

New challenges for ex-Olympians

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When elite-level athletes retire, they often struggle to adapt to their new lives. When finding that the characteristics that were valuable in sport are not equally useful in 'ordinary' life, they often start experiencing disorientation, depression, self-doubt or even illness. This is concluded in research from the University of Gothenburg.

Successful athletes at the elite level develop characteristics that should generate success also later in life. However, this notion may be wrong, according to the new research.

As part of a study, ex-[Olympians](#) from Sweden, Switzerland, USA and Australia were interviewed. All subjects participated in either the 2008 [Summer Olympics](#) in Beijing or the 2010 [Winter Olympics](#) in Vancouver.

Some well-developed features turned out to be very useful in the retired athletes' lives. Two examples are perseverance and organisational skills. However, characteristics, such as [perfectionism](#), hyper-competitiveness, self-centredness and submissiveness, are much less useful and are indeed not desired – at work, in school and in family life.

'Some ex-athletes say that adapting to post-sport life is more difficult than anything they ever experienced as athletes,' says Natalie Barker at the University of Gothenburg, who headed the research project.

The study reveals that those who managed to keep some kind of distance to their sport, or who were able to critically reflect on their experiences,

were able to develop a more flexible and mature self-image.

Provided by University of Gothenburg

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