championship. Following their racing success in 1995, the Women's World Championships Kayak Team was announced as the Canadian Female Team of the Year by Sport Canada. In the 1998-99 Annual Report, the High Performance Director reported that the back-to-back fifth place finishes by the Canadian Team at the World Championships in 1997 and 1998 were "a strong indication that the depth of Canadian

performances and the quality of coaching at all levels continue to strengthen Canada's athlete development system" (CCA, 1999, p. 36).

While a lot of positive comments may be made regarding the success of the women athletes in canoeing, one must bear in mind that Brunet, the athlete who has contributed most to the Canadian success, has lived predominantly in Europe since the mid-1990s and has been coached not by a Canadian coach but by a coach from another country, himself a World Champion. Nevertheless, the success achieved by many athletes at all levels is quite telling: "Canada's consistent results at major international regattas in recent years can be attributed to a more systematic approach to the development and training of high performance canoe/kayak athletes. The Canadian system has evolved slowly but steadily over the past 25 years. This trend will undoubtedly accelerate as the Canadian Canoe Association has recently been provided with additional resources to supplement existing CCA-SRD programs" (CCA, 1999, p. 38).

The 2000 Olympic Games held in Sydney held both joy and disappointment for Canadian paddlers. Canadian women had qualified for all kayak events for these Games and came home with a silver medal in kayak singles and a fifth place finish in both the doubles and fours. The men, who had qualified for only three canoe events and one kayak event, also made the podium once.

Steeped in history and nautical tradition, the CCA has, since its inception in 1900, often been recognized as one of the most efficient and effectively administered amateur sport organizations in Canada. The CCA is an umbrella organization that actually encompasses three separate disciplines: Sprint Racing Discipline, White Water Discipline, and Marathon Racing Discipline.

The Sprint Racing Discipline (SRD) has recently adopted a new approach and vision of canoeing, which was fully implemented in 1996, following an exhaustive self-critique process. At

the Spring 1995 CCA Annual General Meeting (AGM), the member clubs were asked to approve, modify, or reject numerous restructuring proposals. One of the most important principles was the need to involve athletes and coaches directly, the need to give them an opportunity to share their perspective and contribute in the decision making process of the organization. To this end, the member clubs of the SRD recognized the importance of this “athlete-centered” philosophy and approved a number of significant opportunities for athletes and coaches to be active participants within the many SRD committees. Both athletes and coaches now have representatives, either elected or appointed by their own constituency, on the Sprint Racing Council, the SRD Executive Committee, the High Performance Committee (which oversees the National Team program), the Domestic Development Committee, as well as divisional representation on the Canadian Association of Coaches in Canoe and Kayak (CACCK).

The CCA Mission Statement approved at the 1995 AGM has only two directives: (a) to increase the number of Canadian participating in canoeing; and (b) to enable participants to realize personal excellence by providing sound athlete development programs and membership support systems. To these directives are attached a number of values, which the CCA is committed to, and which speak to the new vision and structure: (a) athlete-centered programs and policies; (b) fair play, ethical conduct and equality of opportunity; (c) responsible leadership by qualified coaches, officials and volunteers; and (d) the pursuit of excellence at all levels of participation.

It should be underlined that prior to 1995, a number of these values were not mentioned. In fact, only the following directives were mentioned: (a) to promote competitive canoeing at all levels, from entry to international level; (b) to promote and foster a wide based feeder system through a variety of canoeing activities; (c) to promote an image of competitive sport as a healthy undertaking and to cultivate a kindly feeling among canoeing participants; (d) to be mindful of

health, safety, and natural environments resource facilities and concerns and to promote activities which promote optimal standards, and (e) the CCA further seeks to develop facilities and resources to support its programs and to provide guidance to canoe organizations and individuals for the development of canoeing activities at all levels.

Within the SRD lies the High Performance Committee (HPC), a volunteer committee of five voting members that oversees the sprint racing National Team program and its staff. The HPC has always had solid policies and procedures with respect to those programs involving the sprint racing National Canoe Team. Each year a “National Team Program for Excellence Handbook” is distributed to all athletes and coaches within the high performance stream. The Handbook’s coverage has naturally expanded over the years as the need for policies became more apparent. The Handbook is now an extensive document encompassing such areas as the National Team programs, the Team selection methods and criteria, athlete information (which includes the Sport Canada Athlete Assistance Program and responsibilities of Athletes), the Sprint Racing Council (which includes the Discipline Policy and Athlete Appeal Procedure, the CCA Harassment Policy, and the CCA’s Anti-Doping Policy and Doping Control Program), as well as an athlete’s letter of acknowledgment and acceptance. Although not published within the Handbook, the CCA has approved a Procedural Guide Relating to the Retirement of National Team Athletes in the Fall of 1996 (Appendix E).

Becoming a member of the Canadian Olympic Canoe Team is a long journey. Sprint racing athletes must meet not only national standards set by the CCA and the COA but must also meet international standards set by the ICF and the IOC in order to be nominated for a potential Team berth. Internationally, the ICF regulation states that boats rather than athletes qualify to participate in the Olympic Games. Therefore, meeting the ICF standards qualifies Canada to enter

a boat in the race although individual athletes do not “qualify” per se. However, the CCA and the COA qualify individual athletes. Thus, an athlete meeting the ICF standards becomes eligible for nomination as a Canadian Olympic Team member. In fact, the athlete is given a “Defender Status” that provides her with a small level of protection. Any other athlete who wants to paddle in the qualified boat must race to beat a Defender Status athlete at a scheduled official event such as the CCA Olympic Team selection trials. The CCA then presents the successful athlete to the COA, who must then accept this nomination for the Canadian Olympic Games Team.

Sprint Racing Canoeing and the Athlete Assistance Program

Athlete programs are implemented by the CCA in conjunction with other major sport organizations such as the COA, which oversees the Olympic charter in Canada, and Sport Canada, a federal government agency which oversees amateur sport. One of the most important programs currently in place for Canadian National Team athletes is the Athlete Assistance Program (AAP), the only Sport Canada program that provides funding directly to the athlete.

In working towards its main goal of contributing to improve Canadian performance at major international sporting events, the AAP assists Canada’s international-calibre athletes to excel at the highest level of competition while enabling them to prepare for a future career or engage in full-or part-time career activities. Although there are many avenues to achieve this objective, athletes are most familiar with the AAP helping to offset some of the living and training costs incurred as a result of participation in high performance sport. Athletes are recommended to the AAP by the national sport organization; in canoeing this is undertaken by the HPD and nominations approved by the HPC. Upon their acceptance by Sport Canada, the athlete is considered to have “carding” status.

Today, athletes on the Canadian National Teams are eligible for financial assistance in the areas of living and training allowance, tuition payments, and special needs assistance, which includes retirement assistance. All athletes receive a living and training allowance, the amount of this allowance being based on the athlete's performance in international level competition. Two card categories are currently recognized; the "Senior" card which entitles an athlete to a monthly stipend of \$1100 and the "Development" card which entitles an athlete to a monthly stipend of \$500. Entry into both of these categories is based on criteria prepared by the national sport organization and accepted by Sport Canada. While athletes are named to "Senior" and "Development" card status on a yearly basis, those athletes who have been assessed a "Senior" card and who have also attained a world ranking in an event that is included in the Olympic Games program, now have the further stability of retaining their card for a two-year period. For sprint racing canoeists, this world ranking requirement entails racing to a top eight finish and being in the top half of the field at either the World Championships or Olympic Games. The "Development" card, which is assigned to all first year National Team athletes regardless of their international performance, is also in sprint racing assigned to the top junior competitor (under 18 years) in each of the three disciplines (men's kayak, men's canoe, women's kayak). Should additional sprint racing cards be available following the assigning of the above mentioned cards, the High Performance Director and High Performance Committee then review those athletes under the age of 21 years who have achieved success at criteria races.

The financial support and the structure of the AAP have changed significantly since the precursor program was implemented in the early 1970s. The lack of adequate athlete financial support became very evident in the years immediately preceding the 1976 Olympic Games in Montreal. The dismal state of athlete support led Sport Canada to implement a more structured

and comprehensive program in order to meet the needs of Canada's future Olympians and the Athlete Assistance Program was formally unveiled in 1977. Although there are still complaints among present National Team athletes with respect to the minimal amount the monthly stipend represents, the allowance athletes receive today compares advantageously to the early 1980s allowance which was based solely on an athlete's living and school status. For example, in 1983, a university student living at home would receive \$220 each month plus tuition while the same student not living at home received \$385 each month plus tuition. In addition to the living allowance and tuition, athletes attaining 'A' or 'B' card status were eligible for a yearly one-time payment of \$1200 and \$900, respectively.

The 1980s also saw the introduction of tuition support provided to athletes who are able to attend post-secondary academic institutions and meet high performance training and competition requirements. This support is available only during the period during which an athlete is carded. The tuition support is designed to recognize the difficulty of particular sports (e.g., alpine skiing) within which the athlete, because of training and competition commitments, is not able to attend an academic institution. Tuition credits are provided to this athlete for each year during which she is carded and such credits may be used when the athlete has retired from high performance sport.

Sport Canada also expanded the AAP to include the Extended Assistance for Student Athletes thereby making available financial assistance to athletes retiring from the National Team. Initially, athletes had to have an 'A' or 'B' card status to be eligible for Extended Assistance and also had to have spent a specified number of years on the National Team. Under the current program, an athlete of any level who has been carded for a minimum of three consecutive years may receive some support through a special-needs application. This special-needs request is

considered only from athletes for whom AAP support is their primary or major source of income.

For participants involved in this study, the monthly stipend was not as generous as the current one. Carding categories, again based on international ranking, were more extensive and monthly stipend monies entitlements were based on those categories. For instance, an athlete racing for 'A' card status had attain a top four placing at either the World Championships or the Olympic Games, and for a 'B' card status, the athlete had to place in the top eight positions. The 'C' card, 'C-1' card (a probationary one-year 'C' card), and 'D' card were intended to support athletes with the potential to reach 'A' or 'B' card status. Monthly stipend entitlements were: \$810 for 'A' card, \$685 for 'B' card, \$560 for 'C' card, \$435 for 'C-1' card, and \$375 for 'D' card. In addition, 7 of the 28 women who retired between 1984 and 1998 received Extended Assistance. This assistance varied greatly, from a total of \$1,680 in living allowance for three months with no tuition or special needs money to a total of \$3,600 in living allowance for 8 months with \$2,484 in tuition money. This difference was accounted for under the Extended Assistance policy as special-need requests were subject to an assessment of the athlete's financial means and tailored to their financial need.

The Women Sprint Racing Canoeists

The typical retired woman sprint racing canoeist, was introduced to the sport at age 13 years, more than likely within the Ontario canoe club system. Over the next five years, she honed her skills and performance ability through the local club, training under the guidance of a club coach. This woman sprint racing canoeist experienced the typical athletic experience as she progressed through the various levels of competition, increasingly narrowing her focus towards competitive participation in the Olympic Games. Initially, she was a member of the canoe club for

the summer, enjoying her time at the club and at regular weekend competitions. The canoe club was also a place of interaction, providing a social focus, both on and off the water for her and her canoeing friends. When she began to show high performance potential, the time spent at the canoe club was increased to the winter months as well, where she continued to train under the guidance of a club coach. By the time she was named to her respective provincial team, this athlete had been training for canoeing almost daily, year round. By the year of her eighteenth birthday she was one of the best young women paddlers in the country and was selected to race internationally, quite possibly to represent Canada at the Junior World Championships. Thus, her life as a carded National Canoe Team athlete began and her performance goal of competing at the Olympic Games was that much closer.

During this time, she continued with educational goals and simultaneously enrolled in a university undergraduate program. Over the ensuing years, if this athlete made it to the National Canoe Team not having competed at the Junior Worlds, she likely did not climb from the lower ranks of the women's Team. If, however, she competed at the Junior Worlds, then she most likely moved onwards to race repeatedly at the Senior World Championships, and then had a good chance to ascend further to achieve her goal of being a member of the Olympic Games Team. She may have retired at this time, but if she continued to remain on the Team and challenge herself to perform at an even higher level, she still eventually faced retirement. This eventual retirement was likely the result of an unfair selection decision, poor coaching, or the problematic nature of the National Team environment. Her retirement from the National Canoe Team was likely unplanned and abrupt; a voluntary withdrawal perceived nevertheless to be 'forced' by the circumstances. Essentially, this was what the typical high performance female experienced, from inception to departure, in the amateur sport of sprint racing canoeing.

The women participating in the study are former National Canoe Team sprint racers (n=21) and currently range in age from 24 to 43 years, with an average age of 33 years. More specifically, and as shown in Table 1, the majority are between the ages of 30 and 39 years.

In terms of education, these women athletes are well above the Canadian average in their level of scholastic attainment. Almost all possess an undergraduate degree (n=19), with close to half of these women (n=8) also pursuing post-graduate or liberal profession studies. All of the athletes, with the exception of one woman who is a high school graduate, were undertaking their university or college education while a member of the National Canoe Team, and approximately half of those graduated prior to their retirement from the Team. Degrees attained by these women vary across a wide spectrum of disciplines offered at Canadian universities.

As professionals, the majority of these women followed their educational degree and are currently employed in their chosen fields: medical sciences (dental, physiotherapy, nursing), amateur sport, sciences, law, commerce, economics, education, computer technologies, and environmental-related areas. Three women are not presently professionally employed, one is continuing her university education while two have chosen to temporarily remain in the home as full-time caregivers to their children.

Almost all of the women currently live in large Canadian cities, with the majority residing in eastern (n=7) and southern Ontario (n=6). Three women reside in Alberta, one in Quebec and one in Nova Scotia. At present, three women reside outside of the country.

Table 1

Characteristics of the Women Sprint Racing Canoeists

Characteristic	n	(%)
Age at time of study		
20 - 24 years of age	1	(4.8)
25 - 29 years of age	6	(28.6)
30 - 34 years of age	5	(23.8)
35 - 39 years of age	5	(23.8)
40 - 44 years of age	4	(19.0)
Highest level of education attained		
High school diploma	1	(4.8)
College degree	1	(4.8)
Undergraduate degree	11	(52.3)
Graduate university degree	8	(38.1)
Age of introduction to sprint racing canoeing		
5 - 9 years of age	2	(9.5)
10 - 14 years of age	14	(66.7)
15 - 19 years of age	4	(19.0)
20+ years of age	1	(4.8)

Demographic Factor	n	(%)
Age of first international competition		
10 - 14 years of age	1	(4.8)
15 - 19 years of age	15	(71.4)
20 - 24 years of age	4	(19.0)
25+ years of age	1	(4.8)
Highest level of performance attained		
No international competition	3	(14.3)
Pan American / Continental Cup Team	3	(14.3)
Junior World Championship Team	2	(9.5)
Senior World Championship Team	5	(23.8)
Olympic Games Team	8	(38.1)
Age at retirement from National Team		
15 - 19 years of age	2	(9.5)
20 - 24 years of age	9	(42.8)
25 - 29 years of age	9	(42.8)
30+ years of age	1	(4.8)
Total years competing with National Team		
0 - 2 year	6	(28.6)
3 - 5 years	9	(42.8)
6 - 7 years	3	(14.3)
8 - 10 years	3	(14.3)

Demographic Factor	n	(%)
Total years competing in sprint racing canoeing		
5 - 9 years	5	(23.8)
10 - 14 years	12	(57.2)
15+ years	4	(19.0)

In general, the female sprint racing canoeists were introduced relatively early to the sport, with the majority commencing at age 13, although starting age varied from 9 to 24 years. If we consider the level of attainment (no international competition, Junior World Championship Team, Senior World Championship Team, or Olympic Games Team), there is very little difference between the age of commencement, ranging from approximately 12 years on average for those who were Junior World participants to 14 years on average for those who became Olympic Team members.

Selection to the first international competition came quite early for these women, with the majority attaining their first experience at age 18 years. Those women who experienced Junior World Championship competition (n=10) ranged in age from 12 to 18 with the majority competing at age 16 years. The majority of those women who gained only minor international experience at the Pan American or Continental Cup Championships did so at the later age or 19 years and with a smaller range in age, from 16 to 20 years. The Olympians (n=8) were found in between these two groups, with the majority first experiencing international competition at age 17 years. Three National Team members never experienced international competition.

The athletic life span of these sprint racing canoeists is quite long, with the vast majority

of women competing in the sport for more than a decade. From the first year of canoeing to retirement from international competition, these women athletes competed, on average, for 11 years, with some of them competing for as little as 5 years and others for as long as 17 years. Olympic Team members tended to compete for an average of 12 years, only one year more than those who were World Championship competitors.

Among the respondents are eight Olympians, with half of them being repeat Olympic Team members. Thirteen women competed at the Senior World Championships and among these women, ten also competed at the Junior World Championships. Only one athlete who competed at the Junior Worlds did not proceed to race at the Senior Worlds. Three athletes who did not compete at the Junior Worlds competed at the Senior Worlds, and one of these women proceeded to the Olympic Team.

For most athletes, retirement from international competition occurred around their twenties. While the majority retired at age 24 years, retirement age ranged from 19 to 31 years. For women who were Olympians and those who raced at the Senior World Championships but did not attain Olympic Games status, retirement came mostly around age 25 years. However, for a majority of women who did not compete at the World Championships or the Olympic Games, retirement came earlier (around age 22 years) than for their more internationally experienced teammates.

The year of retirement for the women athletes competing as members of the National Canoe Team spans 15 years, going from 1984 to 1998. In terms of the quadrennial cycle at the heart of the amateur sport system, this means that 4 athletes retired in 1984, 7 retired between 1985 and 1988, 4 retired between 1989 and 1992, 5 retired between 1993 and 1996, and 1 athlete retired in 1997-98.

During the time frame considered for this study (1984 to 1998), over one third of the participants considered their home canoe club to be the Rideau Canoe Club in Ottawa. Other clubs were in Ontario, notably the North Bay Canoe Club and a number of clubs in the Toronto/Mississauga/Oakville corridor. A few clubs cited were in the provinces of Quebec, Nova Scotia, and Alberta. The women of the National Canoe Team were essentially English-speaking: 19 of the women indicated English as their mother tongue, one indicated French speaking and one indicated an other birth language.

While they were National Team athletes, almost two thirds of the women (n=14) set the Olympic Games Team as their performance goal. A large number (n=10) also indicated that being a member of the Senior World Championship Team was their goal, while a few (n=4) had also set their sights on winning the senior women's single kayak event at the Canadian Canoe Championships. Of note is that almost one third (n=6) of the women also cited maintaining their National Team status as an important performance goal. Other performance goals encompassed more intrinsic elements such as "to be the best one could be" and "to increase personal performance race times."

Just under two-thirds of the women (n=13) experienced injuries while training as National Team athletes. Acute and chronic tendonitis of the wrist, elbow, or shoulder girdle was the injury most cited by the athletes (n=11), followed by other overuse injuries of the middle to lower back or shoulder girdle. Also mentioned were more serious health problems such as a rotator cuff problem, a cracked coccyx, and chronic fatigue. Eight women indicated they had sustained no injury at all during their National Team training and competing years.

The Women Sprint Racing Canoeists' Reasons for Retirement

Athletes retire for various reasons and these were considered extremely important for the understanding of the retirement experiences of women sprint racing canoeists. Consequently, each of the women in this study (n=21) was asked to speak about the most important reason or reasons leading her to retire from the National Team. These reasons are presented in Table 2. As can be seen in the table, most women mentioned several reasons. It seems that for many of these women, retirement was the end result of the evaluative assessment of the circumstances surrounding them. These circumstances are dynamic in nature and differing from athlete to athlete, but it seems that it is such dynamics that have led to an athlete's decision to retire. Most athletes have a tale to tell about their retirement experience and in order to grasp the essence of such experience, attention must be drawn to the reasons cited for the retirement decision.

As can be seen in Table 2, the various retirement reasons have been regrouped in categories. "Unfair selection decision" was the most important category, followed by "Poor coaching", and then by the "Problematic nature of the National Team environment." Less popular categories were those regrouping reasons related to the "Non-achievement of goals" and to an "Unhappiness with the current situation." The most cited individual reasons for retirement are "Conflicts and politics within the National Team " (n=17), the coach's "Discriminatory attitude toward women" (n=14), the National Team staff's "Unfair crew selection" (n=12) and "Unfair selection criteria for major events" (n=11), and the "Lack of leadership" on the National Team (n=11). All five of these reasons were cited by more than 50% of the participants. "Poor funding" (n=3) and "Injury" (n=2) were the reasons mentioned the least often.

Table 2
Reasons Given by Women Sprint Racing Canoeists
for Retirement from the Canadian National Canoe Team

Total n	Category	Reason	Number of athletes who mentioned the reason	
			n	(%)
57	Unfair Selection Decisions	Unfair Crew Selection	12	(57.1)
		Unfair Selection Criteria for Major Events	11	(52.4)
		Unfair National Team Selection	9	(42.8)
		Problematic Carding Criteria	8	(38.1)
		Unfair Coaching Decisions	7	(33.3)
		Unfair Olympic Games Team Crew Selection	6	(28.6)
		Unfair Olympic Year Spring Training Camp Selection	4	(19.0)
54	Poor Coaching	Discriminatory Attitude Toward Women	14	(66.7)
		Poor Coaching Competence	9	(42.8)
		Poor Coach Continuity	9	(42.8)
		Lack of Attention to Lower Ranked Athletes	8	(38.1)
		Poor Coaching Support	6	(28.5)
		Lack of Continuity in the Training Program	5	(23.8)
		Poor Communication	4	(19.0)
42	Problematic Nature of the National Team Environment	Conflicts and "Politics" within the National Team	17	(80.1)
		Lack of Leadership	11	(52.4)
		Lack of Fairness	9	(42.8)
		Athlete's Powerlessness to Affect Change	5	(23.8)
17	Factors Forcing Retirement	Loss of National Team Status	7	(33.3)
		Feeling That There Is No Choice But to Retire	5	(23.8)
		Insufficient Funding	3	(14.3)
		Injury	2	(9.5)
12	Unhappiness With the Life Situation	Unhappiness on National Team	6	(28.5)
		Need to Move on in Life	6	(28.5)
12	Achievement or Non-Achievement of Goals	Achievement of Olympic or World Championship Goals	4	(19.0)
		Non-Attainment of Olympic Team	4	(19.0)
		Insufficient Performance Progression	4	(19.0)

Unfair Selection Decisions

Unfair Crew Selection. The selection process of those National Team athletes who would be members of the crew boats (K-2 and K-4) was often thought to be unfair and played a role in the decision to retire. For instance, a crew selection may have meant that an athlete was asked to switch from racing alone to racing with a crew. Such a change is extremely difficult since racing in singles requires an attitude much different from the attitude needed to develop a crew camaraderie. One athlete spoke on her perception of such difficulty:

Canoeing is such an unusual sport because to make a Team you are racing against the people that you will be paddling with and it's very difficult to ask people to do that. Because in order to paddle really fast in singles, you almost have to adopt the "I hate you" attitude. (Karin)

In total, there were 12 women who associated an unfair crew selection to their decision to stop their National Team participation. Those athletes also suggested that unfair decisions were detrimental to the inner workings of the women's team and often lead to intra-team conflict as well as conflict between the women and the coaching staff determining the final crew. These conflicts are discussed in the following way by three athletes:

There were always interplays between the women on the Team especially when you're fighting for seats in the crew boats. (Sandra)

I would say that it was always individual versus individual and then it became crew versus crew. Like the K-2 selections for example. And if you weren't in the K-2, then you had to team up against the other K-2 and things like that. You know, if you were in the K-4, the K-4 stuck together. It was all pretty much to do with selection and who's in the top crews. And it was, just jealousy on some part and sort of a self preservation and a lot of back stabbing going on just to make sure they, you know, put themselves in a good light to stay in their position. You know, the politics. Things were happening, some of it above the table and some below. I wasn't one of the top four so I wasn't involved in the K-2 or that stuff anyway but you could definitely see it happening. (Vera)

At the [date] World Championships, I was taken out of the K-4 200m and replaced by somebody who I had just beat at the National Championships. So I felt that was

really unfair. And it was someone who I was also beating everyday in training, at the training camp for the World Championships ... the reasons given were just that they thought it would be better for the boat. (Donna)

The timing of the crew selection was also a reoccurring concern among these women. Part of the “unfairness” of the crew selections was that, according to the athletes, they should have been made sooner before the competition. Although the athletes recognized that late selection may have, in the eyes of the coaching staff, allowed for the best women to be combined for the crew, the canoeists also felt that late selection left little time for team building and team cohesiveness. Conflict among the women and between them and the coaching staff would escalate as women jostled to be chosen for a crew. The women canoeists’ dissatisfaction with the late crew selection seemed to also have been accrued by the fact that late crew selection seldom occurred within the men’s team: more often than not, male crews were set to race at the team selection races. This was not so for the women’s team, as noted by these athletes:

Even when I won the World Championships with the girls in the K-4 200m, it wasn’t, don’t get me wrong, I was absolutely ecstatic to win, but it wasn’t as if, like our goal was to win but I didn’t want to win it in that way because our boat was put together that day. We went out just for the heats and we just clicked so it was a lot of luck. (Grace)

It goes back to one of the reasons I retired, just because you were the fastest or you were the best didn’t mean you were going to, you know, be in the boat. Among the women, there was always that sense of insecurity. The women never felt at ease and so would always be fighting and competitive and try to get each other rather than having things. I think if we’d gone into the season having things, you know, knowing who the boats were and establishing that early on, I think a lot of those fights would have been eliminated. Even though it was clear as to who was beating who and even if you were in a boat, you were never sure if you were going to stay in the boat. At any time a political decision could be made and you were out. It had nothing to do with who was better, it was political or maybe based on whether the coach liked you that day or whether somebody else was more vocal or more pushy. (Eva)

Unfair Selection Criteria for Major Events. Comments were made by a good number of the respondents (n=11) regarding the unfairness of the selection criteria set yearly for the various tours and major competition Teams. Again, such comments were related to the decision to retire from the National Team. In a number of cases, the athletes thought that the selection criteria were not always adhered to, and that National Team staff manipulated them as needed. There seemed to be a recurring perception that even if an athlete made the selection criteria, she would be bypassed in the selection process for another athlete who had not met the criteria. The reasons given for such “by pass” were thought “flimsy” at best and obviously did not sit well with these athletes. The following Olympic and World Team veterans had the following thoughts regarding the criteria:

I beat her at the Trials, I should have made the Team. I was before her at the finish line. So what happened? (Sandra)

They had said that the first four girls across the line were going to the Olympics. But I was fourth and I didn't go. You know, it was a political decision of who paddles with who. If your coach is not sitting at the right place or being nice to the right person, forget it! And because [name] won the K-2 race and even though I beat her by two seconds in singles, that was the K-2 that was going to the Olympics. It was: “We're not breaking any boats and that's going to be it.” There were times where they changed the criteria half way through, you know, after announcing the first criteria, they then sent us a new one. I don't know the extent of the damage done because of that to the Women's Team. (Fran)

It was kind of a strange situation because [coach] had told me that I didn't make the tour, so in my mind I didn't make the World Team either because there was this standard. They were going to take, first of all, six people and, I forget, people didn't do as well or something and then [coach] was saying they were only going to take four. I wasn't in that top four so, you know, I wasn't going. So I sat there and basically for an hour until they announced the official team. I was just bawling and I had called my parents and told them right then, that was it. And then, an hour later, I made the Team. I was like, okay, here we go again. (Talia)

The main frustration seemed to be not with the criteria themselves, but rather with the fact that changes were often made to these criteria. In some cases, changes were made several months

after the initial criteria were published and distributed. In some other cases, changes were made too close to the selection races. Although the athletes recognized that extraneous circumstances prompted a required change (for example, a COA policy), the athletes were still upset with the poor communication and sensitivity shown when such a change was made. Some of these changes, when they occurred in a new calendar year (that is, January onwards), were perceived by the women athletes to have negatively impacted on their potential performance because of the short amount of time available before the selection races. The quotes below illustrate the concerns that seem to have been common among the athletes:

It would be: "Oh, here we go again with the criteria." Right? Well the criteria was always bullshit. They'd put it into writing and then they'd change it. (Eva)

How can you write something in the Fall and change it in the Spring? How about having criteria set in place for Trials in May and then change it after the Trials in June? It was like: "Oh, all of a sudden, the criteria doesn't work anymore." But you've picked the Team based on one criteria and then you change it. Like to me those are things that just shouldn't be. I mean how can these things be done maliciously but at the same time how can these things be done without realizing that the consequences would be so negative to the women? (Renee)

[Name] and I had won the K-2 the year before, we came fifth at the pre-Olympic regatta and qualified the boat for the Olympics. But then, they changed everything in February and said: "Now we're selecting off K-1s, not K-2s." We didn't even race K-2s at Trials. And they took the order of the finish and then for the fifth position, they had to go to a second set of Trials, right? So they sent the four of us over to Europe and then they had the second set of Trials and then they sent her over to Europe to meet us. (Marian)

A few women (n=4) noted that although they raced in K-1 (singles kayak) to a place on the National Team, their crew boat skills were more accomplished, that is they performed better in a K-2 or K-4 boat. Unfortunately, selection criteria for tours and teams were predominantly weighted for single performances. This was perceived as unfair by these athletes who also thought that they had much more to contribute to selected Teams, if only the criteria included crew boat

skills. In most instances, crew boat skills would earn an individual a place in a crew at a post-selection training camp, but these women had difficulty in placing in singles to even be selected to the camps. Concerns were mentioned this way:

Like, I could paddle K-2. I was never going to make it internationally in K-1 but it's that whole thing about you had to prove yourself in K-1. That whole philosophy of the Team. And I knew all along that I was a team boat paddler and for me to crack the top four in K-1 was always going to be difficult. I knew that my strength was in team boats and I showed it there. (Cathie)

As a team, I was excellent. As a singles, I was crap. You know, in terms of, and I remember [HPD] saying to me: "Grace, you're never going to get anywhere until you do this in K-1." I was always a good team boat paddler but had trouble pulling it off in K-1. That's why I never got to where I should have gotten. (Grace)

Unfair National Team Selection. A number of the women canoeists (n=9) perceived favouritism to have played a significant role in the selection process for the National Team and associated this unfair selection process to their retirement from the Team. Both veteran and lower ranked athletes alike commented on their selection and the factors thought to be involved:

It was a very political system and whoever, you know, the National Team coaches, some of them were club coaches as well and there definitely seemed to be favouritism towards those members from those clubs. And I think a lot of it had to do with politics, it was just very political. (Fran)

Because I had spoken out and because I had left [coach], there was no question that that's what it [her non-selection] was about in anybody's mind. [Coach] was just out to get me, which he basically had said he would when he said: "Keep in mind that I'll be the one picking the Team." (Wendy)

I felt that one of the coaches in particular always tried to get people on to the National Team and the various tour teams and would do anything at a lot of cost to have you not make those teams. Like, we'd have a second set of time controls or third set of time controls trying to get those other people on Teams when I had already made my position. It was sort of best two out of three until they got the two out of three. That kind of thing. (Angie)

I remember one set of Trials and it was [name] and I battling it out for this one spot, because the top four almost seemed to be protected in some ways. And I think she came fifth at one and I came fifth at one. And they sent her on this trip

and not me. No reasons were ever given, but I think it had something to do with them not liking [my coach] and I think that anyone that was coached by [my coach] had a harder time getting selected. (Linda)

Problematic Carding Criteria. It was also noted by some of the women (n=8) that, as athletes who were vying for continued status on the National Team, they had not anticipated the outcome of the final selection process. Half of these women were lower ranked athletes who felt that they had met the National Team carding criteria and yet had not been renamed to the Team. The carding criteria were perceived to be problematic, in that regard, and fueled many athletes' frustration. For these athletes, problematic carding criteria were noted as a reason for retiring from the National Team. Two athletes speak to this issue in the following way:

Initially, I was in total shock and all that. I was totally assuming that I was still on because I had met my criteria. At that time, I didn't know that there had been a cut and that there had been changes. I never expected to be cut when I was. I guess because I thought I had come so far the year before ... I was pissed because I felt that I had done what they had asked me to do towards developing. They would give you criteria every year that you had to be able to do so many bench presses, and bench pulls, and chin ups and you had to place in a certain position at the Trials and at CCA and you had to be a certain time. And I had done those. I had maintained my position. I hadn't beat anybody but nobody new had beaten me. I was faster than [name] at that point but because of her age and how far she had come in the past year she was ripe for a [D training] card. (Helen)

I remember that there was one year that everybody had thought I would get on and I didn't. And like everyone was sort of shocked about it, like, "Why wouldn't they have taken her on the Team?" I had won the juniors [selection Trials], I had gone over to Europe as a junior and done relatively well and competed at the Canadians in seniors and did well. It seemed like there was no reason why I didn't get on but I didn't. (Linda)

Other athletes, who had all represented Canada internationally for many years and been veterans of Olympic and/or World Teams, noted that preset carding criteria cut short their future with the Team. Although each athlete had earned a ranking within the Women's Team top six and would have liked to continue contributing to the Team, the carding criteria lead to their loss of

carding status and hence their perceived premature retirement. These criteria, put into place by the National Team staff, were aimed at the individual athlete and the yearly international performance progress to be made by that athlete. There were no 'off' years incorporated, nor was being close good enough and athletes questioned their basis, especially the age element. It certainly made the athlete wonder what had happened to the concept of having Canada's fastest athletes make the Team or the idea that if a younger athlete wanted to make the Team, this was accomplished by beating a current Team member on the water. Having as a member of the National Team, a woman who has the ability to remain among Canada's best, was seen by the athletes as being in the National Team's best interests. However, this was compromised by the age element. The quotes by these two Olympians illustrate their frustration with the carding criteria:

The year after the Olympics, I trained kind of half-assed and was quite happy to finish fifth and thought: "Oh cool, I still make it." It was a down year ... the post-Olympic year and I had been an Olympian the year before. First, they left me at home and said: "Well you're on the World Team but we're not taking you on tour." Then, I could have gone to the Worlds and they still wouldn't have carded me the next year. Because of my age I had to race at the Worlds and I had to be in the top four. Well they were going to take me to the Worlds, not on Tour, but they weren't going to put me in any boats. So I was just going to Worlds to be a spare. And if I didn't race in the K-4, then I wouldn't have gotten carded again. I think it was unfair. (Marian)

I wasn't old in the way of "old." I mean I was only [early twenties]. Then there we are, one year after [Olympics], and [HPD] does his report on [Olympics] and he says: "Oh, we did this survey on the average age" and he talked about the average age and then he says: "Well, nationally, you know we as an office, we need to figure out how we can keep our athletes in the sport longer." And I'm thinking to myself, well, how can he say that and still have age linked with performance in the carding criteria. The criteria is opposite to what he said publicly. I mean you perform and are among the best in Canada but you're still out because it wasn't good enough at the World level according to his age-related performance criteria. It shouldn't matter if your performance lowers, if you can still be among Canada's best at the finish line, you should still be on the Team. (Renee)

Unfair Coaching Decisions. Selection decisions taken by National Team staff were noted by a good number of the respondents (n=7) as being a reason leading to their retirement from high performance canoeing. These selection decisions were perceived by the athletes as being unfair decisions which ultimately lead to negative repercussions for them. Although the majority of these athletes were Olympic Team and World Team veterans, coaching decisions were made leaving them upset enough to retire. For several athletes, the decision which affected them was taken at National Team selection races, for others it was a selection decision taken during a major international competition and usually involving crew boat seats. Two athletes discuss unfair coaching decisions in the following quotes:

I was also totally ticked because [the woman's coach] came, just hours before the races, to say that we had been switched K-2 partners. I was just being totally hosed and I was like: "Give me a break!" And [the women's coach] was like: "Well you've had this injury and you're not up to speed." I mean, it was [the women's coach] telling me in this robot voice that I was not going to be paddling with [my usual partner] and that I'd be paddling with [another Team member] because I wasn't fast enough. No tact, eh? Whatever the big blurb he gave me, I was like: "Fuck, screwed again." So, I decided that day, that I was going to quit. (Cathie)

I had a big talk with [the women's coach] and we had worked everything out, he had told me that, over the summer, I would be allowed to spend as much time as I wanted at home. He said he really understood. He could see that I was a different person when I came back, I was really happy and I was a better athlete. [Then, in spring training camp], he totally changed his tone and said that I had been miserable all year and that I wasn't allowed to go home until after Nationals. So this was in March and Nationals were in August. So he expected me to go through training camp in Florida, go to Europe, back to [the centralized training base] and be there for the rest of the summer. So, I left and I went home and spent a couple of days with my family and decided that that wasn't what I wanted anymore. So, I faxed [the women's coach] a letter announcing my resignation. (Eva)

From the interviews, it is clear that a coaching decision taken during one competitive season had potentially devastating effects for the next season. For instance, a decision not to send athletes who had met the selection criteria to the World Championships put the word "retirement"

front and center in their minds. This seemed especially true for crew boat members when, in a pre-Olympic year, the criteria were such that selection to the World Championship Team also meant preselection for the following year's Olympic Games Team. For example, if the women racing the K-4 at the Worlds met the Olympic criteria, then those women's names would be put forth to the Canadian Olympic Association as nominated for the Olympic Games Team, leaving other National Team members virtually no possible chance to challenge the crew in the Olympic year. Other unfair coaching decisions were mentioned by the women athletes:

"You qualified, but you cannot race." [The HPD]'s decision not to send me to the Worlds when I had qualified for the Team, that basically ended my sport career then. The doctor said I was healthy to race so who is [HPD] not to take me when I made the selection races. Does [HPD] know more than the doctor to decide that I was to stay home? No, [HPD] was doing [name] and [coach] a favour for sure. I needed that Worlds to feel that I was back, that I was fast again. It was the year before the Olympics and [HPD] killed me. He killed my dream too. (Sandra)

I didn't like the decisions at the selection Trials. I'm talking about the World Championships just before the Olympics. Whether [an athlete] looks bigger, or prettier, or whatever made the coach decide to put her onto the Team, I still had beaten her at the Trials. Obviously that decision really put me down. I had made up my mind then that whatever happened the next year [at the Olympic selection], I am out of it. (Renee)

They [National Team staff] wouldn't show me the time of the K-4 time trials that we did. It ended up that I was faster and after going through a lot of legal proceedings, we found that out. We got the times in the end and [the K-4 was faster with me paddling in the crew] but the reason that they gave that they didn't choose me for the crew was because I was small. They said they picked these people because they felt that they were the strongest in all of the [criteria] areas and then [coach] and [HPD] sat with me on the hill and told me that I was just too small for the crew. (Wendy)

Unfair Olympic Games Team Crew Selection. Six of the eight Olympians who retired during the 1984 to 1998 time-frame participated in this study. All of them (n=6) mentioned that following the naming of the Olympic Games Team, unfair coaching decisions were a major concern with respect to crew selection. Several of them also drew a link between their decision to

retire and such unfair selection decisions. Most problematic for these athletes was the identification of members for the specific crew races (K-2, and K-4), the manner in which these crews were chosen, and the length of time taken to choose these crews. For example, the outcome for an athlete could be that she would race in Trials competition and clearly make the Olympic Team, the ultimate competition for her, then a coach would decide that she would not actually race at the Games. The women athletes all wanted their performance on the water to speak for itself and the decisions involving favouritism to disappear. Also noted by these women were the internal conflicts and the personal toll associated to unfair crew selection. For some women, the Olympic experience, especially with regard to crew selection, left them disheartened with canoeing and high performance competition. For a few, it led to their retirement. Below, two athletes elaborate on this volatile topic:

The first nail [in my coffin] was the K-2 in training camp, when they kept experimenting with K-2s. They put me with [name A] and I had been with [name B]. And [name A] and I just clicked, it was just fantastic. Then, they took me aside because I guess I was one of the faster K-1s then too, in the early summer, and said: "Who do you want to race with?" And here I was this 18-year old kid with my really good friend [name B] and this person I didn't like so much but who was the better boat. And they put it all on my head. And I picked the better boat and I regret it to this day. And that was the first nail, that was what made me think: "These people have no clue what they're doing." (Norma)

There were still internal fights about who was doing the single and the double and who was paddling with who. That takes a lot out of a Team. You have only four women, you know two twos, and it's everybody for themselves. If only the coaches of two women could help the other two and train them as four times one, two times two, or one time four, then we'd be all together. But I guess that's a dream because it never seems to be happening. (Fran)

Unfair Olympic Year Spring Training Camp Selection. Decisions taken with regards to athlete training prior to the Olympic Games Team selection Trials was a negative issue for a few women (n=4) who were lower ranked on the Team. Each Spring, the National Canoe Team

convened a training camp in Florida and attendance was compulsory unless other training opportunities were being undertaken elsewhere with the HPD's consent. Exceptionally, in one Olympic year, attendance at the Spring camp was by HPD invitation only. This was thought necessary to maximize the benefits of limited financial and coaching resources. So only athletes thought to have the most opportunity for attaining the Olympic Team and performing well at the Games were invited. To be denied the training opportunity with other Team members was thought by the four women canoeists to be an indication that the Olympic Team had already been chosen, that is, even before the on-water selection races. Upsetting for these athletes was the fact that they were left without access to National Team coaching and fellow teammates during a training period critical for them. These women felt isolated and unwelcome as National Team athletes. The perceived unfairness of the training camp selection was heightened by the fact that "long shot" athletes had previously jumped onto the Olympic Games Team. In the end, these women rallied together and traveled to Florida at their own expense and with a club coach to assist them with their Spring training. They felt it difficult, however, to be a National Team athlete training in close proximity to other National Team athletes while not being quite part of the group:

I just remember that they phoned and said: "You are not invited to this camp." So without knowing whether I had the potential to make the Olympic Team the next Spring or not, they had already decided. The impression I have of that whole thing was that it was very unfair. (Linda)

That year was kind of weird in Florida. Because it was an Olympic year, I wasn't allowed to train with them. I had to train with a little group. [Club coach] was coaching us and there were some workouts we just hung out with [the 'official' camp athletes]. That was hard mentally. (Helen)

So we went alone with [club coach] and stayed in those horrible trailers. We were there for a few months and I almost quit then actually. (Angie)

Poor Coaching

Discriminatory Attitude Toward Women. An attitude, specifically with respect to where and how women were viewed on the Team by the National Canoe Team coaches and its leadership was thought to be pervasive by a majority of the women (n=14). These women athletes strongly perceived the attitude as negative, non-caring and non-listening. This attitude was also thought to be at the core of the women's secondary status on the Team. Such status seemed to contrast with the attitude of equality and respect that the women athletes felt they were entitled to as a result of their world class performances and recognized international standing. The lack of continuity in the National Team coach position lead to women speaking of the "revolving door" for coaches. This unresolved problem was perceived by the athletes as signifying that the coaches and administration really did not care about the women. Added to this was the athletes' general perception of problematic coach-athlete interpersonal relations and problematic attitudes and behaviours towards women on the part of the coach. Although the women's team consistently competed in the finals at the World Championships and Olympic Games, often gaining the medal podium, the women felt that all the attention and prestige continued to be mostly associated with the men's team. These two Olympians expressed their thoughts on this issue:

As is typical in a lot of sports, the women's team is often seen as a stepping stone to the men's team. And a lot of people don't understand women ... there were a few coaches and people at the top who didn't quite "get it." (Karin)

I don't think there were many people who really believed in us, in the women's team. (Talia)

While none of the women athletes used the term "discrimination," it seems that the expression "discriminatory attitude" best sums up the type of attitude that the women athletes seemed to have encountered while on the National Team. According to many women, the type of

language and techniques that were utilized during training would have never surfaced on the Men's Team. The perception of several athletes are presented below:

There was also times on the water when [coach] was unreasonable. There was once, that happened in front of the whole women's team and we actually got it caught on video tape ... you know, he was swearing at us, you know like, "Jesus Christ" and "God damm it!" Not at us individually but as a group. And he would scream and say that we were stupid. Like when we couldn't get it technically, he would yell at us that we were stupid. (Wendy)

[Coach] could be kind of cruel. He would always comment on our weight. Either we were too thin or too heavy and we could never satisfy him. It was either like "Gain weight [Eva's surname]" and I'd be eating baked potatoes, or it was "You're getting a little chunky, you'd better lose some weight." There was a lot of things like that. (Eva)

I don't respond to a rough and tough kind of guy telling me that I'm not grunting loud enough when I do weights and that I don't weigh enough. Those kinds of things were ongoing. (Helen)

They want you to feel that you are nothing but an athlete. And if you don't make the Team, as [coach] says: "You can go and work at the 711 because they'll always hire you there." It was sick. (Marian)

Further, there was also the perception that the coaches' attitude towards coaching women allowed them to play "mind games" with the athletes. This psychological manipulation was sometimes thought to be tantamount to an abuse of the coach's position of power. The three athletes below, all World Championship Team members or Olympians, offered their general comments on this issue:

[Coach] always used to say to me, when I would get upset about something, you know, I really wanted to be a [occupation] and he knew that because I was always reading the books on the topic and I had told him that was what I was going to do when I retired, and he would always say: "How can you say you're going to be a [occupation] if you can't even do this." So when I got the job and I was a [occupation], I think that's part of why it felt so good, I wanted to send him a letter and say: "Look where I am now, so much for your mind games." (Eva)

He played a lot of mind games. A lot of mind games. So in the Fall, I had had enough and I went to him at Christmas time and said that I was looking at going

with someone else. And he told me right there, he said: "You better think twice about this decision, I'm the one that's going to be picking this team" or something very close to that. (Wendy)

I think, part of [coach's] thing with me too was that I didn't have that cut throat attitude. I almost thought that he liked it when people were kind of bitchy because, that, in his mind, he thought that, well, that's the type of person who'll make the good top competitor. (Vera)

An athlete's size was mentioned by a good number of women (n=6) as a fixation point for the coaching staff. The attitude among the National Team staff was that a successful female paddler had to be large in size, preferably tall with a large solid muscled frame, and that the smaller athletes would not be able to achieve international medal performance. Although size may be of an advantage in sprint racing, these women continued to show that they were among the best in the world (all had reached a top five ranking at the World Championships in crew boat). Yet, these athletes indicated that they were made well aware of their stature limitations. The following athletes, all veterans of multiple World Championships and Olympic Games, noted their frustration with the "size attitude":

Certainly all the years on the Team, I was told that I was too small, but how was I to grow the extra inches [HPD] wanted? I consistently won the K-2 and K-1 at selection trials or placed in the top three when not winning so I was in the crew boats whether they wanted me or not. I raced at two Olympics and Worlds before and after and the women's crews consistently made the finals. (Renee)

I knew that [HPD] thought I was small and there were people that weren't on the Team then that he would pay so much more attention to, like [names] then. You know people who were big, he would get all excited about them. I just sort of got the feeling like he just wanted to get rid of me because he didn't think I would ever be, that I was never going to cut it because of my size. And you know at that time, I think, they really didn't have the right to be that picky because they're weren't that many people that were that good, really. Like if you look at the top ten, okay, so maybe a few of the girls on the Team are small but fast so why don't you try to work with them instead of just saying: "okay, well, lets get rid of them" especially because we had gotten as far as we did. We were owed that at least. (Janet)

[HPD] described that I was too small and I'd never be a champion. How am I supposed to ever reach my performance goals when someone like that is against you. The Association is there to work with the athletes, to support them, to help them get better and faster, and to help them realize their dreams. They should be there because it's a passion and they want to see athletes succeed. Instead, all they did was let the coaches just beat me up, beat up on the one thing that I have no control over. I am the way I am because of what God gave me and it shouldn't matter, as long as I was fast on the water. (Grace)

These same athletes further indicated that the National Team staff attitude towards their physical size negatively impacted on their selection to teams and crews. This impact was felt so much and so often that legal action was taken by several of the athletes in an attempt to protect their rights to being named to the Team in question, based on their on-water performance and not on their size. Here, two athletes comment on the issue of size and their legal fight to race for their country:

In a short version of [what happened] I ended up getting a lawyer to protect my rights against [the coach] and [HPD]. And I can quote because I can still remember what [HPD] wrote: "Grace lacks in the necessary power output to be a world class champion." End of quote. And here I was, an Olympian and [ranked] in the World in a [team-boat]. I'll never forget that because, on the Canadian Team, they never ever did any power output. How they measured power output, I'm still lost about that one. (Grace)

I was faster and in the Appeal Process with my lawyer, that all came out. But the reason that they gave that they didn't chose me was because I was small. They felt that one of the bigger and stronger girls would be more effective over the last 200m of the race No physical testing was done, nothing. It was all subjective ... they had objective criteria that favoured me but they used the subjective decision which was my size ... they never ever gave anyone the results of the time, like I said, until the Appeal Process. (Wendy)

Poor Coaching Competence. The lack of coaching competence on the National Canoe Team was a noted concern for many of the respondents (n=9). Whether a Team veteran or an athlete in the lower ranks, these women spoke almost in unison on this aspect of their high performance experience and how it negatively impacted on their performance, their potential, and

ultimately, on their decision to retire from the Team. It was clearly indicated by these women that National Team coaching was often inconsistent, poor, and unproductive. In reference to the poor coaching, these women raised the issue of coaching knowledge and the coaching program base tenets. These two aspects of the coaching were especially apparent to those veteran athletes who had communicated with international competitors from other countries, those who had trained in other countries along-side international competitors, and those who had an educational background in the human kinetics area. Coaches were thought not to have either enough textbook or hands-on knowledge. This lack of knowledge was seen to reflect on the training programs written for the athletes in the sense that such programs had no solid science base. Below, athletes explain this perception:

[Coach] didn't have enough experience. Like I was training with him and he didn't realize in the whole week that we were always doing the same thing. One day, 250 sprints, the next day, one-minute sprints. So we were basically doing just the same thing because one minute is basically traveling 250m. So after a week, you start to think about it, why are we doing this? (Sandra)

I found that the coach's knowledge was nowhere. There was no scientific thought behind it, just the whole Team was based on somebody's experience, because he or she was doing very good, let's do the same thing. (Donna)

I would say in general terms, on the whole, National Team coaches were non-productive relationships. Most of my coaching, I feel, that was of value to me, was from outside coaches. (Paula)

Poor Coach Continuity. According to many women canoeists (n=9), the continuity of the Women's National Team coaching position was always in doubt. This coaching inconsistency was of great concern for the athletes and was a factor in their decision to retire. The inconsistency was associated, by these women, to negative repercussions on their training and performance progress as well as on the overall women's Team program. The following comments concerning the coaching inconsistency were typical:

I had numerous coaches. I started off with one coach in [home town] but as I made the National Team, I worked with ... five different people who were National Team coaches in my eight years on the Team. (Renee)

There wasn't any coaching consistency. In training camps, it was basically whichever coach was provided by the National Team. And it varied. They had trouble keeping a coach for the women and I don't know if it's because the women's team was so hard to handle. (Marian)

I don't know the extent of the damage done because of that to the women's team but I think we had a different National Team coach assigned every year. (Grace)

Lack of Attention to Lower Ranked Athletes. A large group of the respondents (n=8), all ranked in the lower end of the National Women's Team, mentioned that they often felt "forgotten." The lack of acknowledgment of their presence on the Team was seen as pervasive and rather disheartening for them. These athletes felt that they had made it to the pinnacle of the sport in Canada but that they had been relegated to an "out of sight, out of mind" position in the eyes of the Team coaches and the administration. Ultimately, the lack of attention was perceived as being detrimental to their development and to their psychological outlook. Three of them offer their view of this issue:

[Name] and I used to call ourselves the Phys. Ed. cards. You know, you just felt like you were at the bottom of the barrel and being treated like shit by everyone. Well, not all the athletes, but certainly the coaches and the people making decisions like we didn't matter. (Cathie)

Once I seemed to have become a National Team athlete, it became very confusing as to who was to be my coach and who I was to get direction from, and so I ended up actually getting direction from no-one. (Irene)

You kind of made that leap to the National Team and you just ended up in no-man's land. (Angie)

Poor Coaching Support. One would think that the interaction between the National Team coach and the athletes with whom they worked would be an ongoing and relatively close relationship. However, for a number of women (n=6), the level of coaching support they received

did not meet their expectations. The athletes suggested that yearly training programs were not tailored enough to the individual athlete during the on-land training time period (usually Winter) and during the on-water training sessions, coaching often consisted of merely “holding a stopwatch” and calling out interval times. At the other extreme, coaching was sometimes “berating” an athlete for the entire workout. Quality National Team coaching for the women’s team was perceived by the women canoeists not to be a priority. In fact, a majority of women mentioned relying heavily on their club or personal coach. Ultimately, poor coaching support was a reason given for retirement. Athletes voiced some of their concerns in the following manner:

As a development athlete, I needed more help to get to the next level and I wasn’t getting it. (Helen)

I’d been having some problems racing wise, things had gone from really good to really bad. I just couldn’t see any light. I had just hit a very low point and I didn’t seem to come out of it and there wasn’t anyone around me to help me figure out how to get back on track. (Irene)

He phoned me and asked if I was coming to the workout and I said: “No, [I wasn’t feeling well].” And his comment, which I couldn’t believe, and that’s when I felt “That’s it!” I felt bad because [coach] was such a good guy but it was his whole officious side. [Coach] then said to me: “You’re still on the payroll.” That’s a quote. And that’s when I felt like, I mean, I know that I didn’t do anything great in terms of Europe Tours or World Championships or stuff but I thought I had given a lot to the sport and that they could have at least, I mean, I didn’t think that I was deserving of a comment like that. And so when you hear something like that, it makes you want to paddle even less I remember telling [a male National Team athlete] at the next workout: “I don’t even want to get into this kayak, it’s repulsive.” (Cathie)

Of major concern was the lack of a designated coach for the women and their chosen crews, especially those with medal podium potential, at the Olympic Games. The level of support is discussed below by three Olympic and World Team athletes:

As for a National Team coach, I went to two Olympics without a coach, which is absolutely pathetic. All that training, all the sacrifices I did and there’s nobody there for the most important race of an athletic career. (Grace)

We didn't have a coach and we went to Europe without a coach. No female team coach. There was a problem with [name] or something and they got rid of him, but then, there was no replacement named. (Marian)

There was a coach specifically for the men's K-4 but the women had the potential much more for the podium than did the men. I felt that we performed good but it was just that we had talent and worked hard. If only somebody that knew what they were doing would have been there. Somebody with knowledge to say: "Hey I'm going to take care of the Women's Team." Because, unfortunately, the person who did at that time was also taking care of the whole Team, but he was designated as the women's coach. (Fran)

Lack of Continuity in the Training Program. For those women athletes not chosen to represent Canada in international competitions, the summer months were a difficult training period. Once the National Team was selected and departed for domestic training camps or for international camps and competitions, those left behind were either left on their own to train through a National Team training program or were relegated back to their club programs. According to those women who made reference to such a coaching gap (n=5), neither of these options were thought to be beneficial in their on-going development. Ultimately, the lack of continuity in the training program affected their decision to retire. This athlete summarizes the issue in this way:

In the summer, I was still with my training group at the canoe club, sort of jumping in with their program. But there wasn't a whole lot of consistency with my training. I was just really jumping around on various programs, group to group, and coach to coach, and program to program. I didn't belong anywhere anymore. (Irene)

Poor Communication. Regular contact with any National Team coach was minimal for a small group of athletes (n=4) who perceived their communication with the designated Women's Team coach to be poor. This lack of regular communication contributed to their decision to retire since they felt no coach input into their program or life as a National Team athlete. Three athletes

discuss this problem in the following way:

The National Team coaches, really I had nothing to do with them at all. I mean I think one of them came out once when I was in university to talk with me to see how my training was going. That was it. Other than that, I really had minimal contact other than at training camps or if you were on a competition, then they were there. (Linda)

I always felt that the training programs you got weren't specifically for you. I mean nothing was ever tailored for me. I kind of felt that it was off the photocopier and sent down to [me]. (Cathie)

I would see [the coaches] a little bit at training camps but really had no input from them. (Angie)

Problematic Nature of the National Team Environment

Conflicts and "Politics" within the National Team. Almost every athlete (n=17) cited the "politics" within the National Canoe Team as a reason for their retirement and were able to offer graphic observations of their sport's political landscape. When reviewing the interview transcripts, the term "politics" can be seen as a "catch-all" concept used by the women athletes. This concept is used to depict manoeuvres taken covertly or without the consent of the athletes, by those in authority positions within the National Team. Such actions are perceived as arousing controversy or resulting in negative consequences. "Politics" thus encompasses such areas as conflicts of interest, intra-team conflicts, and athlete-staff/management conflicts. Typical observations relating to "politics" were not unlike the following:

It's a combination of things, the conflict within the [women's] Team. Conflict with the Team and within the Team, I mean the politics and all the shit that went on. (Marian)

I'd had enough of it ... mainly I would say the coaches and the politics behind the sport, the unfairness that I found. (Sandra)

Comments by the following athletes, all veterans of World Championships, indicate that "politics" is also associated to actions by the Team staff and management that were perceived to

be biased and unfair:

I just felt like a pawn in the system and I didn't enjoy it. (Talía)

The reason was also because I just felt that it wasn't a fair sport, so that no matter if you were the best or how much effort you put in, you weren't guaranteed to get what you deserved, like to make the team. (Eva)

I just got tired of the same old things, you know, decisions being made and then things changing and then you having to second guess what you're doing. (Donna)

The years spent on the women's canoe team was for some athletes a very trying time period. It seems as though these athletes were worn down by the "politics" until, eventually, enough was enough, and they retired. The following veterans of Olympic Games and World Championships Teams offer typical comments:

I retired because I was tired, tired of the politics, tired of fighting [HPD]. There's probably a lot of little reasons but those are the two biggest reasons over the past two or three years on the Team. I pretty much couldn't take it anymore. I was going slower instead of faster because I was using all my energy defending myself, trying to get some support from somebody within the CCA. Somebody, just anybody to listen to me and that wasn't the case. So, I knew that I had to go. (Grace)

I felt betrayed by them all at that point [following an Appeal Process]. I didn't like the people that were involved in the sport, mostly the administration, the coaches and I didn't want to invest any more of my time with people like that ... I was exhausted mentally and physically. I just wanted it all over then. (Wendy)

Within the women's Team, politics repeatedly took the form of intra-team conflicts, athlete-coach/staff conflicts and conflicts of interest. Sportship and fairness in competition were also put into question and many women athletes experienced disillusionment with respect to behind-the-scenes methods utilized. The following quotes are characteristic of their thoughts:

Sports should be peace and all these little things that happen in sport kept a bitter side of me. I've always put it aside because I thought that I was getting a lot more out of the sport than I dreamed of, but all of these political things were hard. Very few athletes, unless they're at the very top and you know people in high places and your coach is in high places, have a smooth ride. (Fran)

You talk to people and you know that politics could happen and I had heard rumours. But for the first few years of it, I had nothing but fun and I'd heard all these stories about how the politics can get you and I'd found nothing of that. I'd had this charmed sort of little career. And then at the end, it was worse than anything I could ever have imagined. (Norma)

I don't think that's how I envisioned things to be. I mean, I know Teams have, you know, their little troubles here and there with politics and stuff, but this was way out of hand, every year. (Marian)

It all seems just so political. It seems that it's all preordained and, it effects you. You know, you can say, well you should just rise above all of that. But it's tough when you're young and you're not only competing against the clock but you're also competing against all that crap that goes on. It's hard to bite the bullet because these are dreams and you really believe that you can do it and then it's taken away without your control. (Linda)

Whether Olympic or World Team veterans or athletes lower ranked on the Team, the 17 women spoke in the same voice on this issue.

Lack of Leadership. For a large number of women (n=11) the question of poor or absent leadership played a role in their decision to retire. The leadership of the coaching staff was brought into question, but even more so that of the High Performance Director. It must be noted that quite often these two roles were played by the same person as, through the years and various teams, the HPD named himself to the position of women's coach. The "administration", here referring to the CCA Executive Director and highly placed volunteers such as the CCA Commodore and members of the Olympic and International Committee (now called the High Performance Committee), was not exempt from the women's comments regarding the lack of leadership encountered during their time as National Team athletes. The following Olympic and World Team veterans elaborate on this reason for their retirement:

When you're sort of coming up the ranks, you look up to the National Team members with sort of awe and respect and you think that it's this great institution and it's very structured and it's highly professional and it's going to help you

aspire to world goals. And then, when you actually get there, you realize it's a lot of bull shit that goes on behind the scenes which creates a hell of a lot of heart ache and frustration and all kinds of things. So I didn't anticipate that there would be nearly so much crap going on. I thought that it would be dealt with in a much more professional manner, particularly when it came to Team selection, day to day training, training camps, and coaches. (Paula)

Being a National Team athlete representing your country internationally at World Championships and the Olympics, there are very few people who get to that level and I was at it and I was very proud to have reached that level. But also at the same time, I'm very disappointed that I never reached what I thought I could do and because of the National Team, the Association, and the way it was run, I didn't reach that. And I believe honestly that they should have been there for us and they should have been there to support us ... it should only have mattered what I did on the water. (Grace)

In some respects [the volunteers] were even worse than [coach] and [HPD] because they sat there and automatically sided with [the coach] and [HPD]. [The CCA Commodore] stood there crying in front of me and saying: "I know, I know, you're right but there's nothing I can do, I just can't help you Wendy, I'm up against all these people". And [the CCA Commodore] cried. I swear to God. (Wendy)

The women athletes expected a reasonable level of professionalism from those in leadership positions within the National Team. However, for many athletes, the staff's behaviour, communication skills, and interactions with them was thought to be unacceptable. Negative experiences seem to have formed their opinion of the National Team staff and affected their decision to remain on or to retire from the Team. The following excerpts speak to such experiences:

It was a big mess. They handled it really badly. It was so negative for us. Both [HPD] and the coaches were against us from the beginning. Instead of being strong leaders and handling the situation with some class and objectivity, they reverted to caveman tactics. (Norma)

When [coach] told me, he didn't say: "Talia, I'm really sorry they're only taking four people, they're not taking six." It was more like a walking by and "Oh, you're not going" and that was it. I was devastated and that's why I was pretty choked. Certainly in the end not someone to look to, to lead you anywhere. (Talia)

When we made the Pan American Team, I remember [the coach] saying that: "Irene, you have to put your head back into what you're doing here, you've got to quit doing all your artsy fartsy crafty things and spend a little more time doing your mental imagery and mental training." I was absolutely insulted and it was probably the worst thing that a coach could ever say to somebody because that's how I work ... that's where I relax the best and he was judging me on it ... [coach] obviously didn't make the effort to know and understand me as a person and an athlete. He simply didn't care enough but as a National Team coach he should have. (Irene)

Lack of Fairness. A perception that fairness had gone astray within the National Team was mentioned by a number of athletes (n=9) as an important factor in their decision to retire. Found among Olympic veterans, World Team veterans and those lower ranked athletes, these women all discussed the issue of unfair practices within the National Team. These women were naïve no longer and had their idea of fairness in the sport shaken and, in some cases, even destroyed. Several Olympians voiced this opinion:

That's what I liked about canoeing, you have a starting line and you have a finish line, not like gymnastics or figure skating, forget it. I knew that if I was in that finish line in the top finishers and as the criteria said, then I knew that I should be there [named to a team tour]. So how come I wasn't? It seemed as well that you could go up and ask them to explain that if this is this and that is that, why is not the outcome what it should have been? And always they were able to rationalise their way out of questions. (Marian)

Do whatever you can to be as good at what you're doing, and I agree with that. But to put people's life in the toilet for that game, it's not worth it. Not that way. I mean, you've got to be fair. People have to lose. I mean someone has to not be in that boat or on that team or whatever but do it fairly. (Sandra)

It's just a game because they're just playing with people. It's just a game deep down. I think it's a game for everybody and if you don't think so, then you're a bit delusional. (Angie)

Athlete's Powerlessness to Affect Change. A number of women athletes spoke of their frustration and discontent with the various problems on the National Team. A number of these women were not merely complainers but attempted to affect a change. Five women canoeists

mentioned how it was important to step forward, to speak, and to take action against what was perceived as wrong. The end result they had hoped was a more positive, supportive, and communicative environment for the women's team. However, all five women discussed their struggle to have the staff and administration recognize the necessity for change and all mentioned their abysmal failure. This powerlessness to affect change was highlighted by them as a reason to retire from the National Team. The following Olympic and World Team veterans recall their experiences:

It was a big thing. We wrote letters to get rid of [coach]. [Coach] was women's coach at the time, so like there's five girls, right. Two of them quit. So doesn't that raise a red flag? And both were his personal athletes as well. And then there were another two who are suing him for harassment. (Wendy)

[Coach] was terrible. He was the biggest coward and probably the biggest liar. I don't know if you want me to get into what happened with [coach] but I had a really really bad experience and so did other women. [name A] got a lawyer, [name B] had a lawyer, and I know that [name C] and [name D] both had lawyers. So it was a really big disaster. With all these lawyers against this coach, well ... the [HPD], [Director General], [High Performance Committee Chairman], [CCA Commodore], and the rest of the High Performance Committee; all backed him up as he was totally destroying the Team. Not once did they ever want to listen to any of us athletes. (Grace)

It was [coach] who didn't play fair on the Team because he was favouring [name A] and [name B] and [name C] went forward and made a complaint to the High Performance Committee. They turned it down. (Donna)

I had thought that: "Hey, you people did something wrong," and that when I speak up and let people know, they're going to change it. But I was naïve to believe that. (Marian)

At one point, of eight women on the National Team, seven of them had lawyers. So what's going on? It was bad. How come these things are not getting out beyond the Team? (Eva)

Factors Forcing Retirement

Loss of National Team Status. Many women (n=7) either lost their National Team status and were thus retired from the Team, or knew that they were going to lose their status and effectively retired before the decision was made for them. Losing this status was mostly related to not having garnered sufficient performance points through the selection races to remain within the number designated for Team positions. This lack of performance and resulting downward slide in Team standings occurred for four athletes who were beaten by ‘up and coming’ non-National Team members or by other Team members previously lower in the Team standings. These athletes speak to this loss of carding status in the following ways:

I guess, like everyone, I waited until that meeting, until October, when the Team is announced but before then I knew. I knew to expect the results, that I wouldn't be on it. (Vera)

I was very upset at losing my carding status. That ultimately lead to my retirement. (Helen)

The main reason was that I didn't make the Team. Maybe if I had made it, I maybe would have paddled one more year. (Janet)

The second reason for loss of carding was for an individual athlete to have not met the preset criteria for her carding based on continued performance progress and other contributing variables such as current international ranking, current Team standing, progress made either internationally or within the Team, and age. Three athletes, each a veteran of Olympic and/or World Teams, were dropped from the National Team roster based on these variables. Below are their thoughts on this contentious issue:

I could have gone to the World's and they still wouldn't have carded me the next year. They wouldn't have carded me. Because of my age, I had to race at the Worlds and I had to be in the top four. (Marian)

I retired because [HPD] told me he was not going to card me for the next year. I would not be able to receive the National Team funding ... but I was still ranked in the top women. And he told me before [the selection trials].... He told me he would not fund me financially for the following year. So you know, that was, it was already over. (Sandra)

I figured that it was time to go. I needed to because I wouldn't have made the National Team that year ... although I was still among the top on the Team, they would not have recarded me probably because I was an older veteran of the Team and that they were looking for the youth of the Team. (Renee)

Feeling That There Is No Choice But To Retire. Some women (n=5), including those who were ranked but lost their carding due to preset criteria, thought their retirement decision was taken out of their hands. These athletes felt they had no choice but to retire. Although other factors were interwoven in each case, retirement seemed to be the only option available. The following remarks were typical:

It was around Spring training camp time and I was working and couldn't get that whole period of time off, and so I was out. So I couldn't make it to training camp, so you're gone. I guess I was hoping that they would come up with an alternate solution I had no choice but to quit. (Angie)

My lawyer told me that once the boat races [at the World Championships] and that those girls qualify, there is no chance for me to get in. So we could either do it in a week and a half [before the Team left for the Worlds] or, well you know. And you know what the cost would be. It was very frustrating. At that point it was over. I didn't have a choice, I basically retired then. (Wendy)

I felt like I didn't have a choice in my situation to keep paddling. I didn't think that was an option anymore ... I wasn't happy about stopping. (Marian)

Insufficient Funding. The funding for National Team athletes provided by Sport Canada through the Athlete Assistance Program has always been controversial. According to many athletes, the funding provided is not sufficient to meet the commitment required to reach the world level. Despite this pervasive sentiment among athletes, only three respondents indicated that insufficient funding lead to their leaving the National Team. Below, two common thoughts on

the difficult financial situation:

I was really fed up with being totally broke all the time because money was rare and with the training and the traveling and everything, it was hard to keep down a job. (Fran)

I didn't make the National Team my last year of paddling and then I couldn't justify using our finances to try again. (Oprah)

Injury. Only two women mentioned that their retirement was a result of an injury. For these women, both ranked in the lower half of the Women's Canoe Team, their injuries occurred during National Team training camps and ultimately led to a loss of carding status. A back injury, the result of pulling a water stroke incorrectly, led to a lost season for one athlete and then ultimately her retirement. Although the injury was medically documented and the athlete received physiotherapy, she lost her National Team carding status due to poor performance and this led to her retirement. For the other athlete, a disabling wrist tendonitis led to a poorer performance than expected at the National Team selection trials and this ultimately led to retirement. These women spoke of their circumstances in the following way:

It was first of all due to a back injury that I got down in Florida in the Spring and then ... I wasn't competitive that full season due to the injury. I was on the Team then but then, I was dropped from the Team. (Vera)

The immediate reason why I quit was because I had a really bad injury and so it was right there, it was right in my face ... when I couldn't go to the first set of selection trials because of the injury and, for the second set, I just didn't have the speed work. (Cathie)

Unhappiness with the Life Situation

Unhappiness on National Team. A total of six respondents stated that they retired because, as members of the National Canoe Team, they were not happy and that canoeing was no longer enjoyable. Their unhappiness did not lend itself to a continued interest in high performance competition. For a few of these athletes, unhappiness seemed to be the "final" factor in their

decision to retire. For example, two athletes expressed their feelings in the following manner:

I guess I just wasn't happy anymore. It wasn't providing the stimulation that I needed anymore and to put that much effort into it you have to love it. (Eva)

I was a wreck. Like I was paddling really well in practice but I didn't do well in the races. I'd be going up to the races thinking that and it just wasn't fun anymore. It was really stressful I wasn't really enjoying it those last two years but you kind of get caught up in it, being on the National Team. (Janet)

For other athletes, unhappiness was mentioned as one factor in a combination of factors leading to retirement. For instance, two athletes spoke of this dynamics:

It's a combination of things, but I'd probably say the top one was that it was not enjoyable anymore. And I don't know if that's the cause or the after effect of all the conflict within the [Women's] Team. (Marian)

My Olympics weren't overly enjoyable, and I just realized in [the pre-World] training camp that there was so many more enjoyable people around so why did I need to waste my energy and time with these people. I mean, I hated it then. Yes, I loved training and all that. I loved the canoeing, the racing, and the training but I didn't enjoy the people and the environment that I had to do it in. (Paula)

Need to Move on in Life. It seems that the commitment required to reach not only the National Team but also the international level afforded the women athletes limited involvement in life outside of high performance canoeing. Eventually, a good number of these athletes (n=6) retired having decided that it was time to "move on in life." Respondents, as noted below, offered a number of comments relative to this reason, but foremost was the observation that an athlete was unable to return to "tunnel vision," total focus required to compete at such a high level:

Basically, I just wanted to build a life away from sport because I didn't know what it was going to bring more if I kept going. I wanted to experience other things in life because I was pretty focused. At the same time, I loved it but on another note I really wanted to do something else. (Fran)

Doing the one thing for [number of] years and living with a rather limited budget and, eventually, it kind of gets to you. You want to look at something else in life. (Oprah)

Eventually I just found it all completely phoney. I just thought that if this is just what people consider to be the coolest part of all of this, then it's not for me. I was just thinking that I missed my friends, I missed reality. (Talia)

According to the respondents, the life of a canoeing athlete and the life of a student worked relatively well together. Moving beyond the life of a student and "into the real world" signaled for many the move to also retire from the life of a high performance canoeist. Also, the end of the summer's canoeing season seems to have enabled athletes to view retirement as a means to undertake full-time academics. These thoughts are expressed by several athletes:

I retired actually when I finished university. So, I think that I just felt it was time to go on and get on with my life, get a job and start living a real life. (Linda)

It was just time in my life to move on. It was university time [September] and I should get on with things. (Norma)

Achievement or Non-Achievement of Goals

Achievement of Olympic or World Championship Goals. Goal achievement was a major retirement reason for a few athletes (n=4), all but one of whom had been Olympic Games Team members (the other athlete had attained international prominence with a medal performance at the World Championships). Being named to the Olympic Games Team was the peak of a successful canoeing career for one of the three Olympians. Another athlete had initially contemplated her retirement to coincide with the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games, but when the boycott was instituted, she then decided to paddle for another four years to strive towards achieving her goal of attaining the medal podium. The only non-Olympian in this group of four felt that retirement would follow attainment of a top five in the world performance, be it at an Olympic Games or World Championship. When she accomplished this at the Worlds, she had no further incentive to continue another two years towards the next Olympic Games. For each of these veterans of the National Team, once the goal was attained, there were no second thoughts:

First of all I wanted to retire after living the Olympic experience. I knew that things ended on a good note. (Fran)

I felt that I had basically gone as far as I could go athletically and I had set my next Olympics as my final goal and I had planned my career sort of around that as being my last hurrah. I felt that I had gone as far as I could go. I mean there is always that sort of feeling after you retire: “Well what if I had stayed on another year, could I have done this, could I have done that?” But, really, that wasn’t uppermost in my mind at the time. So, I felt pretty satisfied that I had done what I had set out to do. There was two Olympics and the World Championships in between and I had also raced at the Junior Worlds. (Karin)

My goal was to medal at the Olympics and I had done that. I had done everything that I could do so basically it was the end of my career. There was nothing else to do. That was it, I wasn’t going to get any better than that. I was retiring no matter what. I had made that decision. (Paula)

To be the top five in the world ... I had that goal in mind. And it might have happened at any time, you know, because it’s one of those things that just depends on the race. But that was enough. (Talia)

Non-Attainment of Olympic Team. Being named to the Olympic Games Team was the “make it or break it” point for four athletes. When it became apparent that the Olympic Games Team was not to be, retirement quickly followed. For these athletes, one a veteran of both Junior and Senior World Championships, the others previous Olympic Team members, the results of the selection races spoke volumes and the decision was thus rendered. Their thoughts are voiced below:

The most immediate reason at the time was not making the Olympic Team. I retired right after those [selection] Trials ... specifically because I didn’t see any point in continuing at a high competitive level for the rest of that year not having made the [Olympic] Team. I mean that had been my goal for the year and that goal was not going to be achieved, so I retired. (Becky)

I didn’t make the selection criteria in the first [selection] Trials and I knew that I had to beat one of the other woman to make the Olympic Team. [In the second selection Trials] I was beat by about a foot by one individual, so I knew right away that I didn’t make the Olympic Team. (Renee)

I retired because in my last year paddling, I didn't make the World Team which meant that I wasn't eligible for the next year's Olympic Team. So, I didn't see any need, I didn't see any reason to keep going on if I wasn't going to make the [Olympic] Team. (Wendy)

Insufficient Performance Progression. When reviewing the reason given for retirement, it can be seen that a few themes come together under this "reason," namely not progressing, not training sufficiently to continue, disappointing performance, and poor results at selection races. Whether a five-year veteran, a previous member of the Junior World Championship Team, an athlete who had never competed in a major international competition, or one in her first year on the National Team, all these women (n=4) felt the frustration of not racing to their expected level of performance and retired because of it. Their frustration is evident in the following quotes:

It was all part of the fact that I just wasn't able to get to the next level, so I just decided to pack it in. (Helen)

The most important reason was that I did not feel I was progressing as I thought I should be. (Linda)

I was frustrated having gone from being a very good junior, to an okay junior, to a very bad senior athlete. And it was just really a kind of soul destroying thing. I decided I didn't want to do it anymore. And that was that. (Irene)

The Women Sprint Racing Canoeists' Retirement Experience

While concentrating on the retirement experience of the women sprint racing canoeists, patterns emerged regarding what these women were experiencing and their reactions to the lived experiences. The retirement experiences of these National Canoe Team women are presented in the following three sections; "Pre-Retirement Experiences," "Post-Retirement Experiences" and "Bring Some Closure to the Retirement Experience."

Pre-Retirement Experiences

The Present but Elusive Idea of Planning for Retirement. The majority of women (n=14) indicated that they had not prepared for their retirement. Several women noted that the lack of planning was associated with their youth, their minimal time spent with the National Team, or the fact that it was not something one had to think about. Planning was not in the mind of these athletes, as illustrated below:

I think I was too young, probably younger than most who had retired. I hadn't thought about it at all. I thought I'd paddle, you know, forever and I hadn't really made plans. (Irene)

No, I hadn't prepared. I was pretty well lost when I was done. I went on welfare. Can you believe that! For several months. Isn't that sad? I had been an Olympic athlete and had been named to the World Championship Team that year. Then they cut off my carding right away. (Marian)

I guess I didn't really think about it as much as I should have. I didn't really think I had to, you know. I kind of had it in the back of my mind, but then it's easier said than done. Okay, so one day, you're finished paddling, the next day, you don't get up in the morning at six o'clock and train, so what? Was I wrong! (Donna)

I had always pursued my education, so from that perspective, you might say that I prepared, in a way, I guess, but I wasn't, absolutely not. (Renee)

The large number of respondents (n=14) viewed their retirement as having occurred in an abrupt fashion and many of these women (n=8) mentioned that their lack of planning for retirement was most likely due to the unexpected timing of their retirement. The following athletes speak to the abruptness of retirement.

I hadn't [planned for retirement] because I wasn't expecting it to be at that time and so deliberate. It was all of a sudden. I had no choice but to retire. (Angie)

No, I hadn't at all because I didn't expect it to come so abrupt ... I had been on the Team for a few years and was getting progressively better so there was no need to think of retirement. I guess in my head I still had another few years to decide what I was going to do with school and career. So no, I hadn't prepared. (Wendy)

Some women (n=7) did indicate that they planned for their retirement in a more concrete manner than the majority of their teammates. For these women, planning went beyond thinking that school will lead them to their new full-time career. They actually planned the retirement process and their transition out of the National Team. Their retirement was not abrupt, but rather planned and timely.

From the interviews, it can be seen that only one of these athletes had planned the timing of her retirement around a specific performance goal attainment: a top five ranking in the World Championships or Olympic Games. The remaining six athletes had planned their retirement to coincide with the completion of the Olympic Games. However, not all women actually participated in the Olympics - and two had their retirement timetable moved forward when they retired following their unsuccessful selection races. For these two athletes, the plan slightly changed but still entailed continuing with their studies towards an identified career choice. The following quotes reflect their thoughts:

In the sense of preparing I had a mental preparation because going through that summer I knew that I would retire. I knew that it was there, but I didn't know how soon it would be coming. (Renee)

I had prepared to the extent that I had applied to graduate school and had been accepted and there was no way that I was going to be able to maintain that same level of competitive training and do my [university course]. (Becky)

It was kind of planned. I knew that sooner or later I have to retire, so I was ready for it. I was always working towards a [type] career so I knew that when I retired that year I would finish my last semester, get my degree and start working. (Sandra)

Those athletes who retired following an Olympic Games (n=4) fared best in terms of their pre-planned retirement course. Retirement was entered easily and accepted gracefully. These athletes were 'wined and dined' to various degrees upon their return home following the Games.

Further, it was a typical end of season, a period for relaxing and taking time away from training. These athletes took their initial retirement while both mentally and physically on a high. Each athlete had a better than fair opportunity to make the Olympic Team and knowing that this Olympics would be their last 'hurrah' they were able to confidently undertake final preparations for retirement. Two of these women offer the following thoughts regarding their retirement planning:

I think one of the biggest preparations that I did for my retirement was to remain in school throughout my athletic career. I think that was far and away the number one and that was a conscious decision looking toward retirement....it gave my life another focus. And, I always maintained that you couldn't live and breathe your sport year round because you'd just go crazy. So, it made sense to then plan sort of the rest of your life or at least have an idea of it. (Talia)

I did prepare for retirement. It was so important for me to know before I left for the Olympics, what I'm doing after the Olympics because I fall right on my face with a new life, starting right after that So, I had an alternate plan, full time employment to start in September. (Fran)

With respect to the seven women who had planned for their retirement, all but one had undertaken their preparations for retirement within the year preceding their actual retirement. Although several of the Olympians had previously been participants in the Olympic Games, only one woman felt the need to prepare a long range plan, a full quadrennial in advance. For this athlete, quoted below, it was a traumatic event, the boycott of the 1980 Olympic Games, which galvanized her into preparing for her future retirement.

It was very planned and very smooth in that I had plenty of time. 1980 made me do it. Up to that point I didn't think, I didn't really have any drive or organization at all. I just thought, it's fine, everything is just rolling along. Right? But that was a real crisis that made me think it through. I might never have gotten my act together had it not been for the boycott ... in my mind I realized what a state I was in, so it just made me kind of wake up and smell the coffee. I hadn't finished my education. I didn't know which way to go. I had nothing. My life would be empty, empty, empty without paddling and I just thought, geez, I had better get something together. In the end I had a very organized plan in place. (Karin)

Although almost every woman interviewed was enrolled in an academic institution during her years as a National Team athlete (n=20), there was, however, a general unspoken consensus that this did not per se indicate planning for retirement. The overall environment of the National Canoe Team offered unspoken encouragement and reinforcement for continued education. It seemed that planning for these athletes necessitated looking beyond the attainment of education to where that education would take them, to the actual career itself. The athletes quoted below are typical in their thoughts:

Well, I was still in university and I had a part time job. There was nothing really along the lines of when I retire I'm going to do this. It all just sort of followed my education. (Helen)

Well, I kept up with university and that was always my priority. Like paddling was never a career for me, it was just something that I did, that I liked and got good at. [University] was just part of the life I was leading and my parents, well, they expected all of us to get a degree. It was just something you did. (Janet)

Everybody does it. All your coaches have gone to university. Everybody's coming from the same sort of socioeconomic background where that is the expectation so I think everybody assumes you're going to go to school and you work school into your training. (Karin)

There was also the perception among the athletes that continuing with one's education worked well with the lifestyle of a member of the National Canoe Team. Typical sentiments are exemplified by the following athletes:

The life of a student lends itself fairly well to a summer sport like canoeing. You could go to school through the winter months and blend your training with school, and then you have the summer months free to pursue your training goals and competitions. (Paula)

It's quite different from [other sports]. Going to school fits so beautifully with canoeing, you know, you go to Florida in the Spring, but you don't miss much. If you were in that kind of mode. It's very simple and it works, it fits really nicely that way. (Karin)

The Dream of Achieving One's Goal and Then Retiring. The dream of achieving one's goals, unfortunately, did not happen for all women canoeists. In fact, the non-achievement of performance goals was mentioned by a large number of women (n=14) as being a contributing factor to their decision to retire. Almost all of these women indicated further that they perceived the problematic coaching as the main factor for their inability to achieve performance goals. A Team veteran speaks to the issue below:

I don't think that a lot of [the women] have ever shown their potential because of the problems on the Team We didn't achieve our goals because we didn't have a coach and nobody cared about us because we were girls. I went to two Olympics without a coach. That's why I didn't achieve my performance goals. (Grace)

To a much lesser extent, it was indicated that personal limitations were also factors in the non-achievement of performance goals. All of these women (n=5), were from within the lower ranks of the women's Team. Further, all women who indicated personal limitations also stated that there were other aspects involved as explained by the following sample quotes:

It was personal limits and it was just the combination of the problems I was having. You know, internal problems and external problems. I guess internal with myself and the frustration and my lack of progress, and the external in terms of the Team support that wasn't around me. (Irene)

It was psychological reasons, I think. And, I don't exactly know why. It could have been part of me had just had enough and I was just playing these tricks on myself. (Janet)

The Needed but Absent Discussion of the Retirement Decision. For more than half of the women canoeists (n=13), their retirement decision was entirely a solitary one and discussed with no other person. A common response, as indicated by quotes from the following three athletes, included a specific reference to the National Team staff:

No one even talked to me about it, period. Like, never. I mean, I never had a discussion, not even with [the women's coach] about wanting to retire. (Sandra)

It wasn't discussed with anyone, not even when I telephoned [the women's coach].
(Angie)

No one. Not even someone with the Team. I've never even had a conversation with [HPD]. I've never even talked to [HPF]. I mean I've talked with the [women's coach], though not about retiring. But I'd just never talked to [HPD]. It would not be something I would do. [The HPD] wouldn't be somebody that I'd call to talk with. (Oprah)

Similarly, for the remaining eight women who had discussed their impending retirement, or their plans for their retirement, no athlete had spoken to National Team staff or to teammates. Discussion primarily involved family members, mostly parents, as well as several close friends and in a few instances, a personal coach. One woman, however, did indicate that she had discussed her retirement with a National Team coach, but that the discussion had actually occurred several weeks after her retirement. Typical comments from the women were not unlike the following:

I had talked it over with everybody. I mean I talked it over with my family and with [personal coach]. [My doubles partner] and I didn't usually talk about that sort of thing. It was rather unspoken, but I had been clear that I was not going to keep paddling. (Karin)

I discussed it with a few people, my family, some friends, and of course with my [personal] coach. (Becky)

The Difficult Reality of One's Powerlessness in the Retirement Decision. It seems that for these women canoeists, the two opposite terms of 'voluntary' or 'involuntary' do not fully describe their retirement experiences. For the majority of women, retirement fell somewhere in between these two terms, and so the new term "forced voluntary" has been generated to describe these retirements. Table 3 outlines the distribution of these three categories.

Retirement was voluntary and totally of their own choosing, for a moderate number of athletes (n=6). Of these women, half were Olympians, and their retirement naturally followed the conclusion of an Olympic Games. Among the others, one involved an athlete who retired

immediately following a medal winning performance at the World Championships. An Olympian very succinctly expresses her voluntary retirement:

The retirement part was at the end of the season, so, it was your typical end of the season. We wouldn't be paddling more anyway, so, it was a normal kind of end of the year. (Karin)

At the other end of the spectrum, an even lower number of athletes (n=4) stated that their retirement was involuntary. All of these retirements were due to losing National Team status, because of insufficient performance points garnered through the selection races to remain within the number designated for Team positions. The following two athletes, each a National Team member for one year, offer an illustration of their position:

I could have kept paddling. But, I did get dropped from the Team and that wasn't my decision. (Marian)

Leaving the Team wasn't my decision, but leaving canoeing was. (Sandra)

Table 3

Voluntary and Involuntary Retirement

Retirement Spectrum	n	(%)
Involuntary Retirement	4	(19.0)
Voluntary Retirement	6	(28.6)
Forced-Voluntary Retirement	11	(52.4)

Between the voluntary and involuntary spectrum lies the forced-voluntary retirements. These are the majority (n=11), women who feel that they retired voluntarily, “sort of” but “forced to” because of their circumstances within the National Team. All had initially planned to continue paddling as members of the National Team beyond the time that they ultimately chose to retire. Their circumstances of retirement were perceived as unjust as was a general overall lack of support for their continued involvement with the National Team from Team coaches and administrators. Two Olympians elaborate on their forced-voluntary retirement:

It was sort of voluntary but not really ... it probably should have been after the next year, after the Olympics. (Becky)

It was voluntary, I guess, that I left the Team, but I was certainly pushed into leaving There was a lot of fighting, there was a lot of backstabbing, it was pathetic really to watch. I had to go. (Janet)

Within this forced-voluntary category are three athletes who retired when stringent recarding criteria, based on age and performance improvement, lead to a retirement. One athlete had been named to the World Championship Team, but knew her carding status would be lost at season's end. Another had just narrowly missed making a third Olympic Games Team. These athletes had performed at selection races at least to a top six ranking in the country but lost their National Team status because they had not met the conditions of the preset criteria for their continued carding. The following comments are typical of the athlete's thoughts regarding a forced-voluntary retirement

Although I was still among the top on the Team, they would not have recarded me because I was an older veteran of the Team and they were looking for the youth. (Renee)

Another seven athletes within the forced-voluntary category left the Team when coaching or administrative support was absent or continued to be absent. Problems which were felt to be

insurmountable and associated with basic everyday areas conspired to lead these women to prematurely terminate their National Team careers. Two athletes who thought that they had another quadrennial ahead of them spoke of their premature retirement:

Prior to that year, I planned on going a couple more years at least to the next Olympics Then, there was another big cauffle making [two female athletes] rerace to make the Olympic Team. That's when I just kind of went: "I can't take this anymore, let's get out of here." (Donna)

If someone had said: "Look forget about it, you have another four years ahead of you, let's go and start from square one" it would have been different. If somebody had said: "We want you to continue to be part of the Team and we're gong to do everything we can to help you," I would not have retired. (Irene)

Communicating the Retirement "Decision" to the National Team Staff. There seems to be no clear or definitive manner utilized by the women canoeists to indicate to the National Team staff that they were retiring from their high performance canoeing commitments. Further, once the decision to retire was taken or the time for retirement was upon them, the athletes may or may not have relayed their retirement from the Team to the National Team staff. For three athletes, retirement was "taken for granted" following their successful participation in an Olympic Games. These women had seen the Olympics as their "last hurrah." Although each of these women do not recall indicating their retirement to the National Team staff, there was ultimately some communication with the CCA office as each women, upon retiring, did receive financial support through the Extended Assistance Program. One athlete explains her position:

It was rather unspoken, but I had been really clear to everybody that I wasn't going to keep paddling ... I mean I didn't have an announcement or anything, it was just that this was it. (Karin)

Of those athletes who took it upon themselves to tell the National Team staff that they were indeed retiring (n=5), all but one recalled that no meaningful dialogue between themselves and the coaching staff occurred. For the majority of these athletes, that was the last contact with

the CCA as a National Team athlete. This last contact was disappointing and all too brief, as illustrated by the following athletes:

After the Olympics I called [HPD]. It was probably two or three weeks after the Olympics and I said: “[HPD], I would like to retire from the Team.” [The HPD] said: “Thanks” and we hung up. And that was it. [Number of] years on the Team and that was all [HPD] said. (Grace)

There was nothing at all, just: “Okay, that’s what you want to do, see ya.” (Irene)

I can remember when I phoned up to tell [HPD] that I was not going to the camp and that I was retiring. All [HDP] said was: “Well, I can understand, see you.” That was it. [HPD] never asked why, nothing. I had never had any kind of a relationship with [HPD] so I guess that was it. (Angie)

For the athletes who did not verbally convey their retirement to the National Team staff (n=5), they did convey it through their actions. Most simply did not enter the next National Team selection races or did not enter the Canadian National Championships at the end of the summer, races deemed part of their commitment to the Team and selection criteria. When either of these courses were taken, the reason not to indicate their retirement was quite basic; the athlete needed the carding stipend over the next few months for living expenses and knew that their funding would be immediately eliminated when they indicated their retirement. Two athletes comment on not indicating their retirement to the National Team staff:

I don’t think I really indicated to anybody. I think they kind of knew that [the Olympic Team] was my goal and if I didn’t make it, that I was out. (Becky)

Well, I wasn’t going to tell them because I needed the money for the summer. I had no money. I had to go and live at home So, I just didn’t show up for the Canadian Championships. I don’t recall that anybody contacted me. Nobody spoke with me to verify my retirement or why I wasn’t there racing. (Renee)

For lower ranked athletes who lost their carding status due to a lack of performance to attain the predetermined selection criteria (n=4), they had their non-carding status initially relayed to them by either their personal coach or the National Team coach under whom they trained or as

they recall, they received a letter in the mail indicating their lack of carding status. Several athletes spoke to the relaying of information:

[I had the HPD] come up afterwards [post selection races] and say: “You know you didn’t make the Team, right?” Yeah, buddy, I know that, I’m aware. That was par for the course from [HPD]. (Norma)

I remember [HP Training Centre coach] calling me. [HPTCC] was so nice about it. [HPTCC] called me in to tell me, that basically, they hadn’t announced the Team yet, but that there had been a lot of cuts that year and they had cut back the Team by quite a bit. They had introduced that new D card, so they were looking for even younger athletes. I was not eligible as I had already been on as a C card when they didn’t even have a D card. So, I basically got shafted. I was faster than I was the year before. I met all my criteria but they had one less C card than the year before and that card was a D card, which I did not qualify for. So, there was no room for me on the Team. [HPTCC] brought me over to his place to tell me and I was just a mess, oh my God. (Helen)

I think I pretty well knew, but I can remember waiting to find out, like the day it was supposed to come out, just in case. And, I think I got it through my [personal] coach. I don’t think I was ever told directly by the National office. There was nothing after that. (Oprah)

Many athletes, but not all, recalled receiving a letter from the CCA office formally noting their loss of National Team status. Most women perceived this as a poor final communication and thought that this was a lost opportunity for the CCA to continue a relationship. Overall comments with respect to the letter were not unlike the following:

It was just, kind of, like you get this letter that you’re not on the Team, and that’s it. (Janet)

I think I got a letter in the mail saying that I was no longer a carded member. It was rather poorly done. (Helen)

Of all the athletes in the study, whether they told or did not tell the National Team staff of their retirement decision, only one recalled receiving communication indicating that her decision to retire was a disappointment and asking that she reconsider staying on the Team. And after reconfirming her decision to retire, this athlete recalls that her CCA letter was much expanded

beyond the normal “we regret to inform you that you are no longer a member of the National Canoe Team.” This athlete reflects warmly when recalling having received the letter, and her thoughts are below:

I got a phone call from [HPD] asking me to come back. Not from [the women’s coach] but from [HPD]. I had faxed [the women’s coach] my letter of resignation and then [HPD] called me about a week or so later and then [HPD] followed up again about two weeks later. Believe it or not, [HPD] was actually the best person to me when I retired. So, [HPD] called me first and asked me to think about it. I called [HPD] back and said that: “Yes, I had stuck to my decision.” [HPD] asked me to put it in writing, and I did. When [HPD] received the letter [HPD] called me back to say so. [HPD] then sent me a beautiful letter. I think my mom has it saved as it highlighted all the contributions that I’d made over the years and [HPD] also let me know on the phone and in the letter that if I ever decided to return to the sport that I would be welcome back with open arms. It was incredible. I guess because I never ever gave [HPD] a hard time, of all the girls, so maybe that’s why. [HPD] was really great to me and [HPD] was the only person who contacted me after I retired. (Eva)

The Desired versus the Actual Pre-Retirement Assistance. Several areas where pre-retirement assistance were desired was indicated by the majority of women canoeists (n=17), but this assistance was not forthcoming. An acknowledgment of their time with the National Canoe Team or a simple “thank you” was desired by twelve participants as something that would have assisted their retirement process. This could have been in the form of a letter or as a retirement announcement in the CCA members bulletin. A circulated announcement could have indicated their retirement, outlined the canoeing history of the athlete and their contribution to the National Canoe Team, wished them well in their future, and welcomed them to continue within the sport in an alternate capacity. The acknowledgment could also have been a formal recognition in one form or another, perhaps as a small gift from the National Team. The athlete’s desire for this manner of assistance can be heard in the following quotes:

It doesn’t take much to make us feel human. You know, that you were valued as a human being as opposed to just a competitor. (Becky)

I know this sounds so petty, but I would have liked to have received a thank you for my efforts of being an athlete. You know even to have had the National Team coach phone up and say: “You know, we know you’re disappointed” or “We’re sure you’re disappointed, but we just wanted you to know that we really appreciate the [number of] years of your life that you gave to doing this.” And, to never have got anything, ever, ever, ever, well it hurts still. (Renee)

You know, a thanks for what you’ve given to the sport and even some recognition for what you’ve done. Because, when you leave, you know, there’s not very many people that leave the National Team on a really high note because those spaces are so few and far between. So, the majority of people are leaving with their goals unfulfilled and they just need some affirmation to say, maybe, you didn’t make it, but look at the stuff that you did do. (Grace)

A letter maybe saying: “Thank you for being with us for whatever years with the National Team and we wish you good luck for your future.” When somebody gives an official resignation, like at a company, they say: “Thank you very much and good luck” or whatever. They give you a gift, a memento of your time with them, and they write about you in the company newsletter. If a company does that, how come the National Team, which is basically a company, kind of, doesn’t do the same thing to people who were there spending their early life time, to just say: “Thank you, good luck.” At least they should. (Fran)

Half of the women canoeists (n=10) indicated that they wanted to discuss their retirement with a person or professional outside of the National Team, its staff and volunteers. Preferably, this individual was not only one who was trusted but one who also knew the sport. In wanting to speak with someone, positive feedback for themselves as individuals was also being sought. Comments below give a general overview of what was desired by these women:

I think that I might have just needed a listening post, so to speak, in terms of having a sounding board to feel out my reactions and to know that these reactions were healthy and normal. That would have been useful and that would have made it a less traumatic departure. (Becky)

It could have been a parent, a friend, a National Team person. It could have been anyone that obviously had knowledge of canoeing and of what I had gone through. Someone to help me put it into a better perspective. I mean, I did have people that thought I was going to be okay and thought I was a good person, but I needed that connection to paddling, somebody who knew then how I felt about the National Team. (Fran)

I would have wanted somebody with a global perspective and who was looking out for you and who wanted what was best for you too. (Cathie)

Definitely to have somebody there to give me my options and to talk me through it. And, even if after giving me options I had decided to do the cold turkey retirement, somebody to just be my friend throughout it, and oh, I don't know, there was just a very basic message that was missing in my life, that I was still an okay person even though I wasn't paddling. That my whole identity and self worth wasn't attached to this boat. And, I figured that out eventually, but I think at that stage in my life I needed a mature adult in my life to actually tell me that and I didn't have that at all. (Irene)

Eight other participants indicated that they too, had desired to speak with someone concerning their retirement, especially the reasons and circumstances leading to that retirement. For these women, however, that "someone" was an individual within the National Team program, such as from the High Performance Committee or the CCA Executive, an individual who was also viewed as trusted. These women wished to discuss their years as a National Team athlete, as well as any thoughts that they may have towards affecting positive change. The comments below are representative of this group of women:

It would have been nice to talk to somebody, someone that I trusted or that I knew had spoken with other people and knew wasn't going to blab to others about our talks. Just someone in a different capacity to tell them the what and why. (Norma)

I would have liked to have had somebody on the Committee come and talk to me about it, about my decision and why I made it. (Grace)

I would have liked to have picked up the phone and told somebody what the real reasons were, but I don't know who would have listened. Who to talk to? It would have been nice to talk with someone, but I don't know who you would talk to. There was nobody. (Marian)

Other areas where assistance would have been wanted by these women included continued contact and communication with the CCA (n=9) following their retirement, a better pre-retirement planning program (n=7), and financial assistance for both living allowance and

educational tuition for the immediate months post-retirement (n=6). Comments such as the following are representative of the athletes' thoughts:

[Financial assistance] would have been really helpful, even for six months afterwards, towards getting yourself on your feet. (Renee)

It would be nice to have a National Team alumni type list, you know, where they could continue to send us the news letter and things occasionally. It wouldn't cost them that much to make us still feel welcome. (Janet)

Not all of the athletes, however, wanted assistance following their retirement. Five women stated that they would not have desired assistance; either life was proceeding according to plan, or they did not want any assistance at all because they did not want to have any further contact with the National Canoe Team and the CCA. The following two athletes elucidate these feelings:

I knew when I left it was finished, no contact ever. (Sandra)

No assistance. They didn't care about me when I was on the Team. They never supported me then, so why now? (Grace)

All of the women (n=21) indicated knowledge, if somewhat vague, of the Extended Assistance program, which was in existence during all of their retirements, and of the OACC, which was in place during the mid-to-late 1980's. The lack of knowledge of these programs was unrelated to whether an athlete was a veteran or a short term Team member. Unfortunately, not a single athlete was able to recall specific information pertaining to either financial or support assistance made available to them upon retirement (this includes those athletes who actually received Extended Assistance). Two athletes speak to the issue in the following way:

I didn't know specifically of programs, but I knew that there were some programs available. I just didn't know specifically which ones. (Wendy)

I didn't really know [the programs] exactly. I knew that they existed. I knew that [name] was in charge of that kind of thing because I received stuff from the sport center and the women's program, and I suppose I could go and see [team psychologist] if I wanted. (Talía)

This noted lack of specific knowledge was in contrast with the fact that a number of the athletes (n=7) did remember presentations by the OACC made to them during their Spring training camp and did recall an information mail-out being received. Of note is that the Director of the COA - OACC had been a previous National Canoe Team athlete, and as such, was known to all of the participants in this study. The following quotes were typical of the continued vagueness of the athletes' knowledge and recollection:

I remember actually that there were some mailings that came out to do with, I don't remember exactly, something from the CCA about that, how to find a job, or job skills, something. (Vera)

[The OACC Director] probably spoke one or two times total at the Florida training camps. But that's not really when you want to talk about it. I don't remember receiving any mail-outs or anything but maybe something from the COA to an Olympian. (Renee)

I have a memory about something in the back of my brain, something about what [OACC Director] was doing, but I'm not sure that was at that time or not. I don't remember anything in person. Something in the mail, maybe. (Irene)

Although most women (n=14) indicated that they were not offered retirement assistance, for the three women who retired following the 1984 Olympic Games, there was an attempt by the CCA to prepare them for their post-Olympic time-frame. This information, however, was not necessarily specific to their retirement planning. The following athletes address this topic on the following comments:

What I can remember from it, it wasn't anything organized, put it that way. (Donna)

There may have been some discussions among a few of us athletes, but nothing of significance that I can remember. There was nothing concrete or organized or anything like that. But to be very honest, it wasn't something I would have expected. (Helen)

There was basically the talk of the psychological effect of ending the Olympics, I remember. I don't remember if it was a group discussion or discussion I had with [Team psychologist], but I remember [Team psychologist] saying to think about after and to think about how to handle things as far as the media and the press, while you were there and afterwards. I remember [Team psychologist] saying to think about if it finishes good and if it finishes bad, what are your options, what can you do, and to think if you're going to retire, or keep going, or maybe you don't know. (Fran)

We did do some stuff, some planning with [Head Coach] prior to [Olympic year]. I think it was [Team psychologist] and that group. But not a whole lot. It was, I think, we had a couple of talks or something like that. You know, just think about what you wanted to do afterwards. So, there were a few conversations, but I wouldn't say it was extensive. (Paula)

The Mixed Reactions Associated to the Impending Retirement. A multitude of reactions were experienced by the athlete once it was realized that their retirement was imminent. Table 4 offers an overview of the many reactions experienced, which range from positive to negative and are presented as positive reactions, mixed reactions, and negative reactions. Positive reactions were experienced by a moderate number of the athletes (n=5) when it became apparent that their retirement was imminent. These women were "happy" and were "looking forward" to retirement. They were "relieved" that they were moving forward with their lives. There were also the positive reactions experienced which had negative undertones, such as the prospect of "freedom" and the feeling that a "weight had been lifted" from them. These women included a mixture of all National Team members and the following quotes are representative of their experienced reactions:

There really wasn't any disappointment, or should I say a let down, really. I think for me it was time. I didn't feel that I needed to carry on any further and mentally I was ready for it. So, it really wasn't met with any feelings of regret, or sadness, or anything like that. In fact, it was something that I was looking forward to. (Paula)

I was happy. I was relieved. It was just, it was like a weight had been lifted off me. I was looking forward to living a normal life. (Fran)

Table 4

The Mixed Reactions Associated to the Impending Retirement

Reactions Experienced	Number of athletes who mentioned the Reaction	
	n	(%)
Positive Reactions		
relief	5	(23.8)
time to move on	5	(23.8)
no surprise	3	(14.3)
looking forward to life beyond	3	(14.3)
weight lifted	3	(14.3)
happy to retire	2	(9.5)
happy to end on good note	2	(9.5)
freedom	2	(9.5)
excitement for future	1	(4.8)
Negative Reactions		
upset/angry at circumstances	12	(57.1)
frustrated	9	(42.9)
unfairness	8	(38.1)
difficult to accept	6	(28.6)
bitter	6	(28.6)
stressed	5	(23.8)
disappointed with self	4	(19.0)
sadness	4	(19.0)
wanted nothing to do with 'them'	4	(19.0)
lonely - loss of friendships	3	(14.3)
scared of future	3	(14.3)
empty - big black hole	3	(14.3)
failure	3	(14.3)
misery	2	(9.5)
traumatic	2	(9.5)
just 'wanted out of it'	2	(9.5)
shock	1	(4.8)
isolated	1	(4.8)
scared to speak out	1	(4.8)
loss of continuity	1	(4.8)
humiliation	1	(4.8)

For a similar number of women (n=5), the thought of retirement elicited mixed reactions. These mixed reactions involved “disappointment,” “regret” and “anger” as a result of the circumstances that prompted their retirement, and a “sense of loss” for their sport and the canoeing environment. There was also a feeling of “happiness,” an “excitement” about the future but also a trepidation of what the future would hold, and “relief” as pressure to perform decreased. The following Olympic and World Championship veterans speak of their mixed reactions:

I guess mixed feelings. One was relief and one was, anger would be too strong, but I guess regret would be the better way to put it. Regret that I stopped before I got as far as I knew I could go. (Norma)

I must say I felt kind of happy, but I was very disappointed in the circumstances. (Sandra)

It was a lot of mixed emotions. On the one hand, obviously disappointment at not having made the Olympic Team. There was also relief, in a way, of the pressure being off and, you know, being excited about going back to school and doing something that I had been wanting to do for a long time. And, I guess thirdly, just a sense of loss of continuity and contact with people in that world. (Becky)

The majority of women (n=12), over double the number of those with positive or mixed reactions, had negative reactions to their impending retirement. These women were “disappointed” and “frustrated” at their retirement circumstances and with themselves. Reactions encompassed “anger” and “bitterness.” One athlete felt like a “failure.” For many, it was “difficult to accept” that they were retiring, and one woman was “in shock” at the thought. Among this group of elicited negative reactions, there was a slightly higher representation of athletes who had attained Olympic and World Team status, than those athletes who ranked lower on the women’s Team. The athletes below speak of their negative reactions to their impending retirement:

I didn’t deal with it very well. I felt pretty bitter. (Wendy)

When I finally realized that this was the end, that was a little difficult for me, to accept when I had to, you know, live with the decision to be made. (Donna)

I felt really, really isolated and I felt like a failure, and it was just miserable. (Irene)

It wasn't like I'd done what I had wanted, or tried as much as I wanted and was satisfied with the result. I really wasn't ready to quit but I really didn't think it would change. I didn't have a choice then. It was very frustrating. (Oprah)

Post-Retirement Experiences

The Mixed Reactions Associated to the Actual Retirement. The actual retirement, when the decision had been made and the action of leaving the National Team taken, also elicited reactions from the athletes. Similar to the those associated to the impending retirement, these reactions also vary from positive to negative and can be viewed in Table 5. For some women canoeists, their reactions changed from their imminent reactions while for others there was no change. For most, there was still a difficulty in moving forwards without canoeing in their daily life. The same number of women (n=5) as had positive reactions to their imminent retirement, had only positive reactions to their actual retirement. These were the same individuals, and most were Olympians. The following quotes illustrate the general nature of their comments:

I had a warm glow kind of feeling. I felt really good about myself and what had happened. (Karin)

I guess it just gave me a new focus, because all of a sudden, my focus wasn't on paddling. It was on doing stuff for me. I know that sounds ridiculous because paddling was for me but when you're involved in it, you don't see it like that. You see it as a job and doing a job. All of a sudden, I was able to make decisions for me and, you know, it sounds crazy, but it was nice to be able to come home and watch television when I wanted to as opposed to having to be at a practice. I would say there was more control over my life and with less stress. It was positive and had increased opportunities. (Paula)

Relief during that time because I thought: "Thank goodness, I can just move on to something else. I don't have all those pressures and concerns and everything else." (Janet)

A mixture of reactions, which started out positive and ended negative, was experienced by two women during their actual retirement. From feeling “relief” and “happiness,” and a euphoric sense, as one woman elaborates below, their reactions then changed to feelings of “panic” and “hitting rock bottom”:

I was very excited. I just felt so happy. I felt that I had never been so happy in my life. Actually, it started out very happy and then I started having expectations. This is rather funny and you're probably going to laugh. I thought: “All right, now, I'm free.” You know: “I've got school, I can do whatever I want, I can get a boyfriend.” It became even more difficult, because I had put expectations on myself. I was just an emotional wreck then. This is my looking back kind of reflection on it. You know you're life is steady, it's a line. You're training every day, life is pretty structured, but all of a sudden my line wasn't straight anymore, my daily line, and it was wavy. And, it became huge and was all over the road. I didn't know what was going on emotionally with myself for those first few weeks. (Talia)

As with the reactions experienced when athletes recognized their impending retirement, the majority of these women (n=16) experienced negative reactions during their actual retirement. The athletes in this category now included the five women who previously had noted having mixed reactions for their imminent retirement. The level of negativity experienced by these women can be seen by their use of language. Five women experiencing negative reactions, indicated that their days now involved a “sense of loss” and lacked the “structure” that was inherent in the life of a National Team athlete. They felt at a “loss of what to do” with all their extra free time. These reactions, as expressed below by several athletes, are considered to be mildly negative:

I was probably a little bit lost. But, it was also part relief. It was probably one of those things where I would wake up and think that I had to be somewhere and then realize: “Oh, I don't. No workout!” (Helen)

It really hit me that it was final. I think it was sort of like: “Oh, my God, what have I done!” (Eva)

I found that I became the most indecisive person in the world. You're off the Team now, but being in paddling and training was, well, you've got that goal, your

life is so structured. You know, train, sleep, eat. You've got no time for anything else because you're so in tunnel vision. And, then suddenly, that goal's not there and then what? I lived to train, sleep and eat and then it was: "What am I going to do all day?" (Vera)

Purely negative reactions, with rather devastating consequences, were experienced by many of the women canoeists (n=9) during their actual retirement. These women reacted with "anger" and "extreme sadness." They were "depressed" and cried for themselves and their loss of canoeing. A few felt the stigma of "failure" and "humiliation." Others were ashamed of not performing to their own expectations. Several athletes did not quite believe that their retirement was real, that it was final and that their life of a National Team athlete was over. Athletes elaborate below on these negative reactions:

I was ashamed at first. I was mortified. I was pretty dammed upset. (Renee)

I was really, really sad. Really disappointed and still full of anger and hate. (Grace)

When I think back, it was one of the most traumatic times of my life. I was really upset about it. Like crying and taking long walks by myself. I was upset with everything and everybody, and not sure what I was doing and where I was going and, I don't know. I was a big mess probably for at least a couple of weeks. (Irene)

I felt really depressed. Basically, I was crying quite a bit. I was really depressed and it's almost like, you want to hang on, you want to speak to somebody that is still paddling. (Donna)

Table 5

The Mixed Reactions Associated to the Actual Retirement

Reactions Experienced	Number of athletes who mentioned the Reaction	
	n	(%)
Positive Reactions		
relief	5	(23.8)
time to move on	5	(23.8)
excitement for increased opportunities	4	(19.0)
more control	3	(14.3)
happy to retire	3	(14.3)
less stress / no stress	2	(9.5)
freedom	2	(9.5)
Negative Reactions		
upset/angry at circumstances	8	(38.1)
lack of structure/routine	6	(28.6)
frustrated	6	(28.6)
unfairness	6	(28.6)
depressed	7	(33.3)
lost/empty/now what?/unsure of life	5	(23.8)
loss of identity	5	(23.8)
crying easily/constantly	5	(23.8)
sadness/melancholy	6	(28.6)
stress for finances	5	(23.8)
scared/panicked for the future	4	(19.0)
difficult to accept/hard to believe	4	(19.0)
disappointed	4	(19.0)
boredom/too much free time	4	(19.0)
upset at nonachievement of goals	3	(14.3)
difficult to adjust	3	(14.3)
unsure of self	3	(14.3)
ashamed/mortified	2	(9.5)
needed/wanted to 'hang onto' the Team	2	(9.5)
extremely cloudy	1	(4.8)
indecisive	1	(4.8)
traumatic	1	(4.8)

The Factors Helping the Transition into Retirement. Although their academic choices varied, as did their level of university degree, the majority of women (n=14) said that a return to full-time education was the most significant factor in assisting their transition out of canoeing and into a world without high performance sport. Very few, however, cited their new focus of school as standing alone. Important as school was, there was also the combination of family and friends, mostly those outside of the National Team, as well the presence of a significant other, which assisted them during this period. One women indicated nothing which assisted her transition, but for the another, just having retired voluntarily following a successful career made all the difference to her retirement. The athletes quoted below speak regarding these transitional factors:

My mom and dad were my backbone. They were my rock. (Grace)

I think the fact that helped was that I jumped into school right away. I had something to work towards immediately, something to go to. I think that was probably the major factor. There was always family support there, tremendous support. (Paula)

I had some really great friends, totally removed from canoeing who helped in my transition from [Cathie] the kayaker, to [Cathie], just [Cathie]. That was the biggest one, just being [Cathie] and not [Cathie] the paddler. (Cathie)

The transitional factors of family and friends offered a supportive role to the women during this post-retirement period. Family and friends understood where these women were “coming from,” what competing in high performance canoeing had meant to the athlete, and essentially presented an alternate focus for these women. That too, was what school offered, a new focus, as did new environments, sometimes in a different city. The following athletes’ quotes illustrated their general thoughts:

I think the most important thing that my parents kept reminding me was that every decision I made was my decision, and that they were going to back me up no matter what. That helped a lot. It didn’t matter whether I paddled or not. (Grace)

The fact that I did have a career and I had my husband, you know, who had seen where I was going. He knew all about me with my sport and career. (Angie)

I think in looking back, being in a new place kind of forces you to go out there and explore even though you're upset or depressed the first little while. You have to find out about the place and have to kind of make your mark there. So, I think that it also was a negative thing moving to a new place, but it was also in a way a positive thing, because it forced me to get out of my rut a bit. No one knew me obviously, so they couldn't say: "So, how are you?" (Donna)

A number (n=8) of women canoeists actively sought assistance, either financial or supportive, during their post-retirement. A Sport Canada AAP - Extended Assistance document (1999) indicated that seven female National Canoe Team athletes, who retired between 1984 and 1998, received Extended Assistance (six of the seven recipients participated in this study). Financial assistance was varied for these retired athletes, with fluctuations in living allowance and tuition received. The highest amounts received was for full-time university students and entailed a living allowance stipend for an eight month period and two semesters of tuition paid. Four women were students and two were seeking their first full-time post-athletic career. The majority were Olympians (n=4) and had attained an 'A' card status from their performance at the Senior World Championships. Only one of the recipients had never performed beyond the 'C' card status. None of the women who received Extended Assistance (n=6) were able to recall financial specifics and only indicated receiving living expenses and tuition in general terms as noted in the comment below:

I think, I continued to get my carded status for a couple of months and my tuition for, I think, a semester. (Paula)

The majority of women (n=15) did not receive additional financial assistance in their post-retirement. Although their years of participation on the Canoe Team and their international ranking achieved varied, almost all were students continuing their education at the university level. The

following comments were made by Olympians and veterans of World Championships, when offering their recollections of having not received any financial assistance post-retirement:

No. That's funny. No, not at all. (Sandra)

When I had told [HPD] that was it for me, my funding died immediately. (Grace)

No. Nope. Nothing. See you later They cut off my carding right away and I applied for welfare. (Marian)

This change in financial status was a major setback for the majority of the women who continued with their academic studies (n=12), now without the monthly stipend or tuition paid. Their financial situation was a struggle for both themselves, their parents, and their partners, as generally expressed below:

The loss of my carding money affected both me and my parents because, the Team had paid my tuition and gave me monthly money. So, then my parents had to pay my tuition and I had to get a job when I was out [at university]. (Janet)

I was at university and continued to go to school after I was dropped. I had the odd job once in a while, but it wasn't much and not enough to live on, so I had to move home. (Vera)

The transition was pretty tight. You know, from being able to go to university without paying the tuition yourself and then to live with my parents and have to change schools so that I didn't have rent. And, I had to work a lot more hours too. (Helen)

A few athletes (n=6) sought supportive assistance and their experiences were a mixture of both negative and positive. Neither the coaching staff or the Team sport psychologist were willing to discuss retirement and its circumstances when approached. However, CCA administrative staff was able to assist where possible when asked by a multi-Olympian. The quotes below, from Team veterans, are representative of the experiences in approaching the National Canoe Team staff and the CCA for assistance:

Afterwards I tried to sit and talk to the National Team coaches. I tried to with [coach] and I tried to with [Head Coach] and [HPD]. I tried to initiate a conversation and it was really, I guess it really goes back to what I was saying earlier. I found that they were not very empathetic or very able to provide support. There wasn't a very positive reception to me trying to discuss my disappointment and I didn't particularly feel it was very useful. I guess, the other person that I tried to talk to about it was [Team psychologist] and he wasn't very helpful either and considering his position with the Team was, [Team psychologist] should have been. So, I didn't find anyone particularly helpful. (Becky)

[The CCA Executive Director] had made some approaches to different agents and companies and stuff and was writing letters on my behalf to support any applications that I was making. So [ED] really helped as [ED] was talking to people. And Sport Canada also gave me funding through the Extended Assistance Program. I got "special needs assistance" and I went to get help with my resume. It was special money. You didn't just get it. I went and talked to [Director General of Sport Canada] and said; "Well, here's the situation. I don't have any money and you're just cutting me off at the end of August. I haven't had time to look for work. I've had expenses and you just can't just drop me like this after [number of] years. I need help for a certain period of time." And [the DG] said: "Okay." They gave me a living allowance, I think it was for three months, and then we were going to see how it was after those three. So that was fair. And, any expenses that I had related to my job search they paid for, so, I went and had resume preparation and they paid for that. So they also helped. But you had to go and get that. It didn't come automatically. (Karin)

Similarly, athlete experiences were again a mixture of positive and negative with respect to OACC assistance received. The following two quotes, from Olympians, are representative of the experiences in approaching the OACC for assistance:

I did [seek assistance]. I went once to the COA but it was not beneficial for myself in particular. (Wendy)

At some point I obviously clued in to something that [the COA] was doing. And, how did I know about that? I'm not sure. I can't remember exactly, but somehow I found out about what [the COA] was doing. I can't remember if it was that Fall [after retirement], or the following year, because I did hook up with [the COA] and it was really helpful. (Renee)

Eight women mentioned the National Team sport psychologist, unfortunately, not any used very glowing terms. Two women canoeists who retired after the 1984 Olympic Games,

indicated that the Team Psychologist had spoken with the Games Team, in very general terms, regarding their post-Games plans and reactions. The remaining six athletes made note that they did not have enough of a relationship with the National Canoe Team sport psychologist in order to want to access his or her services, either prior to, or following their retirement. All of these athletes (n=8) mentioned that communication and trust in the sport psychologist were issues. One athlete did speak with the sport psychologist, post-retirement; that outcome was deemed unsatisfactory. The following Olympians and World Team veterans discuss below their concerns regarding the sport psychologist:

I wanted to talk with someone that knew me. But, I had very little to do with the Team sport psychologist my whole career, which I've always wondered about because we more or less lived in the same city. I think, I met with [sport psychologist] only once during the whole [5 years plus one E.A. year] that I was on the Team, and that was just to fill in some forms. (Angie)

[The Sport psychologist] and [HPD] were too close. You know, [sport psychologist] loyalty was obviously to [HPD] and not to the athletes. (Grace)

There really wasn't much communication when I was on the Team, to have any attention after deciding not to paddle. It just wouldn't make very much sense to me. But, I don't think I would have used any then. Maybe, if they had a Team psychologist that you could trust to be discreet, oh, well, maybe. But, it seemed that [sport psychologist] always told the coaches everything. So, it just didn't even cross my mind. (Oprah)

Life Following Retirement. Life was unfolding for those women canoeists who had experienced positive reactions (n=5) during their actual retirement time. These women were now actively undertaking new challenges and moving forward with their lives. There were no regrets with respect to leaving the National Team. These women were quite content with their canoeing career, as well as their retirement experience. Two athletes offer their following thoughts:

That time was positive for me. The stress was totally gone and I had more energy. (Janet)

My reactions didn't change. During that first year I had no thoughts about regretting that I had quit, or anything like that. It was time to move on and things were happening. (Linda)

As with reactions experienced during their actual retirement, those that experienced negative reactions, the majority of women (n=16), continued to feel negative. For some this negativity lessened. These athletes were "seeing the light up ahead" and starting to look towards moving onwards from their retirement experience. For others, however, the negativity deepened as an athlete began to rationally review the events and circumstances which lead to their retirement. Several athletes expressed their reactions in the following way:

My reactions didn't change. I was still really upset, but I did begin to fill the time. I'd started working out again, and running, and casually doing things, so I filled my time. (Norma)

After a few months or so, I kind of, stopped and began feeling like: "Okay, let's get it back together." (Donna)

I became, as time went on, a bit more bitter, as opposed to being so melodramatic and, you know, a tortured sole like I was. It was more just a bitterness as to how things had happened and really wanting nothing to do with the sport and not wanting to watch races, or to hear how people were doing. Just wanting to distance myself from it as much as possible. (Irene)

My feelings got worse and more intense as the months went on, as I started to really think about how it happened. (Angie)

Five women continued to experience a depression in the months post-retirement, which they attributed to their intense feelings of departure from the Team. Two of these women speak below of their reactions:

My days were depressed in bed, mulling around Oh, yes, I was reaching. I didn't know that I was reaching then as much as I did. (Renee)

What depressed me the most was that I had been on top of the world and the only place I could go was down. And that really, really bothered. (Grace)

Three other women attempted to recapture those feelings experienced through high performance training and competition. These aspects are highlighted by the following quotes:

[Retirement] changed my life, like black and white. It's not just a bit of a change. It's like, you're not getting up in the morning and training two and three times a day. Mind you, I trained like crazy the year after, believe it or not ... I kept doing it to the point people would say: "Oh, what are you training for now?" And, I would look at them and say: "For my sanity." (Fran)

My mental state was sort of like a butterfly. I was jumping around and trying all sort of different sports ... I'd look for something that I really, really liked, like paddling, but I couldn't find it. (Vera)

Negative reactions continued beyond the first few months following retirement and into the first year and beyond, for almost half of the respondents (n=10). Although the women were forging ahead in their lives, most with either school or a career, the reactions which they continued to experience, such as "sadness," "disappointment," "anger," and "bitterness" ultimately kept them from returning to canoeing, even as a spectator to view a local club race. The following comments are representative of the on-going negative reactions experienced by the women canoeists:

The first year was very sad, because I didn't want to keep being angry at [HPD] and [DG] for doing absolutely nothing, for not caring, but I was still very angry. (Grace)

My reactions didn't change for a long time. I was still too upset by it all. I think it was many months, if not until the next year before I could go and watch [canoeing]. (Oprah)

I was bitter for a long, long time. I think, my biggest reaction though, was withdrawal, like: "I want nothing to do with you [canoeing], ever." (Wendy)

Negative reactions, directed at themselves as individuals, were indicated as experienced by five athletes. At times, the questions of "who" and "what" they were, were not only being asked of themselves, but also, those close to them were doing the same asking. Once again, it seems that

the events and circumstances surrounding their retirement continued to haunt these women canoeists. The quotes below offer a common voice for these women:

I think that emotionally being dropped like a hot potato was undermining. It was undermining to my sense of self worth and confidence. It took a long time to get those back. (Irene)

How I felt about myself took a little while. For months I didn't feel like me. I didn't like what was happening. I didn't like my life, and I didn't know what to do. I think by the end of the summer, when I went back to school, and when I could spend much more time at school and started getting straight A's, instead of, sort of, B's and C's, that made up for it. (Oprah)

I think when you experience that kind of disappointment and that big a change in your life, your emotions are very mixed for quite a while and other people were uncomfortable talking to me about it. It think people don't like to talk about things that are sad, so, I felt like a number of people that I considered to be close friends or people from the canoeing world, didn't really know how to deal with me because I was no longer Becky, the paddler, I was then Becky, the nothing. I think it's really hard for people to cope with somebody that was that upset like I was, and somebody that's not in their traditional mode. And, then that was more upsetting to me and frustrating. (Becky)

Stress was indicated as experienced by eight women canoeists in their post-retirement. All of the women recognized that it was a type of different stress being experienced than the stress associated with being a National Team athlete. Although the stress in their daily life varied among the women, this stress was not necessarily considered negative in nature. The following quotes highlight typical athlete comments:

The stress was totally gone. I had more energy, because before, I was just always tired. (Janet)

Less stress, but it was positive. Moving to [a new city] and taking a [new job] was still stress, but not like before. Unfortunately, I gained about twenty pounds not training. (Linda)

I think, because I was feeling so down, so depressed, I think, it gave me more stress. (Donna)

The stress of competing was gone, but the stress of changing my life was a new stress, so probably the stress remained high. (Becky)

The months following their retirement were mentioned by over half of the women (n=11) as a time of reorientation towards living their current and future lives. Time was spent in “reflection” of themselves, their life, and canoeing. It was spent “regaining control” of their lives, and “refocusing” on new events or undertakings. For most, it was a time period that was somewhat negative; for a few it was positive. The following athlete comments are reflective of their comments on their life following retirement:

It felt more like, “this was my time” to figure out what to do. (Cathie)

I had to completely refocus and reorient my whole entire life and I did that by getting some work and getting ready for school and things like that. (Janet)

I now had time to do things that I wanted to do. To have friends and socialize and, you know, learn new things about myself, what I can do. That I really, really thought was very positive. The negative was that I didn't really know where I was going in my life. I was working really hard to go somewhere, but I didn't know exactly what I wanted. (Irene)

The structured life of a National Team athlete may have been left behind, but for some of the women (n=5), all Olympic and World Team veterans, structure in one form or another continued in their lives. This structure was now, either built into their life consciously by themselves, or was automatically generated by the events in which they found themselves, such as intense full-time academics. Several athletes offer these general statements on their continued structured life:

My life was pretty much full. I'm a structured person and so I kept it structured, going to the gym, working, and going to school. (Eva)

I wasn't structured and bound by regatta and test dates and those kinds of things so, I guess there was a somewhat greater degree of control over my life. Now, it was structured as I wanted it for each day. (Talia)

Friendships and acquaintances among members of the National Team were mentioned by many of the women (n=14). Of these athletes, five continued to have viable friendships with other National Team women, and in all of these cases, they too had retired. It seems, however, that for the remaining athletes (n=9), once they retired from high performance sport, most of their teammates were also left behind. There was an eagerness to look forward, and to form new friendships, or to solidify those current and ongoing ones. A need to reconnect with previous friends from outside of the canoeing milieu was also in evidence. The following comments offer an overview of this aspect of their life post-retirement:

Other than [two people], I didn't keep in touch with anyone from canoeing. (Fran)

I totally separated from the paddling community and really reconnected with my friends from school, university and high school. (Cathie)

I initially stayed with my family and saw those friends outside of canoeing ... I didn't talk with anybody on the Team at all besides [my partner]. (Karin)

I didn't maintain any friendships from canoeing. Basically, I quit and that was it. I had nothing to do with anyone else again. (Sandra)

For all of the women canoeists (n=21), retirement from the National Team was just that. They retired only from the Canadian National Canoe Team and its high performance program. Their retirement did not mean a retirement from the world of sport and physical fitness, or entirely from the sport of canoeing. All of the women continued with physical activity in some form or another with almost half (n=10) undertaking at least the basics of a physical regime on a daily basis. Many of the women participated in other competitive sports, and three again achieved a high performance level in their alternate chosen sport. Five women did continue to paddle for recreation or returned later to their respective Club programs. None, however, returned to race in the women's senior kayak singles event at the Canadian Championships or at National Team

selection races.

Coming to Terms with One's Own Feelings Towards the Retirement Experiences. In

the post-retirement period, there was, for the vast majority of women (n=18), an incident, a situation, or an activity which was thought by these women to be significant in noting that they had indeed moved forward. A significant point in time varied almost from individual to individual, with the most mentioning that their point of significance was being able to view a canoeing competition again, such as the Olympic Games, merely as a spectator. Other athletes mentioned the time when they began their career or when they realized that they could be successful at something else, such as garnering high marks at university. Being able to revisit their canoe club, returning to the club to coach, or simply the aspect of traveling without the Team were also cited as significant points in time. A few athletes (n=3) indicated that they had not yet come to terms with their retirement. Typical comments from these women with respect to their significant point in time, are as follows:

It was about a year later. I was able to go down to the club and see [coach] and say: "Hi" and feel no regret and no embarrassment about being down there again. (Norma)

Probably four years later, I was able to really watch canoeing on television. I watched part of the Olympics, and I was then able to watch and be excited for the Team, with just a little bit of jealousy. (Renee)

It was just the job. You know, having a career and finally feeling like I was an adult. You know, moving on and being something so different. Wearing a suit instead of spandex shorts. (Eva)

I think one of the hardest moments was watching the Olympics and not being there on the Team. So, being able to do that was a milestone. I was lucky in that some friends of mine invited me to watch it with them. (Becky)

The length of time, from the day of their retirement until acceptance with their alternate lifestyle, differed greatly among these women and ran a continuum from several months to well

over ten years. As can be seen in Table 6, eight women indicated that they were comfortable in their post-National Team life within the first year of their retirement. For these women, there was, more often, an alternate focus that was quite consuming and which allowed a fairly short transition time. The general thoughts of these women are expressed below:

It was pretty quick. Okay, maybe there were a couple of times that weren't so good, but I didn't sit in a room and cry for days, or anything like that. (Helen)

It was probably four or five months, after I started university and I knew that I could be good at school. (Oprah)

After I finished university ... and got my own place and was hired for a job. Probably about eight months. (Paula)

Table 6

Length of Time to Post-Retirement Acceptance

Length of Time	n	(%)
Almost immediately	4	(19.0)
Less than 6 months	3	(14.3)
6 months up to 1 year	1	(4.8)
1 year up to 2 years	6	(28.6)
2 years up to 5 years	1	(4.8)
5 years up to 10 years	4 **	(19.0)
10 years to 15 years	2 **	(9.5)

** includes women continuing to seek their 'time of acceptance'

Towards the middle of the spectrum, seven women indicated that acceptance with their alternate lifestyle took from between one and five years. And, at the opposite end of the spectrum, six women mentioned that acceptance of life following their retirement took a considerable length of time and ranged from over one year to well over a decade later. For these women, the time to acceptance involved coming to terms not only with the retirement itself, but also with the circumstances and events which transpired for them to retire. Comments from the athletes and across the years are presented below:

It took me a full year, or a year and a half to get into my life without paddling. I sort of, had to go through the training camp and the next summer without being there. And, even the first National Team Trials it was kind of: "Oh, I should be doing that." Yes, it probably did take a full year or more, definitely a full paddling cycle. (Irene)

I would probably, believe it or not, I would say about 13 or 14 years. (Angie)

It's hard to say. When I stopped identifying myself as an athlete, or as a former athlete was a fair amount of time, and that's also given the profile that I had when I retired. That people still kept reminding me, and you'd go to events because you were an Olympian, and that continues to this day. (Karin)

The effects really hit me almost five or ten years down the road. That's when I really went through my grieving period. That's when I realized how long I had been struggling with it, so it was more of, it occurred a lot later down the road. (Fran)

Three women have yet to feel truly comfortable with their lives after their retirement from high performance sport and continue to look towards a future day of acceptance of their alternate lifestyle. Each of these women continue to deal with the effect of their National Team career and their retirement, five, seven, and fifteen years later respectively. The following women, all Olympians, shared their thoughts on this issue:

Even now, I don't feel totally comfortable with it. One day I hope to feel like I've moved on. (Norma)

I'm still battling it out 15 years later ... I don't think it ever goes away in a sense, but you manage it though. It's a continual healing process, leaving behind my canoeing and all that happened, even now. (Becky)

Not even now. It took me a year just to actually be in the workforce. I remember not being able to watch the [year] Olympics on the television and it even was hard to watch them again [4 years later]. What was actually more difficult, was around the time of spring camp. I even find, even to this day, I have always an unsettled feeling. I feel like I have to move and its always around the February to March area, time frame. I get this itch and I can't help it. I think it's still persisting and I don't think I had really pegged it over the last years because it has been so long since I paddled but I think it's an innate quality. (Renee)

Bringing Some Closure to the Retirement Experience

In this section, three areas which pertain to the overall concept of the National Canoe Team, and to the sport of sprint racing canoeing, are discussed. Through hindsight, a glimpse is given as to the women canoeists expectations of being a member of the National Canoe Team and of their retirement, versus the actual reality of each. The sport itself, is also reflected upon by the women.

Looking Back at Being a National Team Athlete

Strong reactions were indicated by over half of the women canoeists (n=12) when speaking about their time as a member of the National Canoe Team. These reactions encompassed their perception of being a member of the Team and of their acceptance as a member of the Team, and ran the gamut from very positive to very negative. Here, as with most other reactions expressed by the athletes, there was more of a tendency toward the negative reaction. As well, these women commented on their perception of their treatment during their National Team years and how they thought they were viewed by those managing the Team and the sport. And, once again, the number of athletes who noted their reactions, leaned more to the negative. The following Olympians are representative of the varied thoughts on looking back at being a National

Canoe Team athlete:

Those were some of the best years of my life. The racing, the Olympic Games, the training, I loved it all. And, I loved the travel. It was a great bonus. (Karin)

When I said that I had to turn the page and totally go away from [canoeing], it's because, I had, when I finished, a sense of, well I won't use some words, well okay, like: "To hell with you people." You know? At the same time, it gave me so much. (Fran)

There was certainly no lost love between myself and canoeing, the whole National Team, lifestyle and coaches. (Paula)

Six women who ranked lower on the Team offered a different perspective. Life as a National Canoe Team athlete for these women was much different than life as a National Canoe Team athlete for someone ranked in the top half of the Team. New athletes to the Team or those who continued to be ranked lower in the order found that it was essentially life in a second tier. It was an ongoing concern to be looked on as part of the Team. These women felt isolated and part of the Team program almost as an afterthought. Understanding and accepting that a great deal of time and attention should be given to the top women as they prepare for potential world class performances, however, did not negate the fact that these women were looking to beat one of those women, if given the opportunities to improve. These voiced their thoughts as represented by the following quotes:

If anything, you always felt like you were fighting to be there or to be part of it and you never felt part of the group. I guess, I felt pretty isolated most of the time and sort life a National Team athlete on paper only. So, the experience certainly wasn't a Team feeling that's for sure, it was more of an individual experience. (Angie)

You felt that unless you made the 'A' Team, unless you were an 'A' or 'B' card, unless you went to the Olympics, or unless you went to the Worlds, you were really nothing. (Cathie)

I can count on my one hand the number of times that I had talked directly to anybody in the national organization. I'm sure it was because I wasn't one of the top women. (Oprah)

Prior to ascending to the ranks of the National Canoe Team, athletes had thought about what the experience would be like to one day become a member of that elite squad. All of the respondents (n=21) indicated their expectations and mentioning a wide variety. These ranged from expecting overall support to assist the athlete to aspire towards international excellence, to Team structure of professionalism and discipline, to challenging and exciting times, and finally, expectation of receiving the coveted National Canoe Team clothing. Only one-third of the women canoeists (n=7), however, indicated that their expectations of being a member of the National Canoe Team had been met. Five of the women were Olympians and World Team veterans. The comments below are typical of these athletes' thoughts on their expectations of being a National Canoe Team member:

When I made National Team I was there with my club mates and with my own coach and so, it was a pretty smooth transition to the National Team. It was not a big shock to me or different. (Karin)

In my short but brief experience, it was good. I was proud to say I was a member of the National Team. (Helen)

It was as I thought. It made me feel good to be on the Team and it was a great experience. You know, the experience of sport and training and trying to achieve goals. (Linda)

For the remaining two-thirds of the women canoeists (n=14), their expectations of what life would be like once a member of the National Canoe Team were either not met, or only partially met. This disparity between what was expected and what being a member of the National Canoe Team really entailed, left them rather disillusioned. The following quotes are representative of this group of women:

I don't think that's how I envisioned things to be. I mean, I know teams have their little troubles here and there with politics and stuff, but this was way out of hand, every year. (Marian)

I never thought it was going to be so disruptive and so painful. But the wonderful moments, being a part of the Olympic Team, that was just a dream come true. I had always wanted to be an Olympic athlete. I just never wanted the rest of the shit that went with it. (Grace)

Obviously, as a kid, you expect it to be a more positive experience. And, that's what I didn't expect, that part of when the fun is gone. Yes, it's a job and everything, but the bottom line is it's still an amateur sport, so there has to be some enjoyment. And, there wasn't much of that, even more so towards the end of my time on the Team. (Eva)

Looking Back at Retirement

When reviewing now their retirement from the National Canoe Team, the reactions of the women (n=19) continue to be varied. Four women, all Olympic and World Team veterans, think positively if not philosophically as they currently reflect on their retirement. Their general comments are similar to those following:

You can't paddle forever. It was all very positive. (Karin)

When I look back on it, the timing was right. It was the best thing for me to do at that time. I was comfortable with it, I was ready. I don't view that as a tumultuous time in my life. It was just going through a phase for me, a change in career basically. (Paula)

Although not necessarily positive with regard to their retirement circumstances, seven women think that their retirement was done at the right time given those circumstances or have reconciled themselves to an acceptance of their retirement and its circumstances. Once again, these women are very definite in their retirement reflection, as illustrated in the following comments:

For sure you wonder: "What if." But, I now have absolutely no regrets. I made the best decision at that time, given the circumstances. I don't feel bitter about it now, but definitely I feel that some things could have been in place better that could have taken care of that. (Cathie)

I don't regret that I did it when I did it, because I don't think anything was going to change. And, I couldn't go on with it. I regret that I couldn't continue. (Marian)

My retirement, well, it's the way it happened and I can't change anything now, and at the time I dealt with it the best way I could. Yes, I wish I could have gone out on a bang, on a higher note, but I didn't, so what do I do? (Helen)

Oh, I love it [retirement]. And, I was thinking how stupid I was for spending [number of] years in canoeing. (Sandra)

Finally, eight women continue to have negative thoughts with regards to their retirement from canoeing, or still regard their retirement as premature. Regrets remain, and the manner of their retirement is still troubling, as is the timing of their retirement. The following athletes address their negative reactions to looking back at their retirement:

Sometimes, I still think that I shouldn't have retired when I did. If I had kept going I may have, who knows, made my goal then. (Linda)

I guess I still feel like I slinked away. (Norma)

I should have gotten out of the sport before I had even gotten onto the National Team. Really. I guess there will always be that question in my mind, but then maybe I would now have had different regrets. (Janet)

As presented earlier in the results, not a great deal of thought had been given by these women to retirement and their transition from the National Team into an alternate lifestyle. Similarly, some of the women (n=7) had thought little about future retirement and had few, if any, expectations. Most of the women who did have expectations of their retirement (n=8), indicated that they had thought it would be difficult and that indeed, it was a tough period. The following are comments typical of their expectations of retirement:

Well, I never thought about retirement, so I really didn't have any expectations. (Marian)

I knew that it would be tough to leave, because it had been my whole life for so long. (Linda)

It went according to what I had intended. (Karin)

I thought it would be hard and I expected my friends and family to remain stable. I didn't really expect anything from the National Team and I knew that I'd get over it eventually. I knew it was going to be hard. So, it was pretty much what I thought. (Oprah)

Six women indicated that their retirement was harder than they had expected. Days without canoeing were more difficult than expected, as were coming to terms with themselves and the retirement itself. Several of these women offered the following words in explanation:

I didn't know that it would take me that long to get over it I just couldn't come to the realization that the Olympics just weren't part of my life. You know, you have spent your whole youth, as a teenager, focusing on that, and it finally sunk in ... I finally realized that it's not going to happen. (Angie)

I think what was totally unexpected was how much the whole thing had just drained my ability, I don't even know how to word this, to push myself to do anything. And the only thing that I could do that year was study, which I never really did or do now. But, for that one year I could, and it was the only thing I could do. And, I remember thinking that I used to be able to push myself right through times like this. I couldn't any more. I was totally debilitated in that sense. (Norma)

It wasn't really what I had expected. I hadn't realized in advance how long it would take me to get over the feelings of not having made the [Olympic] Team. That was always the harder thing for me, than the so-called retirement of leaving canoeing. I was ready to leave canoeing. The disappointment, the sense of inadequacies, the things centered with myself. It was internal mostly, but when I talk about not being able to access the National Team coaches after the fact, there was certainly a sense of resentment about that. I felt really hurt. (Becky)

Looking Back at Sprint Racing Canoeing

The sport of sprint racing canoeing and the years these women dedicated to being an athlete within the sport were reflected upon, and the spectrum of reaction continues to be present here also, although the negativity is visibly diminished and somewhat tempered. A large number of women (n=12) said that sprint racing canoeing was a positive and worthwhile experience. These women currently view their sport and their years competing in the sport in a positive manner, no

matter their retirement experience, its circumstances, or their reactions. Whether an Olympic Games Team member, a World Championship Team veteran, or an athlete who remained in the lower ranks of the National Team, they agree that their overall years in sprint racing canoeing were indeed good ones and that canoeing was a great sport in which to have been involved. Below, the women give voice to their current thoughts and reactions when reflecting on the sport of sprint racing canoeing:

I loved the sport. It's just basic. Gliding on the water, being outside, whether it be raining or snowing, to be outside and to try to be the best at something. Sports is a great way to achieve. (Fran)

I view all those years positively when I look back now. I view them as times when I had a lot of freedom. I feel in a lot of ways quite privileged and lucky to have had the ability that I did have, and that I was able to use it to be on the Team. It was a pretty unique situation for kids our age and I feel really lucky to have had that opportunity. (Becky)

When I look at all the sports, I think one of the things I look to, to reflect how I feel about canoeing, is that I would like my kids to paddle. Not necessarily at the National Team, that's up to them. (Karin)

I see it as sort of a phase in my life, a phase of great tremendous growth. A tremendous learning experience. Tremendous and invaluable experience, one that I don't think that I would change it, or trade it in, for anything. I was able to see quite a bit of the world and meet a lot of different types of people and come to appreciate a lot of different cultures. I think, it's really made me realize how important being Canadian is and how lucky we are here in Canada. (Paula)

Seven of these former National Canoe Team women athletes currently react to sprint racing and their competitive canoeing years with mixed reactions. The following comments are representative of these athletes' current thoughts regarding sprint racing canoeing:

In one way I'm happy about it, I wouldn't change my experiences for the world. And then in another way I feel that it was [number of] years lost that I could have been doing other stuff. (Talia)

There's a little bit of the frustration and bitterness still coming through sometimes, but I was always proud to be a Canadian athlete. (Renee)

I loved the training aspect of it and physically it was certainly the kind of lifestyle I enjoyed as a teenager. I just would have liked to have gone one more step and done some international competitions and really been part of the Team. (Angie)

I still have extremely fond memories of my paddling time, my paddling days, but I guess, they are probably a little coloured by my exit from the sport. (Irene)

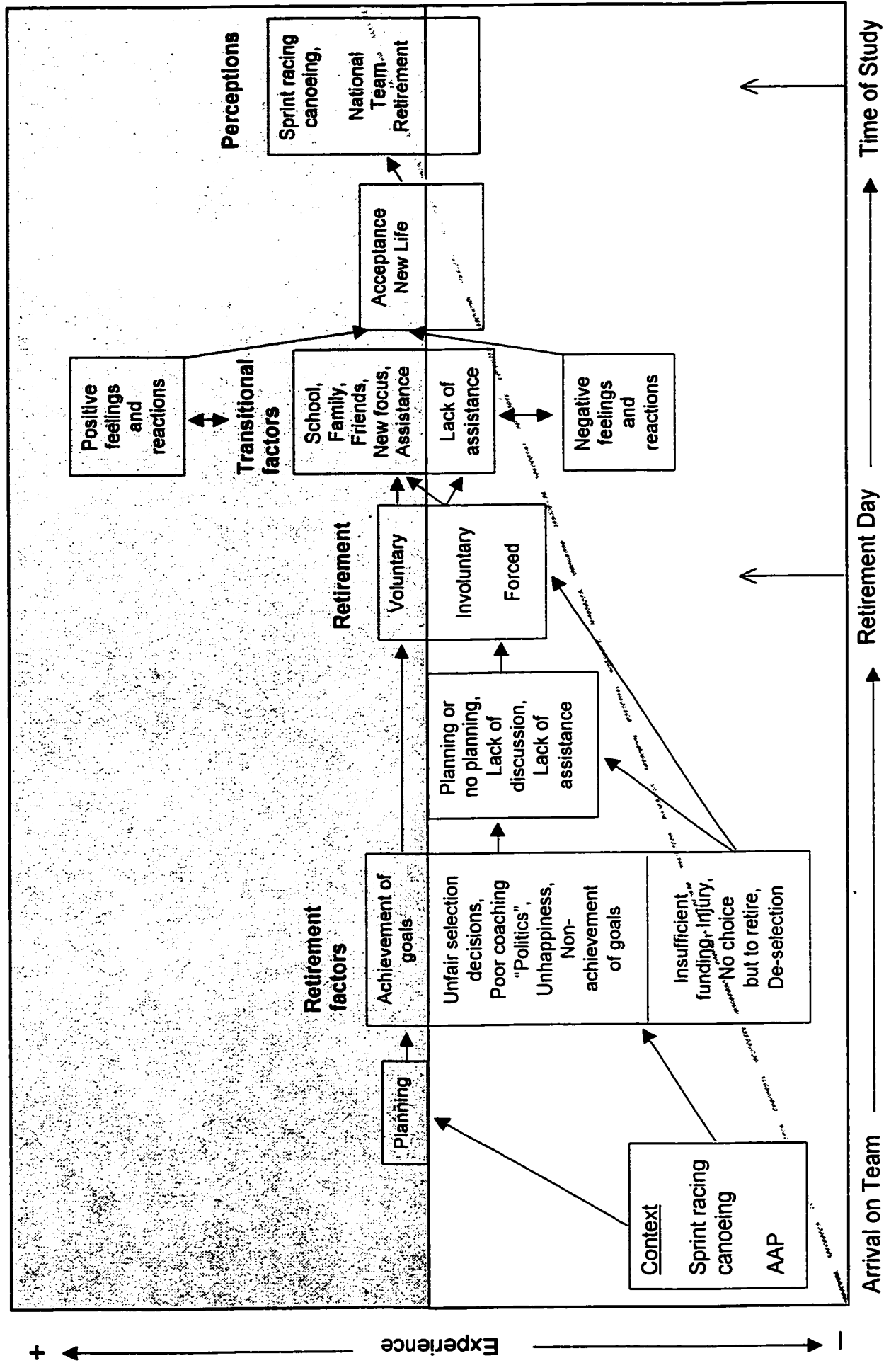
The “good times” experienced in the sport were the ones remembered with fondness and pleasure, although the “bad times” had not necessarily been forgotten.

A Schematic Representation Capturing the Women Sprint Racing Canoeists’ Retirement Experiences

In an effort to capture and understand the essence of the retirement experience for the women sprint racing canoeists, a schematic representation has been drawn (see Figure 1). This heuristic tool presents the major patterns found in the women’s narratives regarding their retirement experiences. Through the subjective experiences of the women, these patterns have emerged to show what these women were experiencing, how they were experiencing it, and how they interpreted their experiences.

The patterns are presented within the contextualized athletic experience, from the time of an athlete’s arrival on the National Canoe Team to her time of departure from the Team, and into her post-retirement life. Although the athletic experience is graphically presented as a continuum, this is not to express a linear relationship or to suggest a cause and effect between “factors,” but rather to indicate a relationship between realities experienced by these sprint racing women. Although the athlete and the sport world are interdependent, each athlete uniquely experiences the sport, having different points of entry, different successes and failures, various lengths of involvement, and various points of exit.

Figure 1. A Schematic Representation Capturing the Canadian Women's Sprint Racing Canoeist's Retirement Experience



Keeping in mind that the women have interpreted their experience, sometimes in positive terms and sometimes in negative terms, this has then been expressed through the placement of a positive to negative vertical axis. A central line and shading further assists in delineating these positive and negative experiences. A diagonal line, from left to right, runs upwards and reflects the general direction of experiences and reactions from the negative towards the positive.

Although this schematic representation may visually present the retirement experience of these sprint racing women, it is not overall ideal. In order to obtain the full picture, further post-retirement experiences would have to be incorporated as it is known that following retirement from a National Team sport, some women continue their high performance careers with a second National Team sport, and others return to sprint racing canoeing to compete at the Masters level.

For each of these women athletes, their National Team experiences and their retirement occurs within the context of the sport of sprint racing canoeing and the overall sport system (e.g., Sport Canada, COA) in which they compete. These two factors provide a background for the experiences as they unfold along the continuum. Early in the continuum, there is a crucial division between those athletes who achieve their National Team goals and those who do not. The majority of women canoeists were within the negative area of the continuum (ie., their sporting goals not achieved), and this aspect was clearly reflected in their narratives about what has been called their "Retirement Factors." Initially, athletes may or may not have planned for their sprint racing career and eventual retirement. Those who planned, more often than not, achieved their goals as a National Team athlete and had experiences best represented by the positive elements found in the continuum. The lack of planning (or a type of planning that may not have unfolded as expected) as well as a lack of discussion and a lack of assistance were elements that were mentioned to be negative contributors to the retirement experience. Further, an involuntary or a

forced-voluntary retirement was, again, a negative element associated by the women to their retirement experience. For those athletes who had planned and had achieved their goals, retirement was voluntary and remained a positive experience.

Transitional factors, normally viewed as crucial to the retirement experience, each acted as a mediator to the reactions experienced by the women canoeists. Education was the most important factor in providing a positive transition. Family, friends, a new life focus, and assistance were also positive mediators during retirement. The lack of assistance received was a major factor in continued negative retirement experiences. The overall positivity of the transitional factors does not, however, diminish the negative feelings and reactions experienced by the majority of women canoeists as part of their retirement experience.

Whether having positive or negative feelings and reactions as part of their retirement, all women canoeists moved forward into acceptance of a new reality. Although the women forged ahead in their lives (most with either school- or career-oriented pursuits), this acceptance of a new life occurred for some in a matter of months, while for others it occurred in a matter of years.

The last element of the schematic representation shows what were, at the time of the study, the feelings of the women canoeists with regards to their National Team retirement experience and to sprint racing canoeing. The majority of the women had positive perceptions regarding sprint racing canoeing as a sport, while mixed feelings and reactions (positive and negative) continued in reference to their retirement experience.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The objectives of this study were to provide an in-depth understanding of sport retirement as experienced by women athletes on one National Team. In this effort to explain this human experience, the global context of these women's retirement needs to be understood and addressed within the patterns which have emerged towards presenting the schematic representation. These patterns not only encompass the experiences of the women canoeists and how they interpret those experiences, but also speak to how these athletes structured the social world in which they lived, that being the National Canoe Team (Psathas, 1973). Much of the research on athlete transition has ignored the perspective of the athlete, yet, to examine the process or to account for all the variables inherent in the process of retirement, the athlete voice must be heard.

This chapter focuses on a discussion of the results obtained from the in-depth interviews and attempts to present and facilitate an understanding of the retirement of women sprint racing canoeists from their own frame of reference. Through a review of the literature, seeking contrasts, comparisons, and similarities, and in an attempt to provide a basis for the results of the current study, it has become apparent that many of these results have not been previously noted in the research. As such, many of the results of the current study stand alone, and it is perhaps only an understanding of the Canadian amateur sport system and of the sport of sprint racing canoeing itself which may allow for their explanation and interpretation.

Any event despite its nature will differ in importance and impact depending on the individual (Charner & Schlossberg, 1986). As such, individuals will differ in their ability to adapt to change. From the data on the reasons for retirement it was seen that there was usually more than one reason behind the retirement. Similarly, there was more than one reaction to the

retirement experience. Further, the circumstances which triggered the reasons for retirement were a major aspect of the retirement reactions. It is apparent that these women were not necessarily reacting to the retirement itself, or even to the reasons they offered for their retirement, but were reacting to the varied circumstances of the retirement reasons. Kirby (1986) has noted that the circumstances surrounding National Team competition have considerable bearing on the athlete's retirement.

The discussion of the results, in an attempt to give meaning to the retirement of women sprint racing canoeists, follows the patterns which have emerged and are presented in the schematic representation. These interdependent patterns are contextualized within the structural framework of organized competitive amateur sport, a framework which according to Kirby (1996) is experienced through both the annual and quadrennial cycles. Similarly, for this study "it is important to recognize that the athlete's point of entry, length of involvement and subsequent leaving experience cannot be considered independent of the cycle ... the persistent rhythms of competitive sport are first, creators of the overall opportunities and second, inculcators of attitudes towards the way competitive sport should in fact (in fact, will) be experienced" (Kirby, 1996, p. 250).

The club system in Canada is the backbone of sprint racing canoeing, and although small in number, canoe clubs operate within a well developed and organized system. Over the years, the CCA and its respective divisions have been recognized as one of the most efficient and effectively administered amateur sport organizations in Canada, yet, according to the women canoeists, this organization was not athlete-centered during their time as a National Team athlete. In order to provide a more user-friendly context for the National Canoe Team athlete, the newly undertaken restructuring must be more than just theoretical and truly athlete-centered, focusing on the needs

and success of the athletes.

The Women Sprint Racing Canoeists' Reasons for Retirement

Retirement from amateur sport has been shown to occur at many ages, at many stages of an athletic career, and for many reasons (Hill & Lowe, 1974; Kirby, 1986; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Werthner & Orlick, 1986). There were a vast array of reasons given for retirement from the National Canoe Team. For some women the reason given was the only reason, while for others there were several reasons that all contributed towards their retirement or their decision to retire from the Team. This is in keeping with studies that have documented many single reasons for retirement (Hill & Lowe, 1974; Murphy, 1995; Stambulova, 1997; Werthner & Orlick, 1986; Wylleman et al., 1993), and with those which it was a composite of several reasons which affected the retirement decision (Schaefer, 1992). Almost all categories of retirement and the reasons within each of those categories are construed as negative. The "Achievement of Olympic or World Championship Goals" is the only positive retirement reason identified and, therefore, the only factor reflected in the upper portion of the continuum. Kirby (1986) referred to the "enough is enough" aspect of retirement and noted that decisions regarding retirement may have had nothing to do with either performance goals or timing factors.

"Planning", for both performance goal achievement and retirement, seems to be an initiating factor for a positive National Team career and retirement experience. Among those few athletes who consciously prepared for retirement, were those athletes who retired following the achievement of their performance goals. Each of these athletes also expressed the "Need to Move on in Life." These athletes, retiring voluntarily, fared the best of all the women athletes. Their retirement occurred according to plan and they entered post-National Team life smoothly, transitioning to comfort and acceptance of their alternate life, if not immediately then, in a matter

of months. Each of these athletes also received Extended Assistance in the form of living allowance and either tuition or special needs for those non-students embarking on a career. The consequences of voluntary retirement for these athletes, shown by the results, is very much in alignment with the literature. Danish et al. (1980) noted that voluntary retirements were initiated by the athlete and were expected. The athlete was felt to be retaining control over her own fate and through voluntary withdrawal allowed for a greater number of options to be available in her alternate life role (Greendorfer & Blinde, 1986; Werthner & Orlick, 1986). Also in line with the literature, is the very small number of athletes which encountered voluntary retirement. Hill and Lowe (1974) and Rosenberg (1980) noted that those athletes who make a deliberate decision to retire are clearly the minority. Further, Sinclair (1990) found that those high performance athletes who planned their retirement received more support from their coaches and had significantly fewer problems post-transition.

“Unfair Selection Decisions” was the category most often cited by the women canoeists, when offering reasons for retirement and it is reflected on the lower (negative) portion of the continuum. The various selection criteria were the problem, and too often, soft, subjective, non-measured criteria were utilized, especially for National Team and crew selection, and selection to major events. Of further concern, was the change or manipulation of the criteria throughout the training preparation and preselection time periods, as well as the lack of communication and explanation involved. The change of criteria had occurred too many times and left too many unanswered questions. It was obvious that the guessing game for change increased the stress of preparing for selection races, let alone for a world class performance, and detracted greatly from the already eroded credibility for those in authority, thereby fostering continued distrust. Kirby (1986) had earlier described changes to the criteria as being disruptive to the athlete’s continued

involvement. One fact was very clear, that it was wrong to change an initially published criteria, certainly not without full consultation with those it impacted upon, namely the athletes. As it was, the best and fastest may not have been benefiting. With this in mind, athletes should know more about the selection processes and to a certain extent, be involved in the process of identifying the necessary criteria. And, in this way, the athletes would not be surprised if they are not selected. Certainly, increased communication overall is needed so that the athletes better understand how decisions are taken.

With respect to the National Team selection and the individualized preset carding criteria, better communication and involvement in the process is similarly necessary to minimize the number of premature retirements. Some athletes were assessed carding criteria which were based on crew boat performance at the international level, and although the crew may have made the designated placing in the year previously, conditions and crews can change from year to year. The individual athlete certainly had no control over the actions of the other members of the crew and could only contribute to the crew's performance, not guarantee its final placement. Yet, there did not seem to be recognition of this variable factor by the CCA administration in the criteria. Further, in each of the situations mentioned by the women canoeists, they had continued to race within the top placement of the National Team selection criterion. Yet, these women, who had not been displaced from the National Team by developing athletes in the selection races, would not be recarded. These retirements were "forced voluntary" and premature, and again, an effort should be made to minimize these types of retirements. It should be recognized that these women still had the desire to continue to contribute and could continue to contribute, albeit at a different level than before, to the overall women's team program.

Unfair coaching decisions impacted negatively on the athletes, leaving them upset enough to retire. This result can perhaps be explained by the findings of Thomas & Ermler (1988), that a centralization of power exists within the National Canoe Team. Decisions taken by the individual appointed as the women's coach, were more often than not, perceived as decisions already discussed and agreed upon with the HPD, who solely reported to the HPC. For the athletes, this centralization of power would leave little room to informally appeal a perceived unfair coaching decision. The futility of the fight without hiring a lawyer was evident and for some women, retirement from the Team was the easier path. Whether National Team selection, major competition or tour team selection, or crew selection, favouritism played a significant role in the selection process. Although criteria was in place, the criteria was often manipulated towards the staff's desired outcome. Not only did this perceived favouritism contribute towards an overall instability and distrust, these coaching decisions were detrimental to the inner workings of the women's team. Of significance were the internal conflicts among the women that resulted from these decisions: the subsequent ill will and "bickering" among them certainly could not enhance the women's performance. It would seem that the women's team was not united in purpose behind their designated coach. The ongoing internal conflicts among the women were fueled by a distrust of the coach, the HPC, the "system," and those fellow athletes who were in agreement with the perceived unfair coaching decision.

Unfair coaching decisions also included the poor timing of crew selections. Other than affording the number one ranked women the flexibility to become a late crew member should the crew not be considered strong enough without her, the reason for these poorly timed crew selections is not readily apparent. Earlier crew selections, when perceived to be done equitably and fairly, enhanced the level of Team cohesiveness, something wanted by the women but not

always evident within the Team. Late crew selection led to tension, stress, and internal conflict among the women which wasted valuable energy. Once again, the on-water performance should speak for itself. Ultimately, the athlete needs to know that selection races are just that, whether for the Team or for a crew. Paramount to the process of course is communication, open and forthright, as the crew selection unfolds according to well developed criteria.

“Poor Coaching,” as a second retirement category, was also reported by McGown (1993) as a reason for retirement. National Team coaching for the women was either lacking, inconsistent, or often poor and unproductive. Coaches assigned to the women’s team were perceived as not having sufficient knowledge of high performance coaching or of the basic scientific tenets applicable to elite athlete training. To a certain extent, this perception holds true. Although most, but not all, coaches appointed to the position possessed Coaching Association of Canada National Coaching Certification Program qualifications, not one coach had proven international experience with women athletes. Again, while most, but not all of those appointed had undergraduate degrees in the areas of physical education or kinesiology, not one coach had extensive formal education in the coaching of international athletes. While searches were successfully undertaken for internationally qualified and respected men’s team coaches, it is unknown whether such a search was ever initiated specifically for the women’s team coach.

The ‘revolving’ door syndrome of the women’s Team was a major area of discontent, as the assigned women’s coach changed almost yearly. The reasons and responsibility for this perhaps lies equally with the athletes and coaches themselves and with the sport organization. Certainly a poor relationship between the coach and athletes would not encourage the coach to be returned the next year, nor the athletes to accept that same coach more readily. Those internationally successful women possibly felt that their continued involvement with the club

coach was more productive than with the 'here today, gone tomorrow' National Team appointed coach. From the sport organization's side, it is possible that the women's coaches were under very short term contracts, perhaps for just the summer competitive schedule, and also that no international search was made for a coach perceived as adequately qualified to coach the women. Quite often the women were designated a coach whose primary responsibility on a day-today basis or during major competitions was not the women's personal and athletic well-being; in the position of Team Leader or Team Manager this individual had responsibilities for the whole team. To these women, this essentially amounted to not having a coach present. Although not all National Team support staff (paid or volunteer) are able to be accredited for major competitions, nor is the National Team budget large enough to cover their separate attendance at these events, it may be necessary, on occasion, for an individual to undertake two positions for a team or tour. Unfortunately, it was the women's team which, more often than not, was put into this situation of sharing the time and attention of a National Team staff member.

A discriminatory attitude, specifically with respect to where and how women were viewed on the Team by the National Canoe Team coaches and its leadership, as expressed by these women athletes, was pervasive within the National Canoe Team system. This perceived discriminatory attitude towards women indicated that the women as individuals, and the women's team as a whole, was not of primary concern to the HPD, the HPC, or the CCA hierarchy. The attitude was negative, non-caring and non-listening, and was also thought to be responsible for the women being constantly relegated to a secondary status on the Team. There was not the equality and respect that they were entitled to as a result of their world class performances and internationally respected status. It is difficult to explain the reasons for this attitude towards women in canoeing in Canada except in terms of historical gender discrimination in sport. It

seems that the hesitancy by the CCA to initially include women into the Canadian ranks, to expand their age groups and race distances, and to view them as equal to male canoers has possibly precipitated an overall negative attitude towards women in the sport, which continues to be consciously or unconsciously propagated. Further, it seems that the volunteer base which excels within this sport and which has a history of individual longevity and next generation involvement has assisted to entrench this subtle attitude. Differences between male and female sport experience persist in opportunity, psychosocial orientations, and reactions to sport participation (Wann, 1997; Weinberg & Gould, 1995). As with the rest of a current woman's life, unfortunately, this perceived attitude will also most likely not be acknowledged by the male dominated system, one also steeped in tradition. Although women held the position of CCA Commodore (President) during the time-frame of this study, the overall membership of the executive and the association's varied committees, are predominantly male.

A perceived lack of belief and support for the individual women on the Team, the 'revolving' door of male coaches, and the abusive language and coaching techniques utilized, all contributed to the negative atmosphere surrounding the women's Team and brings into question the credibility and commitment of the National Team program. The often-voiced dogma of National Team staff, that a successful female paddler had to be large in size and that the smaller athletes would not be able to achieve international medal performance, was perhaps an assessment by them of the typical successful women from the top canoeing countries; an assessment which did not note that there were exceptions. There do not, however, seem to be any published accounts of Canadian women canoeists size versus potential, nor any anthropometric or power output tests, on which to have based their concern.

The lack of coaching support and acknowledgment Team was pervasive and rather disheartening for athletes who were ranked in the lower end of the women's team, usually fifth to eighth spot in the selection race point standings. These developing National Team athletes felt 'forgotten' and relegated to a very 'out of sight, out of mind' position. At any given time there were only eight athletes assigned to the designated women's team coach, and to coordinate for eight athletes their yearly training, to monitor their progress, and to assist with their performance goals would not seem to be overly demanding. Yet, for lower ranked athletes, coaching was almost non-existent and these developing athletes did not develop. It is natural for resources and energies to be channeled to those athletes uppermost on the National Team, as it is the world level performances of these athletes which are the basis of continued financial assistance from Sport Canada. It seems, however, that even these athletes were unsatisfied with the assigned coaching support. The various coaches assigned to the women's team had not met the expectations of the athletes. Expectations are perhaps at the core of the difficulty, as there should have been a meeting of the coach's expectations with those of the athlete's. It is clear that renewed efforts towards designating a well qualified coach for the women's team, a coach capable of communicating with all of the athletes, would result in positive dividends. The lower ranked athletes would pass through their development stage and become international competitors in a more timely and less stressful manner, while those women already competing internationally would acquire trust and a higher level of knowledge to propel them higher at the world level.

As an athlete development system, the National Canoe Team is greatly dependent on this club structure for coaching, training, and facilities. As a result, most women continued to be coached by coaches within the club system, typically remaining with that coach which developed them to the National Team level. The success of these women over the years should, therefore, be

attributed to a strong club development program and ongoing club coaching presence.

The “Problematic Nature of the National Team Environment” was the third major category of retirement reasons. Conflicts and “politics” occurred repeatedly, taking the form of intra-team conflicts, athlete-coach/staff conflicts and conflicts of interest. Almost every athlete commented on the nature of the National Canoe Team “politics,” its negative effect and its part in their retirement. Studies by Sinclair and Orlick (1993) and by Stamulova (1997) also reported difficulties with the coaching staff and poor inter-relations with a coach as reasons for retirement, while Schaefer (1992) reported sport bureaucracy as the most dominant reason for retirement. The sport’s political landscape at the National Team level had a major impact on the competitive life of these women. Bit by bit, they were worn down by the politics and the experience of controversial events and situations that resulted in negative consequences until, eventually, “enough was enough”, and they retired. Retirements as a result of the problematic nature of the National Team environment were “forced-voluntary” and premature. As such, these women had not actualized their international racing potential. Their future contributions and successes to the National Canoe Team were lost. The political problems associated with the women’s team can be associated to the poor or absent leadership on the part of the coaching staff, the HPD, the CCA administration, and the HPC. A reasonable level of professionalism with respect to behaviour, communication skills, and interactions with the women was not present and not only created frustration for the women, but may actually to have prevented some women from reaching higher international level performances. Sportship and fairness in competition was questioned and athletes experienced a total disillusionment with respect to behind-the-scenes manoeuvres undertaken by both volunteers and paid staff, all in the so-called effort towards athletic excellence. Along with the new athlete-centered structure, CCA should address these leadership concerns.

The women canoeists, in their frustration and discontent with the various problems, were not merely complainers but did attempt to affect a change towards a more positive, supportive, and communicative environment for the women's team to train and compete. Unfortunately, these athletes felt as though the system did not care to listen to their concerns, requests, or recommendations for change. Powerlessness, was indicated by Kirby (1986) in her study when Canadian female Olympians were unanimous in their recollections regarding being unable to alter situations which limited their participation. Similar to the women canoeists' perceptions, the powerful were regarded as either the governing association or Sport Canada and most often the athlete had little or no recourse but to accept the decisions made, even when the decisions were perceived to be unfair. When powerless to challenge, they too retired. For the canoeists, there was no formal process in place for the voice of the athlete to be fully heard throughout most of the years incorporated within this study's time-frame. It was only in the last few years, through the CCA restructuring, that a National Team athlete had a formal process for approaching the HPC with ongoing problems. A formal appeal process, however, has been in place to address extreme disagreements, such as an athlete not being selected to a specific team and the athlete feeling that an unfair selection process prevailed, or an athlete complaining of a coach's harassment. These appeals, however, seem to be cloaked in secrecy as athletes are required to sign documentation indicating that the proceedings and outcome will not be discussed.

Although this discretion may be thought necessary to dispel rumours or false innuendoes arising, as only a few within the canoeing hierarchy are privy to the actual facts of the appeal and its outcome, the overall membership is not able to indicate its approval or disapproval of events and decisions which would supposedly be undertaken on their behalf and for the betterment of the sport. It is only when such proceedings are openly available, that the membership is able to assess

the situation and, if thought necessary, to provide direction to the respective CCA Committee, a committee whose members are voted to the position by the membership. Unlike professional athletes, their respective Teams and their management, decisions taken in amateur sport and perceived as political have no major media glare or a public population to scrutinize their actions, only its membership. On occasion some amateur sports fall under public scrutiny, usually due to the high profile of the sport itself or of their athletes. Unfortunately, canoeing is not one of those sports and the results of politically perceived manoeuvres go unnoticed and unchallenged even within the sport itself. There was a clear imbalance in the decision-making, with the CCA holding the majority of control and the athletes the least. Through the restructuring process, the CCA and the athletes need to strive towards a more symbiotic relationship.

Loss of National Team status, cited as a reason for their retirement, is similar to previous studies by Hill and Lowe (1974) and Svoboda and Vanek (1982) who noted that this harsh deselection process occurs at every level of competitive sport. No one athlete felt that the loss of her card was totally justified and the loss upset some women enough that they did not attempt to regain their status the following year, but retired permanently from high performance canoeing. For the athletes that lost their card as a result of not obtaining sufficient points at selection races to retain their status, it was the 'why' and 'how' behind the loss that was of significance. The loss of the card occurred for one of several reasons: poor performance, an inability to perform at all as a result of an injury incurred, a lack of progress thought due to poor or no coaching, or because of a desire by Team staff to bring a junior age athlete onto the Team. All of these circumstances warrant discussion with a National Team staff, either during or at the end of the competitive season, but this did not happen. Again, leadership and communication issues need to be addressed by the CCA administration.

The loss of National Team status due to a preset criteria was, as previously discussed, also unjustified. Athletes retired because they felt that they had no choice, not because they wanted to leave the Team or thought that they had reached their potential. It must be recognized that moving upwards in Team standings can be difficult if everyone ahead of you also looks to move upwards and the status quo is maintained. Equally problematic is basing National Team status on criteria to race to a specific position in the world standings in a crew boat. The individual certainly has no control over the actions of the other members of the crew and can only contribute to the crew's performance, not guarantee its final placement. Shaffer (1990) noted that many athletes choose retirement when they face the failure to meet their main goal of being named to a specific competition or team. Yet, in these instances, retirement was chosen for the paddler.

The situation must definitely be viewed from opposing ends, the athlete who feels that she is still able to perform at an acceptable level and the Team management and recording criteria which seems to place a singular importance to yearly personal progress and continued international performance. Somewhere, however, there should be a recognition that substantial measurable progress may not occur each and every year for an athlete, yet the athlete who still raced to be ranked, has not only earned the right to continue to be a member of the National Team but may well be contributing to the Team in non-measurable ways and areas not fully recognized off the water. The canoeing time and experience should be looked to, to be a stabilizing influence for the Team. Lastly, age should not be a factor in the recording equation. If the athlete can still perform at a level to be one of the best in Canada, then she should not be penalized and forced to retire. As to their chronological years, and in light of the survey conducted several years ago by the National Canoe Team staff regarding the increased age of women competitors at the world level, these women, if deserving, should be encouraged to

remain on the Team. It should be that when a developing athlete is able to outperform the veteran athlete on the water in selection races, then her time to be a member of the Team has come. It seems that the encouragement for the younger developing athlete is at the expense of the older veteran, and perhaps even of the Team itself. Further, this escalation of a developing athlete onto the National Team has replaced alternate training and competitive opportunities that should be explored and funded within the existent Divisional and Provincial programs, either in conjunction with or outside of the National Team.

Injury, as a reason for retirement, has also been noted in previous studies as a common factor for withdrawal from athletics (Hill & Lowe, 1974; Murphy, 1995). Yet, only a few women in this study indicated retirement as a result of an injury. This low number could be attributed to the non-contact aspect of the sport. No doubt contact sports such as hockey, football, soccer, or basketball have a higher injury rate and, therefore, a higher potential for retirement due to injury. Further, the repetitive nature of the kayak stroke, its flowing movement, and its controlled explosiveness may minimize the possibility of injury. When an injury did occur, however, these athletes were not allowed sufficient recover time, not only for the injury itself but to re-attain their previous racing form and performance level. It is conceivable that the decision taken by the coach and the HPD that lead to an involuntary and abrupt retirement was in fact due to their belief that the athlete's inability to progress further was irrevocably impeded and that the athlete would never realize an international level performance.

Unhappiness on the National Team, essentially a lack of enjoyment for the sport itself and their daily environment, was a reason given by several women for retirement. The athlete's unhappiness could either be the cause for their retirement or the final result of other contributing factors. Given the political nature of the National Team and the ongoing issues with the women's

team, it is not hard to understand why these women were unhappy and chose to leave the Team. Towards the end of their career, although they were competing in a sport they had loved, they would have been in a daily situation that was often intolerable, and were interacting continually with people that they did not like or respect. This retirement reason is an intangible, a decision based on emotion. Yet, the reason for the emotion cannot be discounted. It is probable that the CCA administration, through addressing other categories for retirement such as “Unfair Selection Decision,” “Poor Coaching” and “Problematic nature of the National Team Environment” could minimize this unhappiness and, at the very least, negate unhappiness as a reason contributing to an athlete’s retirement.

The ‘need to move on in life’ or ‘it was just time for other things’ were two common refrains with reference to reasons for retirement from the National Canoe Team. This is consistent with the findings of several studies in the literature. Sinclair and Orlick (1993) noted that this sentiment was expressed when athletes were tired of the lifestyle, had achieved their goals, or had had difficulties with the coaching staff. Further, Werthner and Orlick (1986) found that the older (veteran) athlete may have a change in life values and may lose the motivation to train and compete at the required level. It is a reason that, in its purity, stands alone without any negativity expressed by these athletes in reference to moving on with their lives. In fact, when comparing the athletes and the reason given for retirement it was of interest to note that all of the women who indicated having attained their performance goal as a reason for retirement, also mentioned this one. It seems to be for them, that the achievement of their performance goal was the time to move on in life to other challenges.

Achievement of Olympic or World goals was a positive retirement reason, one Sinclair and Orlick (1993) have also reported. Retirement was planned and voluntary. For these women,

the achievement of their specified performance goal marked the end of their National Team careers and they may have thought that they had reached their ultimate goal, that a new goal either could not be set or possibly could be set but not achieved. In addition, perhaps these athletes decided to voluntarily retire while the feelings of success were still fresh in their minds, unmarred by a major goal non-achievement. These numbers, however, are few and leads to question whether goals set were actually realistic ones for each Team athlete. According to Harris and Eitzen, success through sport is largely a myth and while “success through sport is plausible, we are not informed of the tremendous odds against such success” (1978, p. 177). It would seem, however, that with so many women also indicating that their performance goals were not achieved, it has to be considered whether or not their goals were in fact realistic in the first place. The process of goal setting, both short and long term, should come under scrutiny in an effort to ensure that performance goals are in line with the capabilities of the athlete and are progressive in nature. Further, steps should be taken to ensure that athletes are positively addressing their potential goals and are progressively achieving them. The CCA administration should be striving to greatly increase the number of athletes who retire following goal achievement.

The non-achievement of the Olympic Games Team was cited as a reason for retirement by several of the women. Their performance goal, their dream goal, was not to be achieved. With the Olympic Games being the ultimate competition for these athletes and “this Games” being “their Games” due to age or life situations, there perhaps was no thought to continue as a National Team athlete for another quadrennial when the Team status was not achieved.

Several of the women cited poor performance progress as a reason for their retirement. Although Stambulova (1997) also reported the decreasing of sport results as a reason for retirement, he then further indicated that males retired more often than females due to this

objective reason. This may account for the relatively low number of women who cited this reason compared to the earlier categories presented. Aside from personal limitation factors, such as physiological changes or age, which were also reported by Hill and Lowe (1974), it would seem logical that many of the previously discussed factors, (e.g., poor coaching, lack of coaching competence and continuity, a discriminatory attitude towards women), continue to be entwined with poor performance progression.

The 'Story' Within the Results: Mechanisms and Reactions of Retirement

Discounting that almost all the women were academically involved, the majority indicated that they had not prepared for their retirement. It seems that within the women's Team, where continuing with one's education was both the expected and accepted thing to do, "Planning or not Planning" therefore, necessitated looking beyond the attainment of education. Clearly, for the National Canoe Team women, education was not a "planning" factor towards retirement. In opposition to this finding are the study results from Broom (1982) who indicated that education was often relegated to a distant secondary position. As well, Belgian researchers noted that a major reason for Olympic athlete retirement was their difficulty in combining elite sport with their study or work (Wylleman, et al., 1993). Not so for these Canadian women canoeists. Given the findings that nineteen of twenty-one respondents secured undergraduate degrees and eight of those went further to obtain graduate degrees, academics and high performance sport work well together in sprint racing. It could be that undertaking education is such an accepted part of the canoe world that it is not viewed as a separate post-retirement planning action.

A connection can be drawn between the lack of planning for eventual retirement and an abruptness of retirement as a large number of women indicated that their lack of planning was due to the abrupt and unexpected timing of their retirement. Retirement was either involuntary or

forced-voluntary. Unfortunately, these women thought they had many years ahead to plan or that they were too young to think about 'retirement'. Although the athlete knew that withdrawal was inevitable and even knew, if willing to admit, that there was an outside possibility of not attaining their performance goals, their retirement still came with what Rosenberg (1980) called a 'shocking suddenness'. Given that the majority of women also reacted negatively to their retirement, these premature endings are perhaps the most devastating of athletic career endings (Thomas & Ermler, 1988)

If these athletes were beyond their initial year on the Team (all but one were), then this naturally begs the question of when had they expected to begin to plan for their retirement? Those who did plan were not much better as they did so only prior to their last year on the Team. With respect to the preparation to retire itself, these results are similar to those of McGown (1993) who reported that almost half of the women athletes surveyed admitted to not taking any action in preparation for their retirement from international competition.

The results of the present study could be explained by reviewing the chronological age of the athlete. Several athletes were late teens to early twenties, and the number of years as a member of the National Canoe Team, several athletes were only in their first or second year. This would indicate that perhaps the athletes viewed themselves as too young to consider retirement and as just entering into their National Team career and thus plenty of time in the future to think of retirement. Further, if no formal planning process was in place, implemented and endorsed fully by the CCA, planning for retirement was just not a topic one would consciously think about when training and competitive efforts took precedent. Some women, however, did indicate that they had planned for their retirement in a more precise manner than had the majority of their teammates. Similar to the findings by Sinclair (1990), those athletes who planned their retirement

had a smoother adaptation. Further, most of these women retired voluntarily following attainment of a major goal, and these factors have also been documented in the literature as contributing to a positive retirement transition (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993, 1994; Werthner & Orlick, 1986).

Whether impending retirement was discussed with individuals close to the athlete, or discussed with no other person, the women did not approach the National Team staff or the sport psychologist working with the Team for a retirement discussion. Given that a solid relationship was not in place with the National Team staff or with the sport psychologist, it is not surprising that there was a "Lack of Discussion" and that athletes, either discussed their retirement with someone outside of the Team or not at all. Perhaps the National Team staff was not comfortable with such a discussion and felt that it had no part in an active athlete's day. Although the natural inclination may not be to speak of retirement to an athlete, this important and all final occurrence should be impressed upon the athlete as an integral part of the athletic career. It needs to be recognized that retirement planning, including all the potential scenarios, should receive time and energy from both the professional staff and the athlete herself. Coaches, sport psychologists, and athletes should be encouraged to speak openly with regards to their main plan and their contingency plans. There is no doubt that such communication and planning would have minimized the negative repercussions felt by these athletes.

For most athletes, there was a "Lack of assistance" for retirement. As well, the athlete herself did not have an understanding of the resources and avenues available to her. The overall vague knowledge among the women with respect to the AAP - Extended Assistance and OACC programs for retirement would seem to have hampered securing assistance. The findings with regards to the OACC correspond to those found by Sinclair & Orlick (1993) who noted that less than one-third of athletes in their study used the services offered by the OACC and that the

majority of athletes who did not use them either did not require them or were simply not aware of the existence. Although such information was available to the athletes, perhaps its importance was not emphasized enough, or perhaps it was not being presented and reviewed often enough to become integrated into their competitive career and post-career planning. Information on the AAP can be found within each year's 'National Team Program for Excellence Handbook', a document which each athlete receives. Unfortunately, the section on retirement and the Extended Assistance available is minimal and does not clearly outline the scope of the program or the options available to the athlete. Further, there may have been no prompt forthcoming to the athlete that additional information was available. Once again, retirement planning should receive time and energy from both the professional staff and the athlete herself.

For the majority of women, their retirement fell somewhere in between the two opposite terms of "Voluntary" and "Involuntary" and so the new term "forced voluntary" was generated. The difficulties of retirement encountered by the women who retired involuntarily has previously been discussed in the literature. Schlossberg (1981) and Sinclair (1990) retirements affected by external sources have been forced upon the individual by other people or by circumstances, and may lead to a more difficult and troubled period in retirement. The low percentage (28.6%) of women who indicated that their retirement was voluntary has also been addressed previously. Werthner and Orlick (1986) noted in their study of Canadian Olympic Team members that only 42% of the competitors retired for reasons that were within their control. McGown and Rail (1993) also found that athletes were confronted with involuntary retirement, even though the majority had envisioned a voluntary withdrawal from the sport. The type of retirement can be seen to relate to the reasons and circumstances of the retirement itself, as well as to the level of control the athlete possessed. Although very few women indicated a positive reason for retirement

(achievement of goals) and a positive retirement experience, all of these athletes considered their retirement voluntary. Whatever the low percentage of voluntary retirements, the numbers should be troubling to amateur sport where the desired outcome should be the reverse; more voluntary retirements than involuntary and forced voluntary.

Although the forced-voluntary retirement has not been extensively differentiated within previous research, it is thought that this type of retirement is not unique solely to canoeing and, as was the case here, other athletes may have indicated that their retirement was voluntary and then added a small separate caveat. It is this add-on, this caveat which is significant in indicating that the retirement was not truly voluntary, that is was a forced-voluntary circumstance. Kirby (1988) spoke of forced retirement, which was frequently initiated because of conflicts between an athlete and either the coach or the sport governing association. Within canoeing, these varied circumstances are also thought to be the basis for forced-voluntary retirements and encompass a general lack of leadership and the disruptive involvement of Team coaches and administrators, whether it be in the areas of coaching, coaching decisions, crew selection criteria, or carding criteria. Kirby further noted that the forced retirement, was a retiring of the athlete by the coaches or sport governing association "for just cause" (1988, p. 204). A conscious effort must be made by the CCA to guard against these subjective retirements and to overall minimize the involuntary and forced voluntary retirements.

There seems to be no clear, definitive manner utilized by the athletes to indicate to the National Team staff that they were retiring from their high performance canoeing commitments. Some athletes made an effort to telephone their coach or the HPD, while others did not convey their retirement in any manner. It could be that for these athletes, especially those in a forced-voluntary position, it was perceived that there was no need. It was also clear that in the majority

of cases when the decision to retire was relayed, its reception elicited no meaningful dialogue. This lack of response by the National Team staff could be for several reasons; the retirement was expected, the NT staff member was a poor communicator, or the perceived discriminatory attitude towards the athlete prevailed.

The news of the loss of carding status was delivered in a letter from either the HPC Chairman or the HPD, and for many women there was no further contact with the National Team. This avenue, used by itself, seems rather sterile treatment for athletes who struggled years to attain the National Team status and who made a contribution to the women's Team. It could be, however, that no individual has taken it upon themselves to propose additional ways to say good-bye to an athlete. It could also be that the CCA administration does not care enough to go beyond the letter. The CCA needs to recognize that an athlete's retirement, whether voluntary or not, should be an event that the CCA administration shares with the membership to celebrate the career performance and contribution of the athlete. At the very least, this will positively assist the athlete's retirement experience.

No acknowledgment of their time, effort, and contribution made to the National Canoe Team, nor even the offering of a "thank you" was forthcoming for the majority of women following their retirement. All of these would have assisted towards a positive retirement experience. This "off the Team-out of sight-out of mind" position taken by the National Team staff and the CCA administration is not uncommon and according to the literature is based on the Darwinian philosophy of the "survival of the fittest." According to Ogilvie and Howe (1982) this philosophy, which prevails throughout competitive sport, places great value on the individuals who survive, but virtually ignores those who are deselected. Recent studies have shown that the athlete's feelings of "being ignored, used, forgotten, or discarded" upon retirement can be

minimized had the national sport organization recognized the athlete's contribution and had continued contact with them following their retirement (McGown & Rail, 1996; Denison, 1996; Sinclair, 1990; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993).

Positive reactions experienced by athletes, when it became apparent that their retirement from the National Canoe Team was imminent, can easily be understood. Those athletes who had positive experiences throughout their career, continued to have positive reactions as the end of their career drew near. It is, however, more difficult to understand that athletes who have encountered negative experiences through their career can react positively to their impending retirement. To these athletes, perhaps any alternative to remaining with the National Team is more positive in nature. Obviously, these reactions were positive for the wrong reasons. Mixed reactions at the thought of retirement were felt by an small number of Olympic and World Championship veterans of the women's team. Denison (1996), Schlossberg (1981), and Sinclair (1990) have both noted that an individual may perceive both positive and negative aspects from the same transition. It could be that, according to Kirby (1988), although retirement was the right decision, the actual leaving was not.

The majority of women experienced negative reactions. Again, these reactions are understandable when realizing that all of these athletes felt that they had retired prematurely, a few involuntarily but most forced-voluntarily. These findings are consistent with Wylleman et al., who found that an approximate one-third of athletes were reluctant participants in their sport career termination and that "almost all of the female athletes" were included in this group (1993, p. 904). According to Ogilve and Howe (1981), the transition process which began when the athlete first started to consider termination as an imminent reality, often entails a predictable course of reactions. The initial reactions of shock, numbness, and denial are similar to those

reactions experienced by these athletes.

The actual retirement, when the decision had been made and the action of retiring taken, also elicited a spectrum of reactions. Similar to the pre-retirement time, the majority of women experienced negative reactions during the actual retirement and in the immediate days which followed. The initial intense reactions of anger, frustration, and denial which Ogilvie and Howe (1986) indicated to be temporary and which the normally healthy athlete would progress through, had continued for these women beyond the impending termination time-frame. Although the intensity and length of time for each athlete to experience these reactions varied, the lack of preparation for retirement and the reasons and circumstances of the retirement may have affected the ability of the athlete to relinquish their denial and to accept the reality of the situation. It was a difficulty in moving forward without canoeing in their daily life, life which was according to Ogilvie and Howe, "now void of significance and direction" (1981, p. 177). The loss of identity experienced, indicated that these women derived an identity through the athletic role, an identification which began early in their canoeing years and which intensified throughout their National Team career. For those athletes, almost all experienced involuntary or forced-voluntary retirement, they have left behind this role which provided a high degree of salience for definitions of self and identity" (Ball, 1976). The difficulties encountered in sport career transitions and intensity of an identity crisis can be related to the degree which the athlete derived an identity through the athletic role (Ogilvie & Howe, 1986; Sparks, 1998). Further, they were experiencing a loss of canoeing and felt lost in their days filled with free time and which now lacked in the structure that was inherent in the daily life of a National Team athlete. Werthner and Orlick (1982) have indicated that these thoughts regarding identity and idleness are to be expected when retirement is not viewed as an end, but rather as the loss of an intense and very important

relationship. Hill and Lowe (1974) have also indicated that retirement for elite sport, a participation which entails regular and familiar routines with well-defined obligations and relationships, may well mean days without a familiar schedule and ill-defined lines of duty and relationship.

Those few athletes who voluntarily retired following achievement of their performance goals, continued to have only positive reactions to their actual retirement. All but one were retiring following satisfying performance moments, three following repeat Olympic performances. Understandably, these women felt good about themselves. With less stress and more control in their lives, they were able to explore an alternate life.

Transitional factors found to have assisted these women during their transition out of canoeing and into a world without sport varied during the actual retirement time-frame. School offered a single focus although not necessarily a new focus, and family and friends offered a supportive role. School was a constant factor in the women's lives and although they indicated attending school as a mediating factor, it was not granted major significance. For them, it was quite simply that as an athlete they had attended to their education and following retirement they continued with their education. In the literature, Schlossberg has noted that the importance of the physical setting, "is so obvious as to be easily overlooked" (1981, p. 11). It seems that the importance of education for women within the National Canoe Team was so much a part of team life that the women did not recognize the full importance of education to their overall retirement experience. Unlike previous studies where education and career planning were often seen to be relegated to a distant secondary position (Broom, 1982), these aspects remained firm as a part of the athlete's life. The ongoing attendance at university and the obtaining of an undergraduate university degree by almost all of these women would indicate a high level of commitment to the

educational process. Alfermann & Gross (1997) also noted a high level of academic commitment by German athletes. The sport of canoeing in Canada lends itself to continued education by the mere virtue of the competitive canoeing schedule being throughout the summer while the academic school year is usually being September to April. Further, it is likely that the academic achievements themselves create a snowball effect within the women's team, where those athletes entering the Team realize that the veteran athletes have charted a student-athlete course. Peer support enables the continuation of academic attendance and perpetuates its success. In addition, with almost all women training at and competing with local canoe clubs within major metropolis areas, access to academic programs at all levels would not have been an issue.

The importance of interpersonal support systems which includes friends, family, and intimate relationships has also been noted in the literature as an important mediating factor in the retirement experience (Schlossberg, 1981; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993, Wylleman et al., 1993). Family members and long-time friends would have had knowledge of the athlete's past sport experiences and what competing in high performance sprint racing canoeing had meant to them. Their support can be understood, as they would be well aware of where these women were "coming from." On the other hand, new friends allowed the women to undertake a different personae, to escape from the paddler identity, and to forge friendships based on their life beyond canoeing and past athletic accomplishments.

The fact that the National Team sport psychologist was not viewed by the women in a very positive manner and did not assist them with their retirement, should prompt a review of the role of the sport psychologist. Not only was communication an issue, but trust in the sport psychologist was lacking. Of significance is that, as with most amateur sport teams, the sport psychologist was not a full-time staff member and was usually retained on contract or was

volunteering his or her services. This association naturally restricted the availability and access for the athletes. It may also have been that the sport organization had identified only specific areas of counseling, such as performance motivation, or race focus, or had identified specific time frames, such as training camps or competitions, when the sport psychologist's services were desired. Lastly, with respect to the trust issue, it may have seemed to the athletes that the sport psychologist had engaged in an overly friendly association with National Team staff. The athlete's perception, therefore, may have been that the opposite should have occurred, that is, such a friendly and communicative relationships should have opened with the athletes and only limited interaction should have occurred with the staff. The sport psychologist seems to have been coach oriented, not athlete-centered.

All of the women canoeists, once retired, continued with physical activity in one form or another. Leaving a formal or institutionalized level of sport and finding alternate avenues to maintain an identification with sport has been suggested by Blinde and Greendorfer (1985), as an aspect of the retirement transition. These women continued to participate and often competed again in various physical and recreational activities, a few even reentered the sprint racing arena but at the club level only. For all these athletes it could be that a physical routine had become ingrained in their day as well as in their psychological framework. After so many years of being physically active each day it may have been an unconscious decision to continue those activities already engaged in aside from the actual hands-on paddling, as a form of mediating factor following retirement. Some women undertook new activities which were not previously found to be beneficial in cross training for canoeing and thus, were never afforded the participation time. It is also possible that former activities were related to canoeing and were, therefore, not continued.

Reactions experienced over the months following retirement continued for the majority of women to be as they were experienced through the actual retirement; those women who reacted positively continued to react positively, while those women who reacted negatively continued to react negatively. Of importance, however, was the gradual shift with the passing of time away from the extreme negative reaction towards a somewhat tempered negative reaction by many women. These reactions have also been discussed in the literature, where generally the retirement transition, whether smooth or problematic, necessitates a degree of adjustment and that degree of adjustment is thought to be dependent on the individual's perception of the retirement itself (Coakley, 1983; Schlossberg, 1984; Sinclair, 1990). Several athletes continued to experience a depression in the months beyond retirement, and attributed it to their intense feelings regarding their departure from the Team. Taylor and Ogilvie (1998) have noted that the medical literature indicates that a loss of control has been associated with a variety of pathologies, including depression and anxiety. Further, both Kirby (1988) and McPherson (1980), reported that the degree of perceived control that the athlete had with respect to the end of their career can also affect how they respond throughout their career transition. Essentially, as was the case with the canoeists, continued discontent with the retirement experience was most evident among athletes who perceived that they had little control over their retirement. Some women attempted to recapture those feelings experienced through high performance training and competition by immersing themselves into a heavy physical training regime. These kinds of reactions have also been observed by Wylleman et al. (1993), who noted that when confronted with emotional problems such as a disruption of personal identity, a lower level of self confidence, and feelings of depression, an athlete will experience a period of adaptation lasting considerably longer than the majority of athletes. Such was the case with many of these sprint racing canoeists.

Although most women were forging ahead in their lives following their retirement, their continued negative reactions ultimately kept them from returning even as a spectator to view a local canoe club race. It would seem that the events and circumstances surrounding their retirement continued to haunt them. Yet, for a large number of these women, life following retirement beyond those early months was a time of reorientation. Wylleman et al. (1993), reported that retirement requires an almost complete redefinition of the athlete in her new social role as well as a reformation of self-identity, and that the success of this reestablishment of role and identity was dependent on the physical and mental preparedness of the athlete.

Eventually, there was an incident, a situation, or an activity for the majority of women which was perceived as significant towards a reconciliation of their experienced reactions, the noting of having moved onwards and of being comfortable in their new life outside of high performance canoeing. That several athletes indicated that their point in time centered on commencement of their career or when they realized that they could be successful at something else, such as garnering high marks at university, aligns to the results found by Denison (1996) in his interviews of New Zealand Olympic athletes.

The length of time, from the day of realization that their retirement was pending until their time of reconciliation of experienced reactions, differed greatly among the women and ran a continuum from several months to well over ten years. The initial transition time lengths are similar to the results obtained by Sinclair (1990) who noted that athletes took two months to one year to feel totally adapted and two years or longer for a more prolonged adaptation. However, there is no mention in the literature women needing a decade or more to reconcile experienced reactions. It should be noted, however, that for the women who mentioned a more longer transition time, the transition length did not seem to be a problem with undertaking their new life.

The problem continues to be the non-reconciliation of experienced reactions relating to their retirement, its reasons and circumstances.

Strong reactions were elicited when speaking about their time spent with the National Canoe Team and those reactions essentially encompassed both their perception of being a member of the Team and of their acceptance as a member of the Team. The reactions swung from extremes, positive to negative and somewhere in between. The experience of sport has been compared by Thomas and Ermler to another event of life in which extremes of reactions are experienced, through the world of sport the athlete has entered into a love affair uncomplicated by the demands of the other worlds that we know are out there" (1988, p. 141). All love affairs have highs and lows, and sometimes the affair ends only to be resumed at a later time. However, once the National Team "affair" had ended, the majority of athletes did not return. Once again, the explanation for this result may possibly lie within the reasons for retirement.

Prior to ascending to the ranks of the National Canoe Team, athletes often think about what the experience would be like of one day becoming a member of that elite squad. Although a good number of women indicated that their expectations of being a member of the National Team were met, an even larger number indicated that they either were not met or only partially met. The definite disparity between the expectations versus the reality of being a women on the National Canoe Team would have left these athletes rather disillusioned. It would seem that the working mechanisms of the team are closed to outside scrutiny and that the perceived political and leadership problems associated with the women's team are largely unknown to the developing athlete.

Several Olympic and World Team veterans think positively, if not philosophically, as they reflect on their retirement. Although not necessarily positive with regard to their retirement

circumstances, their retirement was either done at the right time given those circumstances, or they have reconciled themselves to an acceptance of their retirement and its circumstances. A good number of athletes, however, continued to have negative thoughts with regards to their retirement from canoeing, or still regard their retirement as premature. Once again, the problem seems to be their non-reconciliation of experienced reactions relating to their retirement, its reasons and circumstances.

The minimal thought and expectations regarding retirement was most likely due to the overall lack of retirement planning by the women. The transition of these athletes is very much in alignment with the literature (Greendorfer & Blinde, 1986; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993, 1994). Of those athletes who did have expectations of their retirement transition, the majority had thought that it would be difficult and indeed it was found to be a difficult period. Given the nature of these women's retirement, most were abrupt and forced-voluntary, as well as the majority's varying degree of negative reaction to their pre- and actual retirement time, their transition would have been much more difficult than of those who had prepared themselves to retire. Those few athletes who had planned and who were able to follow their plans in retirement did have a smooth and relatively short retirement transition, their expectations of retirement were entirely met.

The sport of sprint racing canoeing and the years dedicated to being an athlete within the sport were considered to have been a positive and worthwhile experience by the majority of women. These women currently viewed their sport and their years competing, in this manner regardless of their retirement experience, its circumstances, or their former reactions. Whether an Olympic Games Team member, a World Championship Team veteran, or an athlete who remained in the lower ranks of the National Team, they all agreed that overall their years in sprint racing canoeing were indeed good ones and that canoeing was a great sport in which to have been

involved as a young athlete. This attitude is not surprising given that these women had spent their youth in the sport before attaining National Team status. Here, within the divisional and provincial ranks, they made friendships, traveled, and, enjoyed and thrived on the competitive challenges and experiences. And then, even as a member of the National Team, all was not negative. Although their retirement, for most a negative experience, ended their canoeing years, those years on the Team were also filled with challenges and experiences. And, it was those challenges which the individual athlete strove to accept and accomplish. Lastly, the passing of time seems important in allowing people to reflect on their experiences and for them to feel more positive reactions with regard to those experiences.

Theoretical Implications

The inductive examination of the relationships that emerged from the data allows for the development of interpretations and explanations of the phenomenon under study, that is, the women athletes' perceptions of their retirement experience. Through this investigation of the specific reasons and circumstances affecting these athletes' retirement from the National Team, and the manner in which these athletes reacted to, and dealt with their retirement, major patterns were found in the women's narratives regarding their retirement experiences. These contextualized patterns were presented in a schematic representation that informed the experiences of an athlete from the time of her arrival on the National Canoe Team to her time of departure from the Team, and into her post-retirement life. Although not ideal, the schematic representation offered here delineates the retirement experience and reflects the general direction of experiences and feelings from the negative towards the positive.

One of the major patterns emerging from this study is the crucial cleavage between those athletes who achieve their National Team goals and those who do not. The very small minority of

athletes who achieve their goals as a National Team athlete and who retire voluntarily experience positive retirement experiences and reactions and continue to experience positive feelings throughout their transition into their post-National Team life. Not inconceivable in the context of a competitive sport is the fact that a majority of athletes share stories associated to their sporting goals not being achieved and best represented in the negative elements of Figure 1.

Another major pattern emerging from the narratives is the idea that a majority of the participant athletes experience a “forced-voluntary” retirement, that is, one that is related to negative elements as part of the retirement experience. These types of retirement are somewhat voluntary, yet they must be considered in the context of a decision being taken when there is no other choice at hand. Forced-voluntary retirements are not unlike involuntary retirements in that they are not planned and in that they are associated to premature and abrupt departures. As a result, women athletes speak of negative retirement experiences and reactions, as well as bitterness and frustration toward the sporting group in which they were involved. Although there is minimal difficulty in moving physically past the retirement, through the transition process and into a productive life beyond the National Team, many women continue to carry emotional scars with respect to their retirement circumstances. This particular pattern has immense importance since one of the consequences of the forced-voluntary retirement is the fact that many women do not actualize their international racing potential and, consequently, the athlete’s future contributions (as an athlete, a coach, a manager, a spokesperson, a fan, etc.) are lost to the sport.

Also grounded in the athletes’ stories of retirement is the pattern of transitional factors that can act as a mediator to the experienced feelings and reactions, but whose overall positive effect does not eliminate the negative feelings and reactions. Rather, it seems that negative emotions can be compounded further by the sport organization’s lack of acknowledgement of the

time, effort, and contributions the athlete made to the sport. As such, many athletes experience feelings of being ignored, used, forgotten, and/or discarded.

Another pattern can be unveiled when considering the vast array of reasons for retirement from high performance sport mentioned by the women canoeists, as well as the complex mixture of several of these reasons contributing to the retirement decision and experience. Almost all categories of retirement and the reasons within each of those categories are construed as negative. The first three categories presented in this study encompass unfair selection decisions, lack of coaching, and the problematic nature of the team environment. The only positive retirement reason identified was the achievement of performance goals.

Grounded in the women's narratives is the important finding that retirement from the National Team is simply that, one retires from competing at the international level in that specific sport. It means that retirement from this team does not preclude continued participation in another team, at another level or in another physical activity or sport. In fact, leaving a formal or institutionalized level of sport and finding alternate avenues to maintain an identification with sport is clearly the choice for many women. So, retirement from the National Team does not mean sport retirement.

In terms of theoretical implications, the present study contributed by enlightening the patterns grounded in the women athletes' narratives. An assessment of the existing retirement theories in relation to the present research further highlights the contribution. The fact is that theories existing in the social sciences have generally been unable to account for the conditions of sport that are so crucial in the influence of the retirement process and experiences, as lived by women athletes.

Similarities, however, are found with Kirby's study of Canadian amateur female athletes. For instance, Kirby indicates a "somewhat sequential trajectory or path" which the process of retirement was found to follow (1996, p. 273). As well, disjunctures or decisions to be made as athletes were forced to make choices are described as 'choices of one', a concept relating to what is here labelled "forced-voluntary" retirement. In Kirby's study and in the present one, athletes were aware of the best time to retire, a time when they were considered by the system to have no further competitive value. Finally, Kirby notes that an ease of retirement transition was related to goal achievement. This was also an emerging pattern in the present study.

That retirement is a positive experience for athletes who achieve their goals, plan for retirement and voluntarily retire is in agreement with Sinclair (1990) and McGown and Rail (1996). McGown and Rail (1996) also found reasons for retirement that are similar to the ones found in the present study, such reasons differing from previously reported reasons such as selection process, age-related changes, athletic injury, and free choice.

In contrast to the current study, Allison and Meyer (1988) indicate that for the female tennis professional, retirement is perceived as a positive rather than as a negative event and the process of retirement is not nearly as traumatic as expected. Athletes welcome retirement as it allows them to pursue other life roles. The disparity between studies, one welcoming retirement and the current one despairing over retirement, can be attributed to several factors. Given the various demands of world-class tennis tour, such as the travel involved, simultaneously undertaking potential training for alternate careers was extremely difficult. Further, the frustrations and pressures on the tour created by an individual's success or failure, the lack of social network within the women's tour, and the high degree of loneliness experienced by most athletes away from their loved ones "begin to become a reality with which many of the athletes

were not prepared to cope” (Allison & Meyer, 1988, p. 218).

While previous work by McGown and Rail (1996) reflects both the positive and negative elements as part of the retirement experiences shared by female amateur athletes, McPherson’s one-directional ageing approach notes that most men and women experience little stress in retirement. While McPherson’s approach considers age as the main element involved in retirement, the current study shows how sport brings its own social context within which age is of course only one element associated to the reason(s) for retirement. As much as in the present study, however, McPherson shows that few individuals initiate concrete plans for retirement.

The modified role exit model proposed by Drahotka and Eitzen (1998), although initially applicable to the unique case of ex-professional male athletes, does show some congruence with the patterns identified here for the retirement of amateur women athletes. Not only is the involuntary retirement experience similarly negative, but the role of athlete is never exited completely. That is, there is a continuity of physical activity or sport at one level or another for the athlete. Drahotka and Eitzen’s modified role exit model does specify what goes on in terms of the physical activities of retired professional athletes although it has little to offer in terms of information about the state of mind of retired athletes and whether their negative experiences have continued to play a role in their current attitude toward their sport, their team or their retirement. Finally, while Drahotka and Eitzen may speak of the retired athletes’ marketing opportunities for their public relations value or society’s difficulty in relinquishing the retired athlete’s previous identity, this is hardly the case for Canadian amateur women athletes.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Kirby, in her study of female athlete retirement, noted that “an athlete’s athletic experience cannot be understood as isolated from the sport in which she participated” (1986, p. 87). This statement has certainly been found to hold true for the present study of female athlete retirement. For all of these women, athletic experiences were characterized by an increasingly intense commitment to sprint racing canoeing, and were within the structural framework of organized amateur sport in Canada. In addition, high performance amateur sport evolves in cyclic fashion and the yearly cycle is itself only part of a quadrennial cycle based on participation in the Olympic Games. Consequently, an athlete’s entrance into the National Team, her involvement in the Team, and her eventual retirement are experiences that are influenced by, at the same time that they reflect, a point of time in the cycles.

In reviewing the overall retirement experience of these women sprint racing canoeists, major patterns were found in the women’s narratives, and these patterns were schematically represented in Figure 1 along a continuum of time including the athletes’ arrival on the National Canoe Team, their departure from the Team, and their post-retirement life. These patterns were located within a contextualized athletic experience including positive and negative experiential elements. Further, there was a general temporal direction of the experiences and reactions, going from the negative towards the positive.

The schematic representation shows a clear division between those athletes who perceive that they have achieved their National Team goals and those who do not. Those athletes who achieve their goals as a National Team athlete and who retire voluntarily, clearly the minority, experience positive retirement experiences and reactions and continue to experience positive

reactions throughout their transition and into their post-National Team life. Unfortunately, the majority of women canoeists perceive that their National Team goals were not achieved and their experiences remain rather negative.

The majority of women experienced a forced-voluntary retirement, one that was related to negative elements in their retirement experience. Forced-voluntary retirements, similar to involuntary retirements, were not planned and were associated to premature and abrupt departures not accompanied by prior retirement discussion or assistance. All women who experienced a forced-voluntary retirement spoke of negative retirement experiences and reactions, and underlined the bitterness or frustration they felt toward the sporting group in which they were involved. Although there was minimal difficulty in moving physically past the retirement, through the transition process and into a productive life, many women continued to carry emotional scars with respect to their retirement circumstances years later.

Although transitional factors acted as a mediator to the experienced reactions, the overall positive effect of transitional factors did not eliminate the negative feelings and reactions experienced by the majority of women. These negative emotions were compounded further by a lack of acknowledgement from the sport organization of the contributions the athlete made to the sport. As such, many athletes experienced feelings of being ignored, used, forgotten, and/or discarded.

There were a vast array of reasons for retirement from high performance sport mentioned by the women canoeists, as well as a complex mixture of several of these reasons contributing to the retirement decision and experience. Almost all categories of retirement and the reasons within each of those categories are construed as negative. The first three categories presented in this study encompass unfair selection decisions, lack of coaching, and the problematic nature of the

team environment. The only positive retirement reason identified was the achievement of performance goals.

Retirement from the National Team is simply that, one retires from competing at the international level in that specific sport. This means that retirement from this team does not preclude continued participation in another team, at another level or in another physical activity or sport. In fact, leaving a formal or institutionalized level of sport and finding alternate avenues to maintain an identification with sport is clearly the choice for many women. So, retirement from the National Team does not mean sport retirement.

Although all of the women who participated in this study are now successful and productive contributors to society, the majority remain “sour” with respect to the circumstances surrounding their retirement. Although the individual retirement experience was variable, these women’s continued reaction to the circumstances surrounding their retirement has affected their acceptance of the end of their National Canoe Team career and has coloured their overall National Team experience. For canoeing women, therefore, it is not a matter of “adaptation” to life, since daily life has continued. Rather, the important issue is the one of “reconciliation” with negative reactions and emotions that surface from time to time when memories are triggered in relation to their retirement from the National Team.

Only through understanding and accepting the fact that difficulties exist within the system will the effort be made to eliminate those difficulties. Years after dedicating themselves to a sport and competing for their country, an athlete should not continue to have negative reactions regarding such involvement. The present study speaks to the fact that talented women athletes prematurely left the National Canoe Team because of the system in place, and that others had clear perceptions of unfair decisions, discriminatory attitudes and lack of leadership. Such findings

should be addressed. The responsibility ultimately falls to the CCA to ensure that such actions and perceptions do not continue.

Sprint racing canoeing regularly lost experienced veteran women members of the Team. These members were still ranked among the best in Canada and they felt that “enough was enough” or, alternatively, they were perceived by the National Team staff and administration to have reached their international performance potential. As a result of the forced-voluntary retirements of these athletes, some did not reach their international performance potential and, for most, future contributions to the sport (as an athlete, a coach, a manager, a spokesperson, a fan, etc.) were lost. Again, through an enhanced understanding of the consequences of involuntary and forced-voluntary retirements, the sport governing organization can put into place a program to address the problems posed by these types of retirement, the reasons and circumstances surrounding them, and the negative reactions experiences associated to them.

Assistance in the planning for retirement, both physical and psychological, is required by athletes to minimize the negative retirement experiences. However, it was clearly indicated by the women canoeists in the present study that not only was there little concern within the National Canoe Team in preparing an athlete for career termination, but that there was also no concern with regards to the athlete once an involuntary or forced-voluntary retirement had happened. It seems that, had the national sport organization recognized the athlete’s contribution and continued contact with her following her retirement, her feelings of “being ignored, used, forgotten, and/or discarded,” could have been minimized.

The priority of the Canadian high performance sport system has historically centered on the recruitment, training, and performance outcomes of the athlete, and the system’s obligations to the athlete’s overall development and transition to a post-competition life have more often than

not neglected. More recently, the importance of developing the “whole” athlete has been recognized, if not embraced by some sport governing bodies within the Canadian amateur sport system. It is time now for the CCA as national sport organization to play their role in preparing athletes for retirement and ensuring their successful involvement in life beyond the National Canoe Team.

In addressing the retirement question through an in-depth exploration of the retirement experiences of an entire population of women athletes retired from sprint racing canoeing, a full contextualization of the retirement phenomenon has been presented. In contrast to previous research, this contextualization is further unique in its single-sex approach, as well as its incorporation of the literature on “gifted” individuals as it relates to high performance athletes in sport.

Although the concept of a “predictable and identifiable course” in the transition from athlete to ex-athlete has been discussed in the literature, the schematic representation of retirement experiences presented here shows the athletic retirement experience in context. Although not ideal, the representation delineates the retirement experience in both positive and negative terms, and also reflects the general direction of experiences and reactions. This schematic clearly expresses the crucial separation between those athletes who achieve their National Team goals and those who do not.

Previous research has identified reasons for retirement from sport. This study has indicated a number of different reasons for retirement from high performance sport. Such variety among the overall reasons for retirement seem to be an indication of the differences between the professional and amateur sport systems, between the university and National Team systems, and even between male and female athletes within each of the systems.

In emphasizing the experience that is unique to the individual, the phenomenological nature of the research process assumed the importance of understanding the female participant's perspective. The familiarity of the researcher to the sample population and to the topic under discussion presented both advantages and disadvantages throughout the retirement process. The prior involvement of the researcher as a National Canoe Team athlete and someone who had also experienced retirement from the sport of sprint racing canoeing, and the ongoing affiliation with the sport, provided the perception of shared history and common experiences. Preexisting relations of trust removed barriers to entry with the sample population and to their experiences. On occasion, "bracketing" of prior knowledge or understanding of the individual and their retirement became difficult during data collection and analysis, especially during highly emotional interviews, and care was taken to remain neutral. A feminist theoretical framework was not utilized for this research. Although this research encompasses the voices of women and shares their experiences and emotions, feminist theory was not embraced. It was felt that because of the context of sprint racing canoeing, as well as its history, its situation today, and the prevailing attitudes and atmosphere within it, feminist theory would have led to research results being presented in a language and using concepts (gender, patriarchy, power, culture, hegemony, masculinity, etc.) that would have contributed much to the phenomenon at hand but that would have been beyond the scope of understanding of the sprint racing canoeing organization's understanding. It is also highly possible that such results would not have had an impact on the sport and its organization because they would have been dismissed immediately. Using more of a phenomenological approach and remaining close to the voices of the women athletes was thought to be a way to bring authenticity to the results and to give validity to the suggested recommendations.

Recommendations for research

In that the theoretical development and interpretations of this study will hopefully contribute to the broader base of theoretical knowledge of the athlete retirement experience, they also will be viewed as a spring-board for future research. The dearth of retirement research with regards to National Team amateur sport needs to be addressed. Not only should the focus turn to female athletes and sport specificity, but research needs to embrace all high performance athletes, not only those who have had success at the World Championships and Olympic Games. Clearly, the athletes who achieve international acclaim are the minority and it is the retirement process of the majority of athletes, those who are not achieving their goals and who may experience a negative retirement, to which researchers should now turn. It is the genesis and impact of negative reactions and feelings that need to be understood, as well as the reasons and circumstances surrounding retirement. Further, understanding that the athletes may have no difficulty in physically moving forward in their lives after retirement, the focus should be on the reactions and emotions related to their retirement circumstances that they experience at the time of retirement and that they continue to experience long after retirement.

Practical Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to the Canadian Canoe Association: (a) establish a financial assistance fund that may be accessed by retired National Team athletes who do not meet the AAP-EA criteria, but who are in financial need and require bridging support; (b) provide a formalized opportunity for performance evaluation by National Team athletes of all coaches working with the National Team as well as full-time Team staff and administration; (c) announce a National Team athlete's retirement in the official CCA bulletin, providing details of his/her canoeing career; (d) recognize an athlete's retirement from the National Team, both

voluntary and involuntary retirements, at either the Annual General Meeting or at the National Championships by a presentation of a commemorative memento to the athlete for his/her contribution to the Team; (e) establish a National Team athlete data base for both past and present athletes securing such information as name, current address, current occupation, performance record, major achievements, and any special interest information; and (f) establish a National Team 'alumni' membership within the CCA for continued contact with retired National Team members.

The following recommendations are made to the High Performance Committee: (a) encourage the hiring of a coach for the women's team who has an international level knowledge and history of coaching women; (b) allow for and encourage direct communication between all National Team athletes and the HPC Chairman with respect to all issues and concerns from the athlete; (c) provide training, coaching, and competitive opportunities for all National Team athletes; (d) review carding criteria to reflect the on-water performance in order that athletes be named or renamed to the National Team based only on this performance at identified selection trials; (e) review the duties and responsibilities of the High Performance Director position, and undertake with knowledge of the duties and responsibilities in other sport organizations; (f) ensure that National Team staff assume only one position during training camps or tours; (g) ensure that the services of the sport psychologist are provided to all athletes, and that the sport psychologist associated with the National Team is accepted by the athletes and accessed effectively; (h) present OACC programs to National Team athletes on a regular basis and encourage National Team athletes to explore on an on-going basis OACC programs; and (i) ensure regular contact is made with retired athletes towards offering supportive assistance throughout their transition.

The following recommendations are made to the High Performance Director: (a) ensure good communication avenues are established with all National Team athletes; (b) encourage the athlete to integrate the preparation of a post-athletic career into the goal setting process during his/her competitive career; (c) the HPD and the respective discipline coach undertake to contact personally all National Team athletes following the renaming of the National Canoe Team each Fall; this to include new athletes to be welcomed but also those athletes who lost their carding status; and (d) to include a form in the High Performance Handbook for athletes to use to formally relay their decision to retire to the HPD.

Per aquas ad fraternitatem
“Through the Waters to Friendship”

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APPENDIX A

Demographic Questionnaire

9. During the time period when you were a member of the National Team , were you enrolled in an educational institution? Yes _____ No _____
If yes, in what program of study? _____
at what level? _____
Did you complete this program while a member of the National Team?
Yes ___ No___
Did you complete this program following your retirement from the Team?
Yes ___ No___

10. During the time period when you were a member of the National Team, were you actively engaged in an occupation or profession? Yes _____ No _____
If yes, in what capacity? _____
Did you continue with this occupation or profession following you retirement from the Team?
Yes _____ No _____
Are you now engaged in the same occupation or profession?
Yes _____ No _____
If different, what is your current occupation or profession? _____

11. List your performance goals set when you were a National Team athlete

12. What process was used to set these goals?

13. List any injuries, and the year, incurred when you were a member of the National Team.

14. Name your home-town. _____
Name your development canoe club. _____
Name your canoe club when a National Team athlete. _____
Where did you live when a National Team athlete? _____
Where did you train when a National Team athlete? _____

15. During the time period when you competed internationally, in what year(s) and in which major international competitions did you represent Canada?

16. During the time period when you were a member of the National Team, list any selection processes for a specific tour or Team in which you were not successful.

APPENDIX B

Interview Guide

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Section 1 Reasons for and Nature of Retirement

1. Why did you retire from the Canadian National Team - what was the most important reason(s)?
2. What were the circumstances leading to your retirement?
- probe voluntary versus involuntary, abrupt versus smooth, discussed or not
3. What was your reaction(s) to your imminent retirement?
4. Did you achieve your performance goals with the Canadian Team? Why or why not?
5. What was your coaching situation while a Canadian NT athlete?
6. Describe your relationship with your fellow Canadian NT athletes

Section 2 Retirement Preparation

1. Had you prepared for your eventual? Why or why not?
2. If yes, a) How did you prepare?
- probe steps taken, discussed or not
b) When in your NT career was this planning done?
c) Why did you feel a need to plan for your retirement?
d) Did planning help or hinder your competitive mindset and achievements?
3. Were you offered guidance or counselling for retirement while a Canadian NT athlete?
- probe who, what organization, when, where
4. Did you seek assistance for your Canadian retirement? Where? When? Who?
- probe NT psychologist, NT coach, OCA career center, friends, family
5. Did you know of programs available to assist your planning?
- probe how knew, which ones
6. During your time as a NT athlete had you developed life skills which were transferable to life outside of the NT? If yes, describe those skills.

Section 3 Transitional Phase

1. What was your reaction(s) to your actual retirement, over the first few days and weeks?
2. Did your reaction(s) change over the course of those first few days, weeks?
3. How did your retirement change your immediate life?
- probe positive/negative, increased/decreased opportunities, stress/stress
4. Describe your environment following your retirement, what were your days like, who were your friends?
5. Did your retirement require a change of location for you?
If so a) from where to where
b) from what type of living situation to what type of living situation
6. Did you have alternate lifestyle options readily available to you?

- probe education, career, financial freedom, marriage

7. What factors assisted your transition?
How did these factors assist?
8. Did you receive assistance (both financial and services) from within the NT system as you retired?
If yes
 - a) What assistance (financial or services) did you receive?
 - b) How did this assistance help your transition?
 - c) For how long did you receive this assistance?
 If no, would you have liked to receive assistance (either financial or services) from within the NT system as you retired?
9. How long was the period of time from the first day of your exit from the NT to the point of acceptance/adaptation/comfort with an alternate lifestyle?
10. Was your retirement transition from the what you expected? Why or why not?
11. How do you think you handled your transition out of Canadian NT sport?

Section 4 After the Transition

1. How would you now describe 'life after the National Team?
2. Can you note a turning point or a factor which was significant in telling you that you had moved on, that you felt comfortable with 'life after the NT'? If yes, describe the factor.
3. Once adapted out of high performance sport did you have any contact with the NT part of your life, former teammates, coaches, SGB, etc? If yes, who and in what circumstances?
4. In retrospect, were there any significant factors or mechanisms which either assisted or undermined your adaptation out of high performance sport?
5. In retrospect, how would you have liked to change your retirement experience, if you wanted?
6. In retrospect, was being a NT athlete what you had expected as you came through the system?
7. Describe what you gained, if anything, by being a NT athlete? Describe what you lost, if anything, by being a NT athlete?
8. How do you now view the years you committed overall to sprint racing canoeing?
9. How do you now view your Canadian retirement?

Summary

1. Is there anything that you would like to add to this interview?
2. To assist me with future interviews and to critique this specific interview, what, if anything, would you change in this interview process?

APPENDIX C

Study Introduction Letter

P.O. Box 58
660 Eglinton Avenue East
Toronto, Ontario
M4G 2K0

January 4, 1999

Dear Athlete,

As a previous female member of the Canadian National Canoe Team who retired between the years 1984 to 1998, you have been selected to participate in the study, 'Canadian Women Sprint Racing Canoeists' Retirement From the National Team'. This study on female athlete retirement, is the subject of my Doctorate Degree and will focus on an interview format, either in person or by telephone of approximately one hour. During this interview various aspects of your National Canoe Team retirement will be addressed within a format which encompasses areas of Pre-retirement (reasons for and preparation of), Retirement, and Post-retirement.

If you are in agreement to participate, a Consent Form has been enclosed for your signature and can be returned in the enclosed preaddressed and stamped envelope. Upon receiving your signed Consent Form, you shall then be contacted to arrange a convenient time for the interview. A questionnaire to elicit demographic information only has also been enclosed and your cooperation in completing these pages and in answering all of the questions to the best of your ability is greatly appreciated. Kindly return this questionnaire with your signed Consent Form by February 19, 1999.

ALL REPLIES TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE AND THOSE GIVEN IN THE INTERVIEW SHALL REMAIN COMPLETELY CONFIDENTIAL AND NO INDIVIDUAL'S IDENTITY SHALL BE REVEALED IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS, OR AT ANY OTHER TIME.

I would like to thank you in advance for your consideration to participate in this study. Should you have any questions please feel free to contact me at 416-481-5402.

In sport,

Liz McGown
Doctoral Candidate
University of Ottawa

APPENDIX D

Interview Consent Form

**CANADIAN WOMEN SPRINT RACING CANOEISTS'
RETIREMENT FROM THE NATIONAL TEAM**

CONSENT FOR AN INTERVIEW

The present study, "Canadian Women Sprint Racing Canoeists' Retirement From The National Team", carried out by Elizabeth McGown and supervised by Dr. Genevieve Rail, is research undertaken for a Ph.D. dissertation. This research will entail the completion of a questionnaire to elicit basic demographic information followed by an interview, either in person or by telephone, regarding your retirement from international competition.

It is typical for dissertations to provide results from the research in the document. Information from the questionnaire and quotes from the interviews will be utilized within the chapters of the dissertation and in future publications. In addition, qualitative data from the questionnaire as well as a full interview transcript will be reproduced in the appendix.

Be assured that your questionnaire and interview transcript as well as any quotes used will always remain anonymous. Any references such as names, years, or known associations which may identify an individual will be deleted from the dissertation material.

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I consent to participate in the study, "Canadian Women Sprint Racing Canoeists' Retirement from the National Team", carried out by Elizabeth McGown and supervised by Dr. Genevieve Rail, undertaken for a Ph.D. dissertation. This research will entail the completion of a questionnaire to elicit basic demographic information followed by an interview, either in person or by telephone, regarding your retirement from international competition .

I also consent to have information from part or all of my questionnaire and interview transcript used under the conditions outlined above, in the dissertation and / or future publications of Elizabeth McGown.

Participant

Date

APPENDIX E

Procedural Guide Relating to the Retirement of National Team Athletes

From the Sprint Racing Canoe Team

Procedural Guide Relating to the Retirement of National Team Athletes From the Sprint Racing Canoe Team

Introduction

The decision of an athlete to retire from the National Team is a major "career" event whether the athlete retires after a number of years of successful high performance competition or after a brief and unfruitful experience on the National Team. In either case the Association has much to learn from athletes about their experiences on the National Team. Retiring athletes should have the opportunity to effect changes in the program for the benefit of athletes who come after them. As well, athletes who have invested 10 -15 years representing our country in international competition have every right to expect that the country and the sport, within the resources available, has an interest in assisting them to make the transition from competitive athlete to a wage-earning citizen. The retiring high performance athlete has the potential to become a supportive recreational competitor, a volunteer working in the sport or perhaps an employee engaged in the sport at some level. It is mutually beneficial to the athlete and to the sport to structure some process that will permit both parties to make some positive contribution, one to the other, on the occasion of retirement from international competition.

Goals

1. To improve the performance of athletes in the National Team program.
2. To make association with the National Team Program a positive and rewarding experience.
3. To retain the involvement of retired National Team athletes in the Association.
4. To enable athletes to make a successful transition from athlete to gainful employment in an occupation, profession.

Purposes

These guidelines are meant to identify processes and/or information:

- to allow athletes to inform the sport of the positive and negative aspects of the program they have experienced as a National Team athlete and to recommend changes that will improve the program and ultimately the performance of athletes in the program..
- to assist the athlete to make a successful career transition from athlete to some gainful employment in an occupation/profession.
- to provide information to the athlete that will encourage them to remain involvement in the sport as a recreational competitor and/or as a volunteer at any level of operation - community, division/province, national or international.

Initiation of Retirement

An athlete must inform the Association in writing that he/she wishes to retire from the National Team program. Such notice should be directed to the High Performance Director but may also be initiated through the Director General or the Chair of the High Performance Committee.

Acknowledgment by the Association

Upon written notice of retirement the following parties will make written acknowledgment of the decision to the athlete. All will no doubt want to acknowledge the contribution the athlete has made to the sport. Each will also have specific roles to play in implementing this Exit Review process.

- Director General

Ultimately it is the responsibility of the Director General to see that the intent of the Guidelines are realized and that the professional staff fulfill their responsibilities in this process.

- High Performance Director

As the person to whom athletes are directly responsible as members of the National Team, it seems appropriate that the H.P. Director will assume responsibility for initiating career planning dialogue with the retiring athlete, seeing that they receive information relating to services available to them, and directing and monitoring access to these services

- Comm./Chr. Sprint Racing Council

The Chr. of the Council should assume a major responsibility for inviting the athlete to continue his/her involvement with the sport in some capacity. **(See information package to accompany letter.)**

- Vice Chair High Performance

The Chr. will acknowledge the notice of retirement and inform the athlete of the Exit Interview: its purpose, who is responsible for the interview, time lines for the interview, and a concluding letter to the athlete after the committee has received the Summary report.

Information and Services Available to Athlete on Retirement (To be expanded.)

COA Career Centre
Sport Canada Educational Support
Sport Information Package
Career in Sport
National Coaching Institute

Initiation of the Interview Process

Upon receiving notice that an athlete will retire the Chr. of the Committee will confirm the decision of the athlete and notify him/her of the Exit Interview process: who will be responsible for the interview, approximate period when it is to take place. (The athlete should be given a choice of a male or female interviewer.)

Interviewer

The interviewer will be a volunteer and not an employee of the Association. The number of athletes retiring at a given time and geography may be determining factors in selection of the interviewer.

In order of preference, interviewers will be :

- Athletes' Representative to the High Performance Committee
- Volunteer Members of the High Performance Committee
- Athletes' representative to the Sprint Racing Council
- Volunteer Members of the Sprint Racing Council.

Timing of the Interview

The interview should not take place immediately upon receiving notice of retirement. Time should be allowed for the athlete to reflect on the decision and its implications. A delay of from 2 to 5 months would be appropriate. Extenuating circumstances may on occasion preclude meeting these time lines.

Let the athlete know and plan for 2-3 hours for the interview.

Location

Try to select a location that is comfortable where the athlete can be at ease. If for some reason -timing distance etc - an interview can not be scheduled with the athlete within the two to five month window of time recourse may be made to a telephone interview. Clearly this should be used as a last resort.

Interview Questions

If at all feasible these questions should be sent to the athlete in advance of the meeting in order to prepare for the interview?

1. Why did you stop competing?
2. What was the most important reason for stopping?
3. Do you feel the selection process to the National Team is fair?
- 4. Do you feel the selection process to World (Olympic) Championship Teams is fair?**
5. Did you have access to appropriate coaching while on the National Team?
6. Did you receive adequate support from the CCA while on the National Team?
7. How did you find the interaction with the other disciplines?
8. Do you feel that athletes are involved in decision making on issues that affect the team?
- 9. What are your recollections of your early years on the National Team?**
10. Do you feel you have accomplished what you wanted to in canoeing?
- 11. Were you able to pursue an education while competing?**
- 12. Did your participation/experience as an athlete also meet your personal development goals?**
- 13. Are you prepared for retirement?**
14. What would you suggest to the High Performance Committee to improve the athlete's experience on the National Team?
15. What advice would you give to someone who has just made the National Canoe Team?
16. How do you feel you could contribute to the CCA?
17. Do you plan to remain involved with canoeing? At what level?
18. On a scale of 1 to 10 how would you rate your experience on the National Team?
19. Is there anything that has not been covered in this interview which you wish to bring to the attention of the committee?

Reporting the Interview

The interviewer will prepare a written report of the interview for submission to the H.P. C. In fairness, the report of the interview, before it is submitted to the H.P.C., should be sent to the athlete asking if it fairly represents his/her statements and/or responses to questions. Changes requested by the athlete must be made before submission.

Following a response from the athlete, the interviewer may append to the report recommendations relating to this particular athlete, to the

interview or Exit Review process and to the operation of the High Performance Program.

Presentation of the Interview report to the High Performance Committee

The written report will be tabled with the High Performance Committee.

Consideration of the report may result in recommendations relating to the athlete in question, to the Exit review Process or to the High Performance Program in particular.

Involvement of Athletes Coaches in the interview Process

Where the report warrants a closer examination of information provided by an athlete, the interviewer may contact the athlete's coaches for additional information.

Confirmation of the Report to the Athlete

After the report is considered by the H.P.C. the Chr. of the Committee will contact the athlete thanking the athlete for his/her cooperation and responding to any particular issues, concerns raised by the athlete. Issues relating to ongoing support for the athlete should be directed to the Director of the High Performance Program Director for consideration/implementation. By this letter the Interview component of the Exit Review will be completed.

Attachments (Related Information required)

1. Interview Questions
2. Information/ Services available to the athlete relating to Career Planning
3. Volunteer Roles within the Canadian Canoe Association