

Olympic effort adapting to life after elite sport, new study finds

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While some Olympic athletes excel in their transition into life beyond elite sport others are experiencing problems like disorientation, depression and self-doubt, a new study from The University of Queensland has found.

Dr. Steven Rynne, from the School of Human Movement Studies and colleagues from [Switzerland](#) and [Great Britain](#) conducted the study which found that, while many former Olympians make the transition easily, others found that changing social networks and re-entering the [workforce](#) took its toll.

Dr. Rynne said the study involved interviewing former Olympic [athletes](#) who had both trained for and competed at the [Olympics](#) and the results were surprising.

“Given that Olympians require an exceptional range of characteristics such as determination and patience, one would assume that such characteristics would guarantee success in life after their sporting careers. Our research suggests that this is not always the case,” he said.

“Some characteristics have proved to be useful beyond sport such as organisation and persistence while others proved less useful. Submissiveness, perfectionism, and competitiveness were identified as the most problematic.”

Dr. Rynne said the dramatic shift in daily-to-day activities could be hard

to cope with.

“While some athletes thrive in their respective sporting environments and move into other fields with few problems, others experienced forms of disorientation, [depression](#) and self-doubt when transitioning into lives beyond sport,” he said.

“There is generally a quite significant shift in the daily lives of athletes once they retire from competitive sport such as moving into professional work environments or changing their social networks, and this can be hard to deal with.

“This suggests that it is important to consider who and what shapes the development of Olympians and how this can be improved to foster elite performance as well as adaptive behaviours beyond elite sport,” Dr. Rynne said.

The research team was chosen by the International Olympics Council's (IOC's) Olympic Studies Centre Research Grant Programme to conduct the study, titled Preparing Olympic Athletes for Lives Outside of Elite Sport: Towards Best Practice.

“Much has been made of the Olympic ideals and the kinds of people that become Olympians, but few studies had examined this from a socio-cultural perspective with regard to what and how athletes learn on their path to and during their Olympic careers,” Dr. Rynne said.

The findings will provide direction for further research and possible intervention strategies which may help high-performance sports coaches and practitioners better prepare their athletes for elite competition, as well as for life beyond sport.

“This research will contribute to designing sports coaching programs for

the IOC, international athletic organisations and postgraduate programs offered by The University of Queensland, School of Human Movement Studies,” Dr Rynne said.

As part of his research, Dr. Rynne will attend the pre-Olympic conference in Glasgow to review the studies.

Provided by University of Queensland

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