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**The Death of “The Dream”:
The Experience of the Loss of a Central Identity Among Professional Athletes**

A Dissertation Presented

by

Maria Doelger Anderson

to

The Graduate School

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Abstract of the Dissertation

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Using Norman Goodman’s (2001) outline for a research program on the effect of a failure in a central identity for a person’s sense of self, and Daniel Levinson’s (1978) focus on the concept of “The Dream” as an important element of adult identity, I have undertaken a preliminary research study of how professional athletes experience the transition away from their strong central identity at the end of their professional sports careers. Using survey data from former professional baseball and football players as well as lengthy follow-up interviews, I sought to identify factors that influence this transition process and determine whether there are commonalities among those who make this transition with relative ease or difficulty.

The study considered such factors as: career length, the athlete’s educational attainment, how the athlete’s career ended, the extent to which the athlete clings to his previous identity, and the differences in the sports’ organizational structures. I also drew upon selected memoirs of former professional players and the work of other sociological and social psychological studies of athletes to present some insights into the emotionally charged and intensely personal experience of losing one’s central identity and the difficulties in replacing it. I also introduce the concept of “the nostalgic self” as an alternative to both the “abandoned self” and “not yet abandoned self” as a way in which former athletes retain a portion of their former identity without either renouncing their past or holding onto it so tightly that it prevents their moving forward.

The study found only modest support for whether the respondents’ educational attainment and how their athletic career ended had a relationship with the ease of their transition into a new career identity. There was, however, a striking difference in the experiences between athletes of different generations. These differences seem to be attributable to the significant changes in professional sports brought about by free agency. The project’s results also point to possible future areas of study regarding the transition.

For Norm.

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In the world of baseball a player's uniform carries with it a history and a commitment. Putting it on calls upon the honor of baseball's past, as if within its fabric is the spirit of everyone who has contributed to the team's cause. The longer you wear it, the harder it is to stop wearing it. It is as if it seeps into your soul. Shawon (Dunston) played at the major league level for 18 years. And he often repeated to me this one indispensable piece of advice: "Never give the uniform back. Let them rip it off your body." Once you give it back, he insisted, it will never be the same, and *neither will you.* – Doug Glanville, "Badge of Honor," *New York Times* Op-Ed, January 12, 2009 (emphasis added).

I. Introduction

I began my swimming career as a reluctant six-year-old, unceremoniously and unwillingly enrolled in summer swim lessons in order to conquer my paralyzing fear of the water. Twelve years later I was attending one of the country's premier academic and athletic institutions on a swimming scholarship, a near-miss for the Olympic Team sidelined by the 1980 boycott, and ranked in the top twenty in the world in each of my events. As a world-class swimmer before the days of training grants, appearance fees and lucrative endorsement deals, I was not chasing a dream of a professional athletic career. Nevertheless, I had a powerful central identity as an athlete. It was how I defined myself and the first thing that came out of my mouth when asked to describe myself to others. When a series of shoulder injuries ended my career, and thus my dream of becoming an Olympian and world champion, I quickly realized that I was completely unprepared for life after swimming and unable to think of myself as anything other

than a swimmer. As I reflect on my experiences, I find the process by which I (and other driven athletes) replace our failed central identities particularly interesting. Using the extensive outline of a research program set forth by Norman Goodman (2001), I have undertaken a preliminary study of the experience of failure in the central identity among professional athletes (specifically baseball and football players) by investigating their transition to life after their athletic careers end. This study seeks to identify any factors that affect how individuals create an acceptable new central identity after their playing careers have ended.

There are as many answers to the question posed to young children, “What do you want to be when you grow up” as there are children. Yet many young boys, and increasingly young girls, say that they want to become successful professional athletes. Professional athletes, especially those who excel in the most popular sports, remain highly visible to the world outside of the arena. We see them in commercials, magazine and newspaper advertisements, on billboards, and even with their own reality television shows or specials. The dream of starting for the New York Yankees, Boston Celtics, or Dallas Cowboys captures the imagination of both young boys and young men, as Daniel Levinson (1978) found among the workers he followed for his important work *The Seasons of a Man’s Life*. Some of Levinson’s subjects identified this as a dream they held from childhood through early adulthood.

Young athletes with promise and dedication necessarily spend countless hours training and competing. As they rise through the competitive ranks, those at the top begin to sense that a professional sports career is within their reach. These athletes often sacrifice what most of the rest of us would consider a normal family life. Some move away from home at a young age for advanced or specialized training. Many forego all or part of a post-secondary education for the opportunity to earn a spot on a professional roster. They put all their effort into chasing “The

Dream,” as characterized by Levinson (1978), only to face the very real possibility that they will not succeed. Failure to achieve “The Dream” can be devastating to one’s self-esteem, forcing the forging of another central identity and the development of another dream to chase. Brim (1992) also noted the possibility of despair at finding the dream unfilled, noting that:

We may feel sadness: a survey of several hundred midlife corporate executives found that more than half had wanted to become professional athletes, still believed that they could make the grade, and viewed that lost option as a lost self. I think of Marlon Brando in the taxicab scene in *On the Waterfront* (1954), with his heart broken, saying, “I could have been a contender. I could have been somebody. Instead of a bum – which is what I am.” (p. 84)

Some who fail to achieve their dreams of athletic success find greatness in other aspects of their adult lives. A few fail completely, with their tragic stories and devastating consequences played out in the media and held up as cautionary tales to the next generation of aspiring professional athletes. Most, one surmises, land somewhere in the middle. It is this process of how former athletes move past the failure of their dream to forge a new and meaningful identity that I found to worthy of investigation.

II. Overview of the Proposed Research Project

Goodman (2001) lays out a research program that endeavors to explore the experience of failure in a central identity in adulthood. While the focus of the research program proposed by Goodman is largely a study of self-esteem, I will conduct this first, preliminary study through the lens of the loss of a central identity and the transition towards another to replace it. He identifies many populations he believes would be fruitful to study in this regard – ballerinas, musicians, actors, and other artists, as well as field grade military officers, business executives, academic faculty and research scientists. It is another of Goodman’s suggested populations that I have chosen for this project: professional athletes. Although professional athletes could be considered to be a single population, I believe that there are valid reasons to treat athletes in two different sports (professional baseball and football) as separate populations. I believe the differing characteristics of the athletes’ paths to the professional ranks and the organizational structures of the two sports potentially offer sufficient contrast to provide interesting results.

The chances of a young boy growing up to realize his ambition of becoming an athletic success beyond his Little League or Pop Warner team are extremely remote. According to D. Stanley Eitzen (1999), the odds of a male high school athlete becoming a professional athlete are approximately 1 in 10,000. Despite the long odds, high school rosters are filled with those who dream of a professional sports career. An exceptional few will leave high school with an offer to join a professional baseball team’s minor league system or with a college scholarship. Some of these young men will go on to sign professional contracts, but even just a handful of those will find the storybook career, fame and fortune of which they dreamed.

But what about the others? A professional contract is no guarantee of glory. Baseball players can languish in the minor leagues for years, with a roster spot on the Major League club just out of their reach. Football lacks an extensive professional minor league and so players typically use careers at NCAA Division I colleges and universities as their training ground for the pros. They may be drafted and signed by an NFL club, but still relegated to the practice squad, an alternative and less-prestigious professional league (such as the Canadian Football League or Arena Football League), or cut outright before the regular season begins. A roster spot on an NFL team is just out of reach for them, too.

Failure to realize the dream of a professional sports career can come at a high cost. Athletes who fail often leave the sport without a college degree, marketable job skills, or business contacts to help them transition to another career. The effects of injuries suffered can compromise them physically. Injured or not, failure's damage to their self-esteem may make it difficult to find another set of interests around which to build a new identity. Despite the challenges, many other athletes make the adjustment to life after sports relatively easily. *Thus, the central focus for my proposed research project is to identify and examine the characteristics and experiences that affect the creation of a new, acceptable self-concept by failed professional athletes.*

III. Theoretical Framework: Identity and Related Concepts

Goodman (2001) writes, “Any social psychological study of failure must inevitably come to grips with the issue of identity and a sense of self; and, even more particularly, with the issue of self-esteem.” Although the specific meanings ascribed to “self,” “identity,” and related terms can differ with the theoretical and disciplinary background of the scholars cited, it is useful to begin with an overview of relevant work on self and identity. This will provide a conceptual framework before considering previous studies of athletes and failure that were employed in this project.

Defining the terms involved in the study of identity and self-esteem is difficult. British psychologist Glynis Breakwell (1983) echoes a common complaint when she writes:

Where the concept of identity is concerned there are simultaneously problems of terminology and definition. The terms identity, self, character and personality are all used as labels for that uniqueness which differentiates one individual from the next. Clear and universally applicable distinctions between the terms are difficult to establish. Where one theorist talks about identity another will call it personality or self-concept, yet they seem to be referring to the same thing. ... The term they choose to label these processes is dependent upon the philosophical and methodological foundations of their particular theory. ... More importantly, in the long run it is the theory which they adopt or evolve which determines how they define the term or label they choose. [p. 4]

William James (1890), in seeking to understand and clarify the constituent parts of identity, distinguished between the self as subject (“I”) and as object (“me”). James also recognized and differentiated four distinct aspects of the self: (1) the spiritual self, which entails thinking and feeling; (2) the material self, which entails our material possessions; (3) the social

self, which entails references to those individuals and groups of whose opinions about us we take notice; and (4) the bodily self.

Related to the concept of the social self, Charles Horton Cooley (1902) proposed the concept of “the looking-glass self,” which suggested that the development of our self-concept is based upon our interpretation of how others see us and our response to that interpretation. Morris Rosenberg (1979) similarly defines for us the term “self-concept” as meaning “*the totality of the individual’s thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object.*”

Following closely from the distinction James’ (1890) made between “I” and “me,” George Herbert Mead (1934) ascribed the development of self as culminating in an individual’s relations to the “generalized other.” Mead’s work gave credence to the importance of how others view us. He identified the genesis of the self through the gradually developing ability in childhood for a child to take the role of the other and to visualize his or her own performance from the point of view of others. Very young children at play are not yet able to use symbols, thus their behavior is similar in many ways to that of young puppies playing with each other, acting and reacting based on instinct alone. However, as children grow older they gradually learn to take the role of others through play, such as a child playing the role of a mother in a game of “house” or that of a teacher while setting up a pretend schoolhouse. Children at play in this way are learning to take on different roles, thus cultivating in themselves the ability to put themselves in the place of others who are significant to them. Being able to take the role of the “generalized other” is the final step to maturity and the development of the self, according to Mead.

The “generalized other” thus becomes a de-individualized, representative other, or what sociologists call “social norms.” Mead argued that we all learn to interpret the world as others

do so that we may act in ways expected of us. Erving Goffman (1959, 1967) described his conception of this generalized other in terms of an audience for whom we, as actors, portray roles of limited scope and duration. Actors move from role to role, reacting to different audiences as dictated by context and the role. In this way, we present ourselves to others in what we believe to be the expected fashion and create a relevant identity for each role performance.

The concept of an individual having multiple identities or selves dates back at least to the work of James. As mentioned above, James (1890) laid out four distinct selves, but it was his delineation of the social self that is most relevant and is often quoted by those studying self and identity.

Properly speaking, a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their mind ... but as the individuals who carry the images fall naturally into classes, we may practically say that he had as many different social selves as there are distinct groups of persons about whose opinion he cares. [p. 294]

James continued:

I am often confronted by the necessity of standing by one of my empirical selves and relinquishing the rest. Not that I would not, if I could, be both handsome and fat and well-dressed, and a great athlete, and make a million a year, be a wit, a *bon-vivant*, and lady-killer, as well as a philosopher; a philanthropist, statesman, warrior, and African explorer, as well as a “tone-poet” and saint. But the thing is simply impossible. ... So the seeker of his truest, strongest, deepest self must review this list carefully, and pick out the one on which to stake his salvation. ... I, who for the first time have staked my all on being a psychologist, am mortified if others know much more psychology than I. But I am contented to wallow in the grossest ignorance of Greek. My deficiencies there give me no sense of personal humiliation at all. Had I “pretensions” to be a linguist, it would have been just the reverse. [p. 309]

Many theorists support this concept of the differing impact of identities or roles being played on one's self-esteem. For example, McCall and Simmons (1978), focus on the "prominence" of identities. Rosenberg (1979) writes of the "psychological centrality" of the different components of the self-concept. Additionally, Stryker and Serpe's (1982, 1994) "hierarchy of salience" helps to determine which identities are most likely to affect overall self-esteem. As professional athletes are assumed to have an over-powering drive and determination to succeed in their sports, and are seen to have devoted so much time and energy to their craft to the exclusion of many, if not all, other pursuits, it would be reasonable to view their identity as an athlete the most central, prominent, or salient among all they possess.

Levinson (1978) refers to the formulation of a disproportionately important central identity, which he calls "the Dream," as one of the major tasks of the beginning of adulthood and which he calls a "factor that plays a powerful and pervasive role in early adulthood." Levinson explains that "Many young men have a Dream of the kind of life they want to lead as adults. The vicissitudes and fate of the Dream have fundamental consequences for adult development." And he describes its evolution as follows:

In its primordial form, the Dream is a vague sense of self-in-adult-world. It has the quality of a vision, an imagined possibility that generates excitement and vitality. At the start it is poorly articulated and only tenuously connected to reality, although it may contain concrete images such as winning the Nobel Prize or making the all-star team. It may take a dramatic form as in the myth of a hero: the great artist, business tycoon, athletic or intellectual superstar performing magnificent feats and receiving special honors. It may take mundane forms that are yet inspiring and sustaining: the excellent craftsman, the husband-father in a certain kind of family, the highly respected member of one's community. Whatever the nature of his Dream, a young man has the developmental task of giving it greater definition and finding ways to live it out." [p. 91]

The fulfillment of the Dream contributes significantly to a man's sense of self-esteem, as "the hero of the Dream" is one of many figures in the man's self-image. This heroic figure can also be seen as an "ideal self" -- the man he would like to become.

Similarly, Markus and Nurius' (1987) concept of "possible selves" can be seen as constituent parts of this idealized image and can include what we hope to become -- as well as what we fear becoming. They assert that:

Possible selves are conceptions of the self in future states. The possible selves that are hoped for might include the powerful or leader self, the elegant or glamorous self, the revered and esteemed self, the rich and famous self, or the trim, toned in-shape self. The dreaded possible selves may comprise an equally vivid and compelling set. One's fear and anxieties can be concretely manifest in visions of the alone and unwanted self, the addicted or dependent self, the violent and aggressive self, or the undervalued and unrecognized self. These constructions of potential selfhood are deft blendings of the representations of one's roles and social categorizations (self as worker, spouse, parent) with views of one's particular attributes or habits. The repertoire of possible selves contained within an individual's self-system are the cognitive manifestations of enduring goals, aspirations, motives, fears and threats. Possible selves provide specific cognitive form, organization, direction, and self-relevant meaning to these dynamics. As such they provide an essential link between the self-concept (or identity) and motivation. [p. 158]

In his model of the self, Rosenberg (1986) identifies three types of "desired self images" that serve a similar role to that of Markus' "possible selves" -- the "idealized image," the "committed image," and the "moral image." The "idealized image," which Rosenberg adapted from psychoanalyst Karen Horney's work in *Our Inner Conflicts* (1945), refers to what each person would like to become. Horney, according to Rosenberg, wrote of a fearful child who "creates in his imagination a picture of someone who is the ultimate in beauty, intelligence, kindness, goodness or whatever. This imaginative construct comes to be the type of person he

would like to see himself as.” Rosenberg’s “committed image” is one that the person takes more seriously and is somewhat more realistic, while his “moral image” is what he believes he *should* be.

It is the relative importance of these conceptions of self that determines their influence on a person’s self-image and self-esteem. Levinson (1978) views the Dream as being quite powerful because it is central to a person’s conception of self. Markus (1987) and her colleagues argue that some self-conceptions are especially significant – including possible selves that do not yet exist for the individual – and consider them part of the “core” self. As noted above, one of Rosenberg’s principles of self-concept formulation is that desired self-images impact self-esteem through “psychological centrality.” Rosenberg (1986) argues that

the significance of a particular component [of the self] depends on its location in the self-concept structure – whether it is central or peripheral, cardinal or secondary, a major or minor part of the self. ... In other words, a person’s global self-esteem is based not solely on an assessment of his constituent qualities but on an assessment of the qualities that *count*. [p. 18, emphasis in original]

Those qualities that count are of significant importance in how an individual sees himself. In Rosenberg’s (1986) scheme, self-esteem is one of two distinct “motives” of the self. Self-esteem signifies the positive or negative value a person places on him or herself along a continuum. The second motive, self-consistency, is the desire to “protect the self-concept against change or to maintain one’s self picture.” People will usually strive to maintain a positive and stable image of themselves. As Rosenberg asserts, “A major determinative of human thought and behavior and a prime motive in human striving ... is the drive to protect and enhance one’s self-esteem.” Failure in a significant or central role therefore threatens an

individual's self-esteem. There are also individuals for whom failure confirms a low self-image and thus maintains self-consistency.

Goodman (2001) notes that Rosenberg and Stryker are both symbolic interactionists who espouse the importance of social structure in their models; thus, there are similarities in their concepts of identity. Like Rosenberg's concept of "psychological centrality," Stryker's (1982) work identifies a "hierarchy of salience" that highlights that not all roles have an equal effect on an individual's self-esteem or the multiple selves that contribute disproportionately to his or her sense of identity. Stryker identifies two elements of commitment that contribute to the positive or negative effects of a particular role on an individual's self-worth within that particular role. For Stryker, commitment refers to both the "extensiveness" (number) and "intensiveness" (importance) of the ties individuals have to others as a consequence of playing certain roles and thus having specific role-identities. A significant role that involves pleasant relations with people who are important to the individual, such as that of a husband or father, can have a positive impact on self-esteem. On the other hand, strained relations with a supervisor or co-workers in the important role of employee can have similarly negative consequences.

I believe that Stryker's concepts of role performance and salience are particularly relevant when studying the importance of a central identity. As a result, for the purposes of this project, I am employing Stryker's structural symbolic interaction framework and concepts from his identity theory as the basis for my view of identity. Stryker (1987) states, "the central proposition of identity theory asserts that commitment impacts identity salience impacts role performance." Athletes who succeed in their sport and go on to sign professional contracts are clearly committed to their roles as athletes. The years of training and sacrifice necessary to attain this success preclude commitment to many other roles. This high level of commitment

thus increases the importance of the role as an athlete among the portfolio of roles that comprise their identity and contributes to the intensity with which they perform their roles. Could such a commitment even limit the number of roles, since competing activities and relationships may be jettisoned to focus on athletics nearly to the exclusion of everything else, thus giving the role of athlete even greater weight?

Beginning from the foundation of Stryker's identity theory, the work of Breakwell (1983, 1986) and Goffman (1952, 1959, 1963) are useful tools for analyzing the possibility of failure in a central identity and the threat it poses to self-esteem. Breakwell's identification of different strategies to cope with the threat of failure is particularly relevant. Breakwell's coping strategies include "intrapyschic" and "interpersonal" strategies. The intrapyschic strategies involve "deflection" (as a defense mechanism), "acceptance" (redefinition and reattribution), and "reevaluation" of the existing or prospective identity content. Interpersonal strategies include "isolation" (minimizing the threat by staying away from others), "negativism" (confronting those posing the threat to identity), "passing" (removing oneself from the threatened identity), and "compliance" (or acquiescence). The relevant work of Goffman, aside from that mentioned above on the performance of roles and self-presentation, includes his work on stigma and reactions to failure. His work on stigma, subtitled "Notes on Management of Spoiled Identities" (1963), identified responses to failed or "spoiled" social identities by those who are stigmatized. People who have suffered devastation and public failure can often bear the shame, humiliation and stigmatization after their "fall."

Over and above the works cited above, it is Goffman's "Cooling the Mark Out" (1952) that is perhaps the most applicable analysis to this research project. In this piece, Goffman explored the experience of an individual's involuntary loss of a social position. The "cooling

out” process for the “mark” (the victim) is an orchestrated dance that attempts to serve as an “adjustment to an impossible situation.” The “cooler” is the person tasked with telling the mark that he or she has failed and who tries to do so in a way that mitigates the negative consequences for both the individual and organization and eases the mark’s transition out of the current position. To accomplish this task, Goffman argued, the cooler can provide an explanation for the failure that blames others for the mark’s failure. An example would be that the mark was told he or she wasn’t being fired for performance deficiencies, but rather that the organizational structure has been changed and the position he or she occupies is being eliminated. Additionally, the mark can be presented with what may be considered acceptable alternatives, for which Goffman states the following examples: “[a] lover may be asked to become a friend; a student of medicine may be asked to switch to the study of dentistry; a boxer may become a trainer.” In other cases, the mark may be allowed a chance to gain more experience and earn his or her position back. A relevant example for this research project is that of a professional baseball player who is sent down to the minor leagues to further develop his skills or prove himself deserving of another chance with the major league club. The work of Goffman, among others, clearly has great relevance for this project and has been used previously by several researchers who have studied professional athletes.

IV. Summary of Selected Research on Athletes

In the detailed description of his research program, Goodman (2001) includes aspiring professional athletes among the list of populations that are reasonable to study as they face the very real possibility of failure. The odds are against any one individual making it to the major leagues, even if he has had great success in college or in a minor league role. Among those fortunate few who do make the major league roster, all but the truly exceptional performer are faced with the threat of an early end to their careers and the loss of their central identity and resultant blow to their self-esteem. These threats include the possibility of a career-ending injury, the deterioration of skills due to age, the physical grind of today's year-round training regimen, the signing of younger prospects who will challenge the older athlete for a position on the team, changes in the club's management or ownership, and possible financial considerations such as a salary cap or revenue sharing system. Even those athletes fortunate enough to have had long and successful careers may have to face failure as their advancing age erodes their physical skills and forces them to retire before they are ready to do so.

Goodman (2001) identifies three studies involving athletes and their career trajectories (Ball, 1976; Faulkner, 1975; Harris and Eitzen, 1978) that he believes are relevant for the study of professional athletes. To these I would add three more (Drahota and Eitzen, 1998; Haerle, 1975; Koukouris, 1994) because of their additional insights and possible contradictions to be investigated.

Robert Faulkner (1975) undertook a study comparing the career contingencies of professional musicians in the second tier of symphony orchestras and hockey players in the highest level of the minor leagues. The study highlighted the concerns of age and the structure

of the organization in which the individuals performed as key considerations for career advancement and mobility. The musicians interviewed felt strongly that once a musician had reached his late thirties or very early forties, he had advanced as far as he could within the ranks of the symphony orchestras. They were cognizant of what they viewed to be a fairly rigid age-related ceiling. The hockey players interviewed had aspirations to be named to a major National Hockey League (NHL) club, but felt strongly that they had a strictly limited number of years during which to attain that goal. Many hockey players do not attend college, especially those who come up through the ranks of Junior Hockey in Canada, and so there is always a new crop of eager teenagers ready to take the place of older players. Thus, the hockey players interviewed felt that they only had until their mid-twenties to make it to the NHL. Advancement to the NHL after age 25 was rare.

Faulkner (1975) also provides strong evidence for the effect that organizational structure had on an individual's ability to advance. At the time Faulkner completed his study, professional hockey was a tightly-controlled, tiered organization with a network of minor league teams controlled by powerful owners. There was a sense among the players that they had little or no ability to control their fate. Players could be sent down to a lower-level minor league team or released altogether with little or no warning, despite having arguably better performance statistics than their teammates who remained.

In contrast, professional symphony musicians belong to no one organization except while they are under contract during the season. The different symphony orchestras are arranged in relatively loose tiers that are based on reputation and prestige but an individual has an opportunity to work towards his own individual goal of advancement. For example, if a cellist wants to become a section leader or "first chair" in a prestigious orchestra, he can choose to

move down in prestige and take that leadership position in a lower-level orchestra. Having gained the necessary experience, he would then be in a position to audition for a leadership position with a more prestigious group when an opening occurs. The musician is free to take his talent to another group as long as positions are available. During the season his position is secure: while he can leave for another opportunity, he cannot be “sent down” by management.

In a study that also highlights the effect of organizational structure on failed athletes, Donald Ball (1976) investigated the differing experience of failure in the worlds of professional baseball and football. Drawing on the work of Garfinkel (1956) and Goffman (1952), Ball argues that those who fail in professional baseball are typically subjected to what amounts to the experience of “status degradation,” while in football it is more likely that the failed athlete will be “cooled out.” Professional baseball, like hockey, consists of a tiered and tightly controlled set of major and minor league teams. There are distinct differences in status and prestige among the different minor league levels (A to AAA) and even more acutely between AAA and the major leagues. Being sent down to a lower level contributes to a sense of “death,” and thus status degradation, according to Ball. To further support his argument for degradation, he uses the terms “deadman” and “non-personage” to describe how the failed baseball player is viewed by his former teammates upon receiving the news of his demotion. Professional football, in contrast, does not have a true professional minor league system, although NFL teams do maintain small but formal practice squads whose players can be activated should a roster player need to be replaced because of injury or poor performance during the season. Players who are released from their NFL teams have an outside chance of being signed by another team, but most do not secure another position and find themselves out of the sport. Thus, the first instance of failure at the professional level for football players often means the end of their playing careers

rather than a demotion to a lesser league or team. Ball thus argues that the failed football player is “cooled out” such that the transition out of football is eased by the organization and his former teammates.

Ball also considers the transition of the players from athlete to former-athlete and how they find another career. He argues that baseball players at the end of their playing days have bleaker prospects for acceptable alternative careers than football players. He attributes this to the fact that football players are more likely to have attended and/or graduated from college than baseball players, who are often drafted out of high school. In addition to the non-athletic skills such educational opportunities provide, the years spent in college provided football players with access to alumni and boosters who can provide valuable career contacts after a failed NFL career, according to Ball.

The studies of Faulkner and Ball highlight the role that organizational structure plays in career mobility. As noted previously, professional baseball is comprised of a multi-tiered minor league system that feeds only a small percentage of players to the major league teams. Players can enter the minor league system at several points in time: immediately after high school (as 32% of the players drafted in 2010 – and 56% of those drafted in the first round), from junior colleges, from four-year colleges and universities after they have reached the age of 21, and at any time after their college graduation. Players can spend years moving through the minor league system (often being promoted and demoted within the same season) and never be brought up to the major leagues. Their opportunity for advancement can be hindered by a younger prospect who happens to play their same position or aided by the injury, retirement, or trade of players ahead of them on the depth chart. If they are released by one organization, they can try out for other organizations, including teams in independent and semi-professional leagues.

Additionally, minor league players at the highest level (typically AAA) can be called up to the major league team during the last two months of the regular season when Major League Baseball allows teams to expand their rosters in order to give the minor leaguers a chance to show their skills to the major league managers in preparation for the following season.

Football is much more straight-forward. It has no minor league system. The NFL rules dictate that a player cannot be drafted by a professional team for at least three years after his class graduates from high school. Thus it is extremely rare for a player to go from high school to the NFL without at least attending junior college. College football acts as a *de facto* minor league, and in fact, every player chosen in the 2010 NFL draft was playing for a college or university the previous fall. A college career, even a short one, is virtually the only path to the pros.

Another difference between the two sports is the sheer number of players drafted. In order to fill positions throughout the minor league system and account for high school players who opt to go to college instead of the pros, Major League baseball selected over 1,500 players in the 2010 draft. In contrast, the 2010 NFL draft included only 255 players. NFL draft picks have only the summer training camp during which to impress the coaching staff and earn a place on the opening day roster. While a select few of those who do not make the roster are kept on the payroll as members of the practice squad, the majority find themselves with no future in the NFL. Some players try to stay in the game by playing in the Canadian Football League (CFL), though the CFL puts a cap on the number of non-Canadian players allowed in the league. Others go to the Arena Football League (AFL). Either way, very few get back into the NFL. The lack of an extensive minor league system in football means that many draft picks reach the end of their professional careers within a year of being drafted. When I began this project I believed that this

difference, rooted in the different organizational structures of the two sports, would prove to be significant.

Harris and Eitzen (1978) investigated the timing of career failures (e.g., before a person's career starts, early in their career, or later) and what difference that made in the consequences of the failure. They assert that it is important to understand why the person fails and what effect this may have on how he copes with failure. For example, did the individual have insufficient skills to succeed, unrealistically high goals, or an inflated sense of his own abilities? Was he victimized by the organizational structure in which he was situated or was the failure the result of some personal attribute or problems unrelated to his athletic performance? Interestingly, while Harris and Eitzen also cite status degradation and cooling out as consequences of failure among athletes, they reverse Ball's assignment of the terms and view baseball players sent down to the minor leagues as those being cooled out and football players released from the team and facing a total separation from the sport as suffering status degradation. I began this project with the expectation that the results would align with Harris and Eitzen rather than Ball, for I foresaw cooling out as being prevalent among baseball players sent down to the minor leagues from the majors (or to a lower level within the minor leagues) since they are given a pathway back to the major leagues. I expected that status degradation – and subsequently treating the failed individual as a “deadman” – would be more prevalent when players are being forced from the sport altogether, as in football where there are very few opportunities to return to the professional ranks after failing.

In his occupational analysis of the careers of professional baseball players, Rudolf Haerle (1975) endeavors to answer some questions of relevance to this research project. These include: What kinds of work do players find after retirement (or failure)? What problems of adjustment

do players face after the end of their playing careers? Does a career in professional baseball provide for later occupational mobility? One of Haerle's key findings, and one that is relevant to the proposed research project, is that at each turning point in a baseball player's career – from the preparation in the years leading up to being drafted to the establishment of a career after baseball – education plays a crucial role. Specifically, Haerle finds that while the retired baseball player's first job is more dependent on his achievement in baseball (based on what he terms the BFI or "baseball fame index"), the man's level of education becomes the predominant indicator of career success over the long term. He concludes that "in short, employers may be initially dazzled by having a well-known athlete connected with their organization, but the ability to produce on the job, associated strongly with years of education, gradually assumes priority." Haerle states that while this was "not unexpected, the documentation of the educational impact on athletic careers is especially significant."

It should be noted that each of the studies summarized to this point was completed before the explosion of professional sports salaries that came about with the advent of free agency and the development of strong players' unions. Recent decades have seen a significant rise in the "league minimum" salaries that even marginal players earn, expanded opportunities for commercial endorsements and other income based on the athlete's visibility and marketability. Free agency and the negotiating power of the players' unions have grown too. All this makes it possible for even marginal big league players to earn a good living as professional athletes, even as critics charge the financial interest overwhelms the players' passion for the sport. Does the influence of money affect the pursuit of "the Dream"? One of my objectives was to determine if recent and dramatic changes in players' income produced different results from these earlier studies.

Konstantinos Koukouris (1994) conducted a study that examined the experiences of European amateur athletes disengaging from Olympic sports. While his study did not include American professional athletes, some of the athletes he interviewed did receive financial support for their training. While acknowledging that his results are not necessarily applicable to professional sports, his investigation into and comparison of voluntary and involuntary exits from competitive sports is relevant to this study. Although the athletes in Koukouris' study identified some problems with their transition away from active competitive sports, many others spoke of the exit from sports as a "rebirth" that allowed them to pursue other interests and be free from the constant rigors and injuries of training. Koukouris identifies factors that were responsible for an athlete's disengagement from sport, but concluded that no single factor could be considered primary. These factors include the extreme and exclusive investment in time and energy required to remain competitive, embarrassment at failing to win or achieve standards set by the athlete and his coach, injuries that were sometimes blamed on coaches and poor training methods, and the exclusion of athletes from the decision-making process of their sports clubs. With regard to the adjustment to life after their athletic careers, Koukouris finds that regardless of whether or not their exit from sports was voluntary, most of the athletes surveyed "experienced elements of rebirth rather than social death" and surmises that "it is more likely that adjustment problems will be experienced by former athletes who are less educated, less successful, and oriented toward the past, or those who have terminated athletic careers abruptly and unwillingly, and who come from a working-class background." The findings on educational attainment are consistent with earlier studies and suggest that higher levels of education are indicators of success in a post-athletic career.

Koukouris further finds that those athletes who come from working-class families have weaker educational backgrounds than those who come from the more privileged ranks in society. Koukouris' results about athletes who have trouble looking forward and hold on to their identities as athletes longer is an example, perhaps, of the concept of the "not-yet-abandoned" self. His results may also indicate that those athletes who fail to create a new central identity for themselves as they reach the end of their athletic careers fare more poorly in the transition to a life after sports than their peers who look towards a new identity more quickly. The difficulty in abandoning the previous identity also seems to have been more difficult for those athletes whose careers ended with little warning and thus allowed them little time to prepare. These findings concerning education and the time to prepare for the end of an athletic career are indeed applicable to this research project.

Drahota and Eitzen (1998) studied the role exit of professional athletes as they left professional sports through retirement, career-ending injury, or being released and unable to find a position with another team. They identify role exit as a particularly trying time for athletes who "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 from others bordering on worship, the money and perquisites of fame, the camaraderie with teammates, and the intense 'highs' of competition." Drahota and Eitzen then ask if there are patterns of behavior that are evident in the role exit of these individuals, citing the work of Helen Ebaugh (1988). Ebaugh outlines the process of abandoning of a role, or of "becoming an ex," and states that it involves four stages. These stages include: experiencing first doubts regarding commitment to the role; searching for acceptable alternative roles; the occurrence of a specific event (turning point) that triggers the role exit; and the creation of a new identity.

Ebaugh (1988) also identifies characteristics that shape the role exit. For example, role exits are easier to negotiate if they are voluntary and potentially reversible. A difference does exist, according to Ebaugh, in the experience of those who exit roles involuntarily. She argues that those individuals do not go through the first two stages (experiencing doubt and seeking alternative roles) before their exit; as the exit is unexpected, they do not have time for those stages of planning for the future. Professional athletes experience involuntary exits in two ways: through a career-ending injury or being cut/released from the team. Both can be unexpected and, except in cases where the injured athlete is seen as a sympathetic and heroic figure, can have devastating consequences for the athlete's self-esteem. Drahotka and Eitzen (1998) also find that the stage of creating the "ex-role" is a difficult one, as many of the athletes that they interviewed could not fully accept they were no longer athletes for years after the end of their careers. They state clearly that "this study revealed that the role of professional athlete is never exited completely. But the problem for athletes is not how to finally be rid of their past identity but rather the challenge of how to live with it." Living with their past identity and successfully incorporating it into their post-playing career identities would suggest an easier transition to a new central identity.

The ability, or lack thereof, of a former professional athlete to move beyond that central identity is described by Goodman as the difference between the "abandoned" versus the "not-yet-abandoned" self (personal communication, 2010). Hence the concept of role exit, and whether or not the process is completed, and how long it took to complete are central to this project.

Drahotka and Eitzen (1998) are the only researchers in this group who include experiencing a career-ending injury among the ways in which an athlete can fail. The other

studies mentioning injuries do not hold that athletes perceive them as a personal failure.

Nonetheless, injuries clearly have a place in the role exit theory previously outlined. My own experience suggests that they have some influence on the process and so I believe injuries are important to include in this research project. The athlete who faces the “what if” scenario can have a difficult time letting go of his or her central identity when the days of competition come to an end so suddenly and unexpectedly.

V. Anticipated Results and Hypotheses

Based upon the results of the previously cited research conducted on athletes, I expected to find how former professional baseball and football players let go of their central identities as athletes and create new ones at the end of their playing careers was related to the following factors:

1. *The different organizational structure of the two sports.* Professional baseball players can remain in the minor leagues for years holding out hope of making it to a major league team whereas professional football players have virtually no alternative path to an NFL roster if they do not make the team directly out of summer training camp. I expected to find that among the athletes who do not achieve lasting professional success, those who spend the fewest years trying to do so will be able to more easily abandon their central identities as professional athletes and create new ones. Stated in more general terms, the more quickly an individual realizes that his dream is no longer attainable, the more easily he can begin to formulate a new, significant, desirable goal for himself (H1).
2. *The level of educational achievement before the end of the athlete's playing career.* I expected my results to reinforce those of earlier studies that indicate that success in a post-playing career is tied to educational attainment. My study, however, included data on educational attainment at the time of being drafted, as well as data on any continuing formal education undertaken during an athlete's playing career. I believed that this might be especially important among baseball players who spent significant time in the minor leagues, as so many of them sign professional contracts right out of high school. Thus, in general, I expected to find

that increased educational attainment makes the transition from a failed central identity less difficult as it provides a greater number of career options (H2).

3. *“Abandoned” versus “not-yet-abandoned self.”* I expected to find that those athletes who could not create successful professional careers and who had difficulty in letting go of their identities as professional athletes would be unable to develop new central identities (H3).

Further, I hypothesized that those athletes whose careers ended abruptly – either by injury or unexpected release from their teams – would have the most difficulty in moving on (H4). I did not expect to find that this result would be more prevalent in one sport than the other, however. In general, then, the ability to move past the failure in a central identity will ease the transition to a new one.

4. *Opportunities for post-playing career made possible by college celebrity status.* College football players, being in the collegiate limelight in one of the dominant revenue-producing sports, may have the opportunity to develop relationships with alumni, boosters and community business owners who can help in job placement at the end of an athlete’s playing career and thus ease the transition to a new career identity (H5). I did not believe collegiate baseball players to have experienced the same opportunities. Thus, if such relationships aided former athletes in beginning a post-playing career, the effect would be limited to football players. I believed that networking, as is promoted in the business world, would also ease the transition out of one career and into another for the former athletes.

Based on the above statements and expected findings, overall I hypothesized that my findings would support, in part, the conclusion of Ball’s 1976 study that former professional football players more easily made the transition from their playing days to a new career than former professional baseball careers (H6). I further hypothesized, by extension, that this

transition was made possible by the ability of the football players to more readily relinquish their central identity as athletes and have more opportunities to create new ones, which is a corollary to H3, above.

However, I also expected to find that the drastic changes that have taken place in professional baseball and football regarding players' salaries in the last three decades would introduce complexity and prevent such neat generalizations that arise from the studies of athletes completed before such changes occurred. Thus I envisioned that experiences of "failed" professional athletes in more recent generations might deviate from those studied in the 1970s (H7). I awaited the results of my research to determine how the experience of failure in a central identity might have changed for younger former professional baseball and football players.

V. Data and Methods

As previously stated, the central focus of my research project was to identify any characteristics or experiences that influence the “failed” professional athlete’s difficulty in creating a new, acceptable self-concept. To determine the consequences of “failure” in a central identity among individuals who have devoted many years to its pursuit, I compared the experiences of former professional baseball players with those of former professional football players using on-line surveys and follow-up interviews. By the term “professional” players, I refer specifically to those baseball and football players who were drafted by Major League Baseball (MLB) or one of the professional football leagues – the National Football League (NFL), Canadian Football League (CFL), or the now-defunct United States Football League (USFL) – or had signed a professional contract for playing at this level. These players may or may not have attended college.

For this study, I initially defined “failed” athletes to be those baseball and football players who ended their professional playing careers without spending two full years at the highest level of their sport. I defined this “highest level” as earning a spot on either a Major League Baseball or National Football League roster during the regular season. The athletes I intended to target had thus come out of high school or college and signed professional contracts with Major League Baseball or the National Football League but had not gone on to the longer and more lucrative careers of which they might have dreamed.

In the early stages of this study, however, I determined it was necessary to broaden the study’s scope beyond those former professional athletes with such short careers. Additionally, testing my questionnaires quickly demonstrated that defining this set of former professional

athletes as having “failed” was problematic for several reasons. First, “failure” can be perceived as a pejorative term. Using it in my survey could have both offended potential respondents and influenced the study’s results by introducing negativity. Many of these athletes take great pride in their accomplishments, even if their career fell short of their own expectations. Being labeled a “failure” was seen as denigrating and it was suggested that it could possibly turn away potential study participants. Given the difficulty I anticipated in identifying and recruiting participants, this seemed unwise. Second, the term “failure” is highly subjective. Failure to one player may mean not being elected to the Hall of Fame after retirement, whereas to another it may mean not being drafted or having the opportunity to play professionally at any level. Thus, I decided to allow the players define for themselves whether they succeeded in their identity as a professional athlete through the free response survey questions and follow-up interviews.

A. Surveys

In seeking information regarding former professional baseball and football players and their transition away from their identities as professional athletes, I created a pair of surveys. The two surveys differed only with regard to sport-specific language (see Appendices) and they were posted on-line using a survey service. The surveys could be completed anonymously if desired. Only those respondents who volunteered for a follow-up interview or requested a copy of study’s results were required to provide their names and contact information.

Identifying potential respondents proved to be as difficult as anticipated. I contacted the offices of the National Football League, the Canadian Football League, Major League Baseball, Minor League Baseball (MiLB), and the players’ and alumni associations of each league and several individual teams, explained the project and requested help in forwarding the information

to former players. None of these organizations offered such assistance. My alternative contact methods (see below) were reasonably effective yet yielded a less varied respondent population than the official organizations would likely have, given their access to all living former professional players.

Using the membership roster of The National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA), I contacted those members who listed their employer as either a National Football League, Major League Baseball or Minor League Baseball organization. Via email, I explained the nature of the study to them and asked if they would be willing to forward the survey information to any former players with whom they were in contact. Several athletic trainers expressed interest in the study and were helpful in recruiting survey respondents. I also sought out former players who currently coach baseball or football at the college level. Targeting the colleges and universities whose players had been drafted in recent years by either MLB or the NFL, I scoured the posted biographies of the baseball and football coaching staff members, contacted those who listed former professional playing experience and requested their participation. I also posted information about the project on several social media sites and was able to contact several former players in this manner. In addition, I used my membership in the alumni association of my *alma mater* to contact fellow alumni members whose names appeared on public listings of former professional baseball and football players. While this particular approach was the most successful at generating study participants, it also led to an over-representation of those with a high level of educational attainment in the study population. Finally, I contacted those respondents who had included contact information with their survey responses and asked them to pass along the survey information and link(s) to any of their former teammates with whom they regularly communicated. Using all of these methods I exceeded my original goal of 100 survey

responses. The surveys gathered information on the respondents' backgrounds, education, professional sports career, any measures taken to prepare for life after their sports career, and whether or not they have found and are satisfied with a new career identity.

I received survey responses from 133 former professional athletes: 66 former baseball players and 57 former football players. Of these 133 responses, 20 surveys were set aside as the respondents did not answer enough of the questions to consider their responses valid for comparison purposes. The population of respondents was not as racially balanced as the sports themselves have been in recent years, with 79.6% of total respondents identifying themselves as white, 18.6% as African-American, 0.9% as Hispanic, and 0.9% as Asian or Pacific Islander (Chart 1, below). The breakdown for baseball was 96% white, 2% African-American and 2% Hispanic. For football it was 60% white, 38% African-American and 2% Asian or Pacific Islander. By comparison a 2010-11 breakdown of U.S. professional sports described MLB as 62% white, 9% African-American, 27% Latino/Hispanic and 2% Asian, and the NFL as 30% white, 67% African-American, 1% Latino/Hispanic and 2% Asian (Chart 2, below).¹

¹ Sources of data: The University of Central Florida, National Consortium on Academics and Sports (NCAS) -- <http://www.bus.ucf.edu/documents/sport/2010-NFL-Racial-and-Gender-Report-Card.pdf> and http://bus.ucf.edu/documents/sport/2011_MLB_RGRG_FINAL.pdf

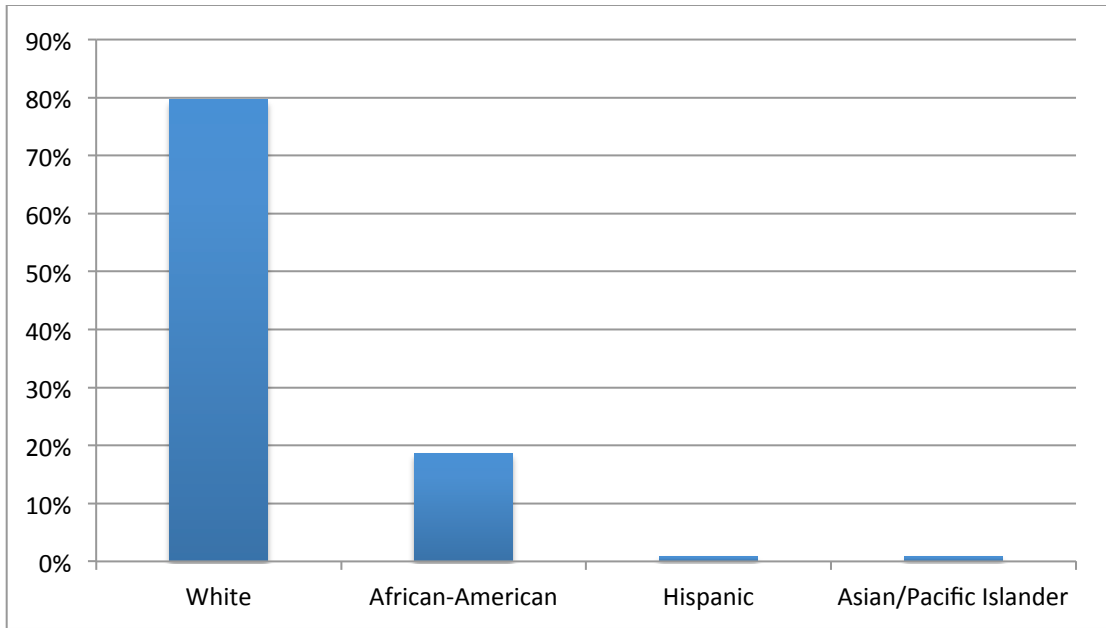


Chart 1: Racial breakdown, by percentage, of survey respondents

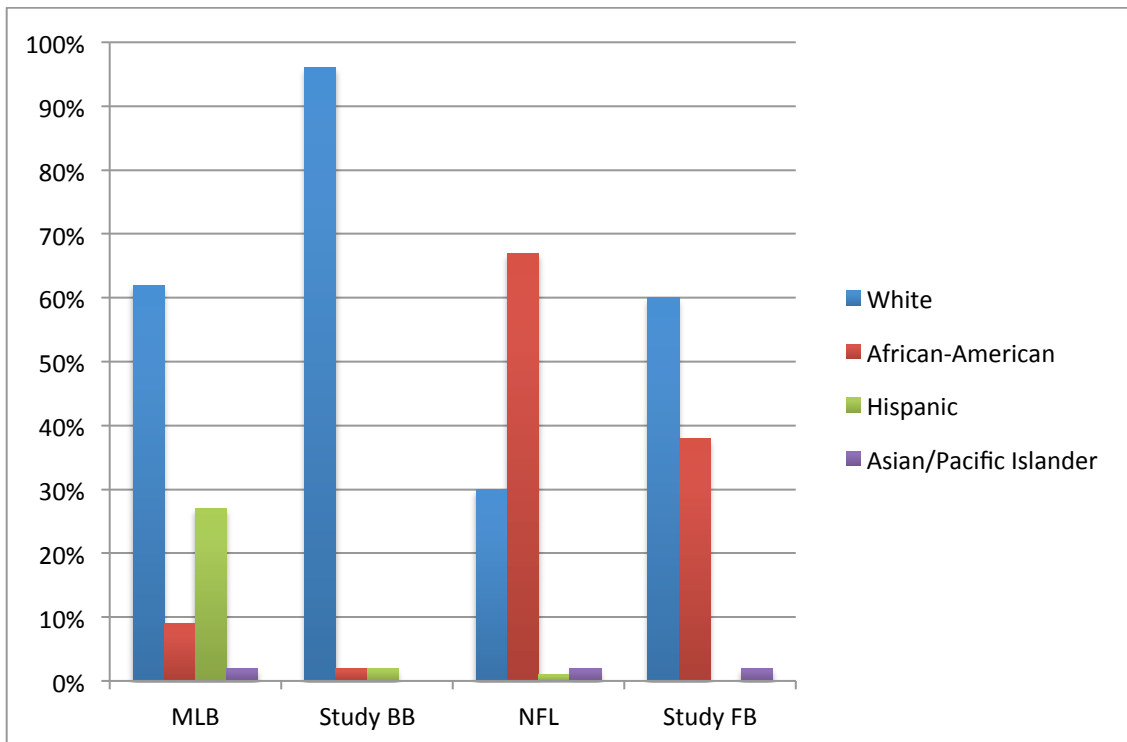


Chart 2: Racial breakdown of MLB Players (2010-11), NFL Players (2010-11), and Survey Respondents (Study BB & Study FB)

Much of this difference, especially the drastic under-representation of Hispanics among the baseball players, is likely due to the fact that I limited my sample to players born or educated from an early age in the United States. I assert that the growing numbers of professional baseball players who come to this country as teenagers from Latin America represent what I believe to be a very different population with very different experiences. I excluded them from my study for this reason.

Another difference in the background of the survey respondents and the population of professional baseball and football players can be found in the level of educational attainment at the time each player signed his first professional contract. The survey population was over-represented compared with the larger population of all former athletes with men who had graduated from college by the start of their professional sports careers. Among the survey respondents 53.1% were college graduates – 35% of baseball players and 73.6% of football players had graduated from college before beginning their professional sports careers. Recent studies show that number to be very high in comparison with the current population of professional baseball and football players. A 2009 Wall Street Journal survey of media guides for all Major League Baseball team reported only 26 current players and managers listed as having four-year degrees.² While that does not count for players in the minor leagues, it is a surprisingly low figure. Football players fare better in terms of college graduation rates. While it was estimated that in the mid-1990s only 30% of NFL players had college degrees, an effort by the league to reach out to players and help them continue their education by the NFL's Player Development Program had increased the college degree completion rate to 46% by 2004.³

² <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124511558996917441.html>

³ http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4200/is_20040830/ai_n10175672/

An effort by the NFL to address the educational needs of its players is often cited as necessary because of the short careers of professional football players. Overall, it is widely reported that the average length of a professional football career is 3.5 years.⁴ The saying among football players that you are “always just one play away from the end of your career” (due to injury) is well known. For professional baseball players, the average career is 5.6 years in length, according to a 2007 study.⁵ Among survey respondents, the average career length was longer than each of these numbers – 6.7 years among the baseball players and 6.4 years among the football players who completed the surveys. However, I do not believe that these differences make my population significantly different than the general population of professional baseball and football players. There are many factors that influence length of career, most especially in what round each player was drafted. In fact, according to the NFL, among those players who make the opening-day rosters of their teams as a rookie year, the average career rises to 6 years in length.⁶

In trying to capture the experiences of former athletes who played before and after the advent of free agency, strong players’ unions, and large salaries, I sought out former professional players to include who were members of what I am calling the “older generation” – those born in 1960 or earlier. The respondent population comprises 30.1% of those players, while 69.9% were born after 1960.

⁴ <http://nflcommunications.com/2011/04/18/what-is-average-nfl-player%E2%80%99s-career-length-longer-than-you-might-think-commissioner-goodell-says/>

⁵ <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2007/07/070709131254.htm>

⁶ <http://nflcommunications.com/2011/04/18/what-is-average-nfl-player%E2%80%99s-career-length-longer-than-you-might-think-commissioner-goodell-says/>

To find out whether the results I anticipated were supported by the survey data, I ran analyses using SPSS to test for relationships and determine if any relationships found were strong enough to be considered statistically significant using the *chi-square test*. I also worked with the data to create additional variables to support additional analyses. Such variables included creating different time scales for the questions regarding the length of time for respondents to find a new career identity or to become satisfied with it, as well as grouping responses as to how a respondent's playing career ended into a binary variable of voluntary/involuntary. This was necessary to have enough responses in a particular category to run a meaningful analysis. I used these derivative variables to identify any additional relationships.

B. Interviews

In order to get additional information beyond the surveys, I asked respondents whether they would be willing to take part in a follow-up interview. A majority (66%) of the survey respondents volunteered to be contacted for a follow-up interview. Although I was unable to contact and arrange interviews with all of those individuals, in the end I was able to complete 44 interviews. I conducted 43 of the 44 interviews by phone and one in person. I used semi-structured and open-ended interviews to collect more detailed information from the subjects than was possible with the survey. The survey took the average respondent 20 minutes to complete, whereas the average interview lasted 50 minutes, with several stretching to nearly two hours. This additional time allowed me to gather much more detailed information from the participants and ask more complex questions. While I devised a basic script for the interviews (see Appendices), each interview each took a different path as the former players were asked to begin by describing their professional sports careers and each man had a very different story. Despite

this individuality, each subject answered every scripted question at some point during his interview. The responses to the interview questions were coded and those variables included in the data tables. The variables added from the interviews included a measure of how easy a player's transition was to life after their sports career, whether they were unhappy with the way their sports career ended, whether they mentioned education as being important to their success after their sports career, and whether they had teammates who they felt were at a loss in planning for their future after sports because they lacked education. These data were included in tests for relationships based on the set of anticipated results. Additionally, answers to open-ended questions in both the surveys and interviews, as well as anecdotal information from the interviews, were recorded for use as illustrative examples for the arguments to follow.

C. Sports Memoirs and Biographies

As another source of information and for comparative purposes, I selected seven examples of the experience of the end of an athlete's playing career from the wealth of available biographies and memoirs of former athletes. I looked not only for evidence to support or contradict the personal accounts I received from respondents, but also to compare the experiences across different generations of players. Consequently, I studied biographies and memoirs of athletes in each era. For example, in the decades before free agency, players' unions, and skyrocketing salaries, I expected to find written evidence of players needing to work during the off-season and thus possessing work experience that would prove valuable at the end of their playing careers. Conversely, I expected that more recent writers would focus on the generous salaries paid even to those players making the league minimum and thus not prominently include information regarding preparation for life after a playing career.

Another area I wanted to investigate was the experience of players either being cut from their team or sent down to a lower level, such as the minor leagues in baseball. My intent was to resolve the discrepancy regarding those experiences as being labeled either “cooling out” or “status degradation” and to determine under what circumstances each was likely to occur (Ball, 1976; Harris and Eitzen, 1978). The examples from each of the memoirs and biographies were recorded for this purpose. In addition, several interviewees were also asked about their experience of being traded or sent down and how their teammates reacted and treated them at the time. These sources provided anecdotal evidence for use in either supporting or contradicting the findings from the memoirs and earlier research.

VI. Results

A. Quantitative Data – Survey Responses

As mentioned previously, 133 former professional baseball and football players responded to my survey, and all but 20 of those completed the survey fully and are included in my data.

Analysis of the survey data was performed to test whether the results supported the proposed hypotheses. There were limitations with the data given the relatively small number of survey respondents. Some responses had to be combined into a smaller number of response categories to create sufficiently large cells for a valid analysis. The small number of responses and particular characteristics of the population of survey respondents prevent any generalizations for the population of all former professional baseball and football players. The main purposes of the survey were to identify key characteristics of the respondent population, collect information about their background before they became professional athletes, learn some basic facts about the length and relative success of their professional sports career, and, perhaps most importantly, allow those who would later take part in an interview to think back on the transition away from their sports career. As many of the respondents were a decade or more removed from the start of this transition, I viewed this as a valuable tool. I coded the survey response variables and performed analysis using SPSS to test whether the data supported my hypotheses.

H1: The shorter the athlete's career, the easier it was for him to make the transition to a new, satisfying career identity.

To determine if the data supported this hypothesis, I used a measure of the length of the respondent's career as the independent variable. The range of responses extended from 0 to 18 years but the counts of discrete years were too small for valid analysis. To compensate, I created

an ordinal variable for the length of career to allow for a more even distribution of responses: a “short” career included all respondents whose careers lasted up to three years, “medium” included careers from four to six years in length, and “long” included all athletes with careers that lasted at least seven years. These categories followed empirical breaks in the response data.

The dependent variables used in analyzing this hypothesis included measures indicating:

- Whether the former professional athlete had found a new career identity and, if so, how long it took him to find his new career identity
- Whether the former professional athlete is satisfied with his new career identity and, if so, how long it took him to become satisfied with his new career identity

I also ran the analysis controlling for the generation of the player (those born before 1961 and those born in 1961 or later) to determine if free agency and the accompanying salary increases affected the relationship between the length of a player’s career and how long it took him to find a new, satisfying career identity.

The only analyses of the full survey data set that showed a statistically significant relationship were those between the length of the respondent’s career and the time to find a new career identity. This relationship was significant with a value = 0 .045 level for all respondents when including those who answered that they had not yet found a new career identity (Table H1.1). When those responses were removed from the data the relationship the significance rose to the 0.023 level (Table H1.2). Both analyses indicate that the professional athletes with shorter careers were more likely than the others to find a new career identity in less than one year.

Table H1.1: Length of athletic career and length of time to find a new career identity (including respondents who have not yet found a new career identity)

How Long to Find a New Career Identity				
Length of Sports Career	1 Year or Less	More than 1 Year	Not Yet Found	Total
Short	19 (68%)	7 (25%)	2 (7%)	28
Medium	16 (43%)	16 (43%)	5 (14%)	37
Long	15 (31%)	24 (50%)	9 (19%)	48
TOTAL	50	47	16	113

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	9.761 ^a	4	0.045
Likelihood Ratio	9.886	4	0.042
N of Valid Cases	113		

a. 1 cell (11.1%) has an expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.96.

Table H1.2: Length of athletic career and length of time to find a new career identity (excluding respondents who have not yet found a new career identity)

How Long to Find a New Career Identity			
Length of Sports Career	1 Year or Less	More than 1 Year	Total
Short	19 (73%)	7 (27%)	26
Medium	16 (50%)	16 (50%)	32
Long	15 (38%)	24 (62%)	39
TOTAL	50	47	97

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	7.530 ^a	2	0.023
Likelihood Ratio	7.757	2	0.021
N of Valid Cases	97		

a. 0 cells have expected counts less than 5. The minimum expected count is 12.60.

While separating the data by generation produced no significant relationship among the older subjects, there were two statistically significant results among the younger generation. As above, the relationship between the length of their athletic career and the time to find a new career identity was significant for both the full set of respondents (P-Value = 0.026, Table H1.3) and for those who responded that they had indeed found a new career identity (P-Value = 0.014, Table H1.4). Thus for the younger generation of players, the relationship between a short professional athletic career and spending less than a year to find a new career identity is more pronounced than for the total study population as a whole.

Table H1.3: Length of athletic career and length of time to find a new career identity (including respondents who have not yet found a new career identity) in respondents born in 1961 or later.

How Long to Find a New Career Identity				
Length of Sports Career	1 Year or Less	More than 1 Year	Not Yet Found	Total
Short	15 (71%)	4 (19%)	2 (10%)	21
Medium	13 (43%)	13 (43%)	4 (13%)	30
Long	7 (25%)	14 (50%)	7 (25%)	28
TOTAL	35	31	13	79

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	11.018 ^a	4	.026
Likelihood Ratio	11.309	4	.023
N of Valid Cases	79		

a. 3 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.46.

Table H1.4: Length of athletic career and length of time to find a new career identity (excluding respondents who have not yet found a new career identity) in respondents born in 1961 or later.

How Long to Find a New Career Identity			
Length of Sports Career	1 Year or Less	More than 1 Year	Total
Short	15 (79%)	4 (21%)	19
Medium	13 (50%)	13 (50%)	26
Long	7 (33%)	14 (67%)	21
TOTAL	35	31	66

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	8.491 ^a	2	0.014
Likelihood Ratio	8.919	2	0.012
N of Valid Cases	66		

a. 0 cells have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 8.92.

The data showed no statistically significant relationship between the length of career and the subjects' satisfaction with either their new career identity or the time it took them to become satisfied with their new career identity. Thus my conclusion is that based on the survey data there is only weak evidence to support this hypothesis as the only statistically significant relationships that exist are between the length of the career and the time to find a new career identity. The data fail to reveal a relationship between the length of career and satisfaction with a new career identity.

H2: The higher the level of educational attainment, the easier the transition to a new, satisfying career identity

The independent variable used for the analysis of this hypothesis was the level of educational attainment by the athlete at the time he signed his first professional contract. For football players, this response was always at least one year of college -- although players can be drafted who have not attended college, they are the exception and none were present in the study population.

Baseball has different rules, though. Baseball players can be drafted at four points:

- After they graduate from high school
- After they complete one or more years of junior college
- During college when they have reached the age of 21 (typically after their junior year)
- After they have completed college

This provided more varied responses than for the former football players. The dependent variables were the same as those used for the analysis of H1 and I also ran a set of analyses by generation of the respondents.

Statistically significant relationships were found in several of the analyses using different groupings of educational attainment prior to a professional sports career and length of time to find a new career identity. These included a relationship between completing at least three years of college and finding a new career identity (P-Value = 0.013, Table H2.1) indicating that those athletes who had attended college for at least three years were more likely to have found a new career identity by the time they were surveyed.

Table H2.1: Level of educational attainment at the start of the professional athletic career and whether a new career identity had been found

Have You Found a New Career Identity			
Educational Attainment Before Turning Pro			Total
	Yes	No	
Less than 3 yrs. College	9 (64%)	5 (36%)	14
3 or more years College	88 (89%)	11 (11%)	99
Total	97	19	113

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.108 ^a	1	.013
Continuity Correction ^b	4.252	1	.039
Likelihood Ratio	4.855	1	.028
Fisher's Exact Test			
N of Valid Cases	113		

a. 1 cell (25%) has expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.98.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table.

Several analyses of the older generation of players found statistically significant relationships between the level of educational attainment of the subject and both the subject’s ability to find a satisfying new career identity and the time required to establish their new career identity. While the analysis also shows a statistically significant relationship between education and the time to find a new career identity (Tables H2.2, H2.3), it found none between education

and the time to become satisfied with a new career identity. However, given that more time had passed for this older generation of respondents, this “finding” may be just that the additional time allowed them to find a new career identity, rather than revealing a true relationship between their level of educational attainment and their new career identities. Thus these findings for the older generation cannot be taken to support this hypothesis.

Table H2.2: Level of educational attainment at the start of the professional athletic career and if a new career identity had been found among respondents born before 1961

Have You Found a New Career Identity			
Educational Attainment Before Turning Pro	Yes	No	Total
Less than 3 yrs. College	1 (33%)	2 (67%)	3
3 or more years College	30 (97%)	1 (3%)	31
Total	31	3	34

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	13.684 ^a	1	.000
Continuity Correction ^b	6.934	1	.008
Likelihood Ratio	7.639	1	.006
N of Valid Cases	34		

- a. 3 cells (75.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .26.
- b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Table H2.3: Level of educational attainment at the start of the professional athletic career and time to find a new career identity among respondents born before 1961

How Long to Find a New Career Identity				
College Graduate	1 Year or Less	1-2 Years	3 or More Years	Total
Yes	13 (65%)	2 (10%)	5 (25%)	20
No	2 (18%)	4 (36%)	5 (45%)	11
Total	15	6	10	31

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.684 ^a	2	0.035
Likelihood Ratio	7.043	2	0.030
N of Valid Cases	31		

- a. 3 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.13.

Among the younger generation, statistically significant relationships emerged for all respondents between education and both the time to find a new career identity and the time to become satisfied with it. However, when one excludes those who answered that they have not yet found or become satisfied with a new career identity, only one relationship remains statistically significant (Table H2.4), but the direction of the relationship is mixed. While college graduates were more likely than high school graduates to find a new career identity in one year or less, the group of respondents who attended but did not graduate from college before turning pro were the group that was slightly more likely to find a new career identity in one year or less.

Table H2.4: Level of educational attainment at the start of the professional athletic career and time to find a new career identity among respondents born in 1961 or later.

Educational Attainment Before Turning Pro	How Long to Find a New Career Identity		
	1 Year or Less	More than 1 Year	Total
High School	2 (33%)	4 (67%)	6
Some College	21 (70%)	9 (30%)	30
College Graduate	12 (40%)	18 (60%)	30
Total	35	31	66

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.448 ^a	2	.040
Likelihood Ratio	6.582	2	.037
N of Valid Cases	66		

a. 2 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.82.

Given that the relationships that were found were few, my conclusion is that there is only limited evidence from the survey data to support this hypothesis.

H3: Individuals who hang onto their athletic identity will have greater difficulty finding a new, satisfying career identity than those who do not.

In investigating this hypothesis, the independent variable used was whether the survey respondents indicated that they still viewed themselves as professional athletes, despite being no longer active in their baseball or football careers. As with the previous analyses, the dependent variables were the length of time to find a new career identity after the end of the professional sports career, and the length of time to become satisfied with that new identity. Also as above, I ran the analyses controlling for the generation of the players.

The data show no statistically significant correlation between a former player still viewing himself as a professional athlete and the time to find a new career identity or become satisfied with a new career identity. Thus my conclusion is that there is no evidence from the survey to support this hypothesis.

H4: Those individuals whose athletic careers ended involuntarily will have more difficulty in finding a new, satisfying career identity than those who voluntarily retired from their professional athletic career.

In order to determine if a survey respondent ended his sports career voluntarily or involuntarily I included a survey question asking how the respondent's career ended. The response choices were "voluntarily," "due to injury," "being cut from the team due to performance," "being released from the team due to financial considerations," or "other" (no responses were received for other). I collapsed all the responses other than retiring voluntarily into a response labeled "involuntary." I used this measure as the independent variable to assess this hypothesis. I again used for the dependent variables of the length of time to find a new career identity after the end of the professional sports career and the length of time to become satisfied with that new identity. Also as above, I ran the analyses controlling for the generation of the players. The analyses yielded no statistically significant and thus my conclusion is that there is not support for this hypothesis from the survey data.

H5: Due to their "celebrity status" on college campuses, football players more than baseball players will have assistance from contacts they made during their college years and those contacts will help them more quickly transition to a new, satisfying career identity after their professional sports careers are over.

In attempting to validate this hypothesis I divided my respondents by sport. The independent variable used was whether the respondents replied that they received assistance from anyone they met during their college careers in finding a job after the end of their playing careers. The dependent variables used were the length of time to find a new career identity after

the end of the professional sports career and the length of time to become satisfied with that new identity. Also as above, I ran the analyses controlling for the generation of the players.

The data show no significant difference between those baseball players who attended college and football players (all of whom attended college) with regard to their reporting that they received assistance from a college contact in finding a new career. Thus my conclusion is that there is no evidence from the survey data to support this hypothesis.

H6: Former professional football players make the transition to a new, satisfying career identity more easily after the end of their playing careers than do former professional baseball players.

In the analysis of this hypothesis, the independent variable used was the sport the respondent played. Again, the dependent variables used were the length of time to find a new career identity after the end of the professional sports career and the length of time to become satisfied with that new identity. Also as above, I ran the analyses controlling for the generation of the players.

The survey data show no statistically significant relationships between the sport played and the time either to find or become satisfied with a new career identity. Thus my conclusion is that there is no evidence from the survey data to support this hypothesis.

H7: Do other differences exist between the two "generations" of players?

In determining empirical support for differences based on generations, I used the year of birth of the player as the independent variable. Those men who were born before 1961 constitute the older generation, while those born later comprise the younger generation. While in previous analyses I used generation as a control variable and also split the survey respondents into

generational groups and ran analyses on each group separately, I also ran analyses with generation as the independent variable and the following dependent variables:

- the length of time to find a new career identity
- the length of time to become satisfied with a new career identity
- the level of educational attainment when signing the athlete's first professional sports contract
- whether the athlete pursued job training during his athletic career
- when the athlete began thinking about a career after sports (before, during or after the end of his athletic career).

I used these analyses to determine if there were any inherent differences between the two groups based on generation that presumably could be attributed to the changes that free agency and increasing players' salaries that came along subsequently.

The data show a statistically significant relationship (P-Value = 0.048; Table H7.1) between the player's generation and the time to become satisfied with a new career identity. Players in the older generation became satisfied with their new career identities more quickly than those in the younger generation.

Table H7.1: Generation of player and the length of time to become satisfied with a new career identity

How Long to Become Satisfied with New Career Identity				
Generation	Less Than 2 Yrs.	2 - 5 Yrs.	5 or More Yrs.	Total
Pre-1961	18 (60%)	7 (23%)	5 (17%)	30
1961 or Later	28 (53%)	23 (44%)	2 (3%)	53
Total	46	30	7	83

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.087 ^a	2	.048
Likelihood Ratio	6.054	2	.048
N of Valid Cases	83		

a. 2 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.53.

The data also show a statistically significant relationship (P-Value = 0.00; Table H7.2) between a player’s generation and whether or not he pursued job training during his athletic career. Members of the older generation were much more likely to have pursued job training during the off-seasons than members of the younger generation.

Table H7.2 – Generation of the player and whether he pursued job training during his athletic career

Job Training Pursued During Career			
Generation	Yes	No	Total
Pre-1961	24 (71%)	10 (29%)	34
1961 or Later	22 (28%)	57 (72%)	79
Total	46	67	113

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	17.990 ^a	1	.000
Continuity Correction ^b	16.262	1	.000
Likelihood Ratio	18.073	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	113		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 13.84.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Thus my conclusion is that the survey data identify differences between the generation of players that seem to be linked to the significantly smaller salaries of professional athletes in the time before free agency and strong players unions, as will be discussed below.

Additional Findings from the Survey Data

Beyond investigating the seven hypothesis laid out for this project, I also looked for other results within the survey data that were worthy of note. The survey data show a statistically

significant relationship (P-Value = 0.013; Table H8.1) between the sport played and whether the player began to think about a post-sports career before, during, or after his athletic career. The majority of football players began to think about another career before the start of their professional football career began, while the majority of baseball players thought about a post-sports career during their professional baseball career.

Table H8.1: Sport played and when the athlete began to think about a career after sports

	When Did You Start Thinking About Post-Sports Career?			
Sport Played	Before Pro Career	During Pro Career	After Pro Career	Total
Baseball	16 (27%)	32 (53%)	12 (20%)	60
Football	28 (53%)	16 (30%)	9 (17%)	53
Total	44	48	21	113

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	8.634 ^a	2	.013
Likelihood Ratio	8.747	2	.013
N of Valid Cases	113		

a. 0 cells have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 9.85.

Many of the interviews with former football players support this finding as they remarked that as a football player “you are always just one play away” from a career-ending injury and that was the reason they had to be thinking about another career earlier on. This, I would argue, would partially support the assertion that football players would have an easier transition than baseball players (H6), but neither the survey nor interview data support any such broad relationship.

B. Qualitative Data – Interview Responses and Sports Memoirs

The information obtained through interviews with the respondents and from a selected sports memoirs was also studied to determine whether there was support for my hypotheses. In some cases there was not documented support but enough of an indication of support to suggest that future investigation is warranted.

The interviews I conducted with 44 of the survey respondents allowed me to obtain information beyond what was gathered from the survey. The interviews were semi-structured, with each interviewee being asked the same set of initial questions, but as the interviews touched on many emotional issues, each took a slightly different path. The interviews thus became extended conversations with each former athlete telling of his unique journey through the transition away from a career in professional sports. Despite the varied nature of these responses, I was able to code and compare responses in areas that could then be used to determine whether they supported my initial hypotheses.

H1: The shorter the athlete’s career, the easier it was for him to make the transition to a new, satisfying career identity.

To determine from the interviews whether there was a relationship between the length of a respondent's professional sports career and the relative ease of the transition to a new career identity I created an additional variable to use in my analysis. While it was evident from the interviews that all the interviewees experienced regret at the end of their professional sports careers, it was possible to differentiate and code their transition based on the relative difficulties they experienced as "easy," "moderate" or "difficult." Regardless of the length and relative success of their sports careers and how ready they were to move on, all the former athletes expressed a degree of sadness at the loss of their athletic career and their identity as professional athletes. However, they differed in the extent to which they related struggling with the transition and for how long. This is the information that was used to divide the transition experiences into the three categories, paying particular attention to the emotion expressed and words used to describe the experience. The range extended from "minor adjustment" to life after sports to "hellish."

Using this as a dependent variable, as with the other variables from the surveys, to determine if a relationship existed between the ease of the transition and the length of time for a respondent to find and become satisfied with a new career identity, I determined that there was no statistically significant relationship. Thus the interview data does not support this hypothesis.

While I was unable to find any explicit mention of career length as it relates to the transition to a life after sports in the selected memoirs I surveyed, there was one instance of a player not wanting to be led on if he had no chance at advancement. Baseball player Dirk Hayhurst (2010) writes of wanting to be told directly and quickly if his minor league coaches or managers believed he had no chance at making it to the major leagues. He notes that being given

false hope would prolong his agony and delay his start at a life out of baseball. This one entry, however, is not enough to show any support for this hypothesis.

H2: The higher the level of educational attainment, the easier the transition to a new, satisfying career identity

In determining whether the interview data provided support for this hypothesis, I again used the ease of transition as a dependent variable in my analysis. No statistically significant relationship was found between the interview subjects' level of educational attainment and the ease of transition to a new career identity, but the interviews provided some anecdotal evidence of the existence of a relationship.

Though not asked directly whether their education helped the transition after the end of their professional sports careers, 27 of the 44 subjects (61%) interviewed voluntarily stated strongly that a solid college education (with a degree earned) was very important to their success after sports. Similarly, 27 (though not all the same subjects as just mentioned) responded that they played with teammates without a solid college education and perceived it to be a real problem for those players who feared life after sports and had no plan for what they were going to do after they could no longer play. However, there was no statistically significant relationship among the interviewees between educational attainment and ease of transition. Thus my conclusion is that the interview data does not directly support the hypothesis, but provides evidence that further investigation may be warranted.

Educational attainment was also important for three of the players whose memoirs I studied for this project, Doug Glanville (2010), Matt McCarthy (2009), and Robert Smith (2004). Glanville and McCarthy had degrees from Ivy League institutions to fall back on after their

athletic careers ended and although Smith left college before graduating, he was a diligent and serious student who publicly espoused the value of his education and has gone back to finish his degree since his retirement from professional football. Thus there is some evidence from selected sports memoirs to support this hypothesis.

H3: Individuals who hang onto their athletic identity will have greater difficulty finding a new, satisfying career identity than those who do not.

To investigate this hypothesis there was no variable I could create to use for analysis and thus could produce no data to support or fail to support this hypothesis. The discussions with the interview subjects did, however, produce some interesting material regarding how the former athletes incorporate their past careers into their current lives and to what extent. My study of selected sports memoirs, however, did reveal an explicit effort by two former football players to leave their careers behind them and they expressed a determination to earn success in another field that would allow them to be thought of as more than just a former pro athlete. This will be discussed, below, in an examination of Goodman's (2010) concepts of the "abandoned self" and the "not-yet-abandoned self," and my identification of a concept I term the "nostalgic self" and the implications for the ability of an individual to successfully create a new identity after the loss of that of professional athlete.

H4: Those individuals whose athletic careers ended involuntarily will have more difficulty in finding a new, satisfying career identity than those who voluntarily retired from their professional athletic career.

To gain a greater understanding beyond the survey data on how a player's career ended, during the interviews I asked the respondents not only how the end of their career came but also how they felt about it. From their responses I was able to determine whether they felt their careers had ended "poorly." The responses that allowed me to create a variable for this included not only the reasons listed on the survey but also responses from some who felt that there was a political reason they were forced out, even if they made the decision to retire themselves and thus it was a voluntary exit. I used these responses as independent variable to assess this hypothesis. I used again as the dependent variable the ease of the transition to a non-sports identity.

The only analyses that showed significant relationships between how the subject's athletic career ended and the ease with which he found a new career identity were found among the interview subjects (P-Value =0.003; Table H4.1). Among the interviewees, those who felt their careers did not end poorly had an easier transition to life after their sports careers. While a player feeling that his career did not end poorly does not necessarily equate to a player retiring voluntarily, it does indicate that players who left their sports under less difficult circumstances had an easier time making the transition to life after their professional sports careers. Thus my conclusion is that there is evidence from the interview data to support this hypothesis.

Table H4.1: Whether or not the interviewee indicated that he was unhappy with the way his athletic career ended and the ease of his transition to a new identity.

Ease of Transition				
Did Career End Poorly?	Easy	Moderate	Difficult	Total
Yes	7 (30%)	7 (30%)	9 (40%)	23
No	17 (81%)	1 (5%)	3 (14%)	21
Total	24	8	12	44

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	11.600 ^a	2	.003
Likelihood Ratio	12.407	2	.002
N of Valid Cases	44		

a. 2 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.82.

H5: Due to their “celebrity status” on college campuses, football players more than baseball players will have assistance from contacts they made during their college years and those contacts will help them more quickly transition to a new, satisfying career identity after their professional sports careers are over.

To follow-up on the survey question regarding whether the respondent had received help with their transition to a new career from anyone they met during their college careers, I asked the interview subjects about this directly. Only three of the interview subjects mentioned receiving any significant help from anyone they knew in college. However, in two of the cases it

was a friend or fraternity brother, rather than a local businessman or athletic “booster,” who helped them. Thus my conclusion is that there is no evidence from the interviews to support this hypothesis.

H6: Former professional football players make the transition to a new, satisfying career identity more easily after the end of their playing careers than do former professional baseball players.

In order to determine whether the interview data support this hypothesis I again used the ease of transition as a dependent variable. There was no statistically significant relationship found between the sport played and the ease of transition to a new career identity after the end of the professional sports career. Thus my conclusion is that there is no support from the interview data for this hypothesis.

H7: Do other differences exist between the two “generations” of players?

Interviews with players from the older generation provide evidence for difference between the generations of players. Many of the interview subjects remarked that they knew their athletic careers were unlikely to provide enough money for them to live on after retirement. They noted the importance of exploring job opportunities during their playing careers as a means of providing themselves with a more secure financial future. The younger players interviewed, who stood to earn much larger salaries than their predecessors, did not feel the need to pursue job training for financial reasons.

Thus my conclusion is that the interview data identify differences between the generation of players that seem to be linked to the significantly smaller salaries of professional athletes in the time before free agency and strong players unions.

Additional Findings from the Interviews

The interviews provided the richest source of information about how each player dealt with the loss of his central identity as a professional athlete at the end of his playing career. Additional information was gathered on questions included in the survey during these interviews, while topics not included in the survey were also raised and suggested interesting areas for further investigation.

Eight of the subjects interviewed reported that at least one member of their family had a very difficult time accepting their retirement from sports since part of the *family member's* identity was wrapped up in being related to a professional athlete. This was not a topic specifically covered on the survey, however I was prompted to ask the interview subjects about it as one survey respondent included a lengthy answer to an open-ended question detailing how difficult it was for his family to come to terms with the end of his playing career. Regardless of the player's advancement to the major leagues, the effect of his retirement on the family dynamics can lead to a very high probability of divorce. Players from each sport corroborated the frequency of divorce. Some said that 90% of their former teammates who were married during their playing careers divorced soon after retirement. This was an issue I had not intended to study, but the interview responses suggest it as a possibly valuable topic for future investigation and speaks further to the emotional trauma experienced by many of these players at the end of their athletic careers.

Thirteen of the interview subjects reported needing to find something to do (job, parenthood, coaching, players association/alumni association involvement) to replace the “glory” or “importance” of their past sports careers. Until they did so, they could not complete the transition away from their identity as a professional athlete. I was able to follow up on this issue through the interviews and found several players who struggled to find something they could excel at again.

Contrary to the assertion that the central identity of a professional athlete is completely overwhelming and consuming, 14 interview subjects stated strongly that they were not “defined” by their sport. A few, in fact, worried at the end of their careers that people would view them or judge them solely on the basis of their athletic careers. This was somewhat of a surprise to me. There were also a handful of players who reported being relieved at the end of their careers. Yet, as mentioned above, even those players who seemed ready and accepting of their end of the professional sports careers often spoke in their interviews of regret.

One particular area of note from the interviews was how few players mentioned the need to find a job to earn money after their athletic careers were over. Athletes who were in a position to earn very high salaries were in the minority in my subject pool (for example, only a small percentage of the baseball players in this study ever made it out of the minor leagues), yet financial concerns clearly took a back seat to the need to feel important, accomplished, and recognized. Thus the issues surrounding the psychological aspects of the transition suggest the more intriguing areas for future study, not the objective measures like educational attainment, length of career, or generation.

VII. Discussion

A. Results vs. Hypotheses

The results of this study were far from conclusive for most of the hypotheses. Regarding the expected relationship between the length of the professional athletic career and the ease of the transition to a new identity (H1), the survey data showed only weak support for those with a shorter career having an easier time, while the interview data showed no support at all for this hypothesis. As with all the hypotheses, we can question whether the composition of the respondent pool and its relatively small size influenced the results. In this instance, it is conceivable that the relatively high level of educational attainment contributed to this, as a greater percentage of college graduates (including several from prestigious colleges and universities) participated in this research study than are present in the ranks of professional baseball and football overall. It may be that those with higher levels of educational attainment understand more clearly the long odds of making a professional roster. By the same token, perhaps under-represented in this study are highly touted young players, the top baseball prospects who are often signed right out of high school. However, it may be the case that it is not the length of the career that matters to the player, but whether he had an opportunity to compete for a roster position. A complicating factor may also be that the only relationship found was between career length and the time to *find* a new career identity, not to *become satisfied* with it. The decision was made to include both of these measures in the survey as the work of Levinson (1978) points to a man refining his Dream, or replacing it with another goal when a childhood desire does not come to pass. This distinction between finding and becoming satisfied with a new career identity may not be relevant for the many athletes in this study who view their

professional sports careers as more than just employment, but rather a reflection of who they are as a person. Other respondents, however, expressed a desire to be defined as a person based on other aspects of their lives – they viewed themselves as who they “are” rather than what they “do”. Thus the survey’s use of the concept of a career identity having to replace the athletic one may be problematic.

At the beginning of this study I was convinced that educational attainment was an important factor in helping former players transition to new identities (H2). I considered this to be common sense and felt strongly that since most players were not going to have long, glorious and lucrative careers, then those with a strong education and a college degree would have more opportunities to replace their athletic identity with a successful career-based one. There was limited support for this hypothesis from the survey data and the memoirs, while the interview data was inconclusive yet suggested this as a topic to be studied further. The discrepancy between the findings and my hypothesis is striking. The composition of the respondent pool may again be in play here, as with the high percentage of college graduates in the study there simply may not be enough diversity in educational attainment to accurately capture the influence of education on success in finding a new career identity. This is particularly prevalent among baseball players as nearly half of all players drafted have not attended college. Additionally my population also had few football players who attended schools known more for their football than their academics, the so-called “football factories.”

Whether a retired player hung on to his identity (Goodman’s “abandoned” versus “not yet abandoned” self) also proved to have no relation to the ease of the transition after the end of an athlete’s playing days (H3). However, the interview data did provide some interesting insights into a small group of players who fell in between Goodman’s categories. These athletes do not

incorporate their former identity into their every day life, yet they do not fully abandon it. Their identity as an athlete sits in their lives like a trophy on a shelf or a diploma on their office wall. I am calling this the “nostalgic self” and I believe it is a concept which merits further study.

The hypothesis that showed the most contrast between the survey and interview data was another I was certain would be proven true in this study. I fully expected to find that the way in which an athlete’s career ended – voluntarily or involuntarily, due to injury or being cut or released – would influence how quickly and easily a player moved on to a new identity (H4). The survey data showed no support for this, while the interview data did support the hypothesis. I believe that these conflicting results can be attributed to the fact that many respondents indicated on the survey that they retired voluntarily when, in reality, they were forced to do so. During the interviews I had the opportunity to ask detailed questions about the end of respondents’ careers and learned that even though they were the one who technically made the decision to retire as they were not injured or cut/released, they felt that they were either forced out for “political” reasons, realized that the team was probably going to cut them soon, or that because of a history of injuries or fear of the risk of injury they felt they had to walk away. Many believed they could find spots with other teams but were unwilling to put themselves or their families through yet another move. Thus the definition of “voluntary retirement” was in practice different in the survey than it was in the interviews. Even those players who had long, successful (by most standards) careers expressed regret at the end of their careers and often viewed voluntary retirement as really involuntary.

The data also failed to support the hypotheses that claimed that football players would have an easier time with the post-career transition (H5, H6). No relationship materialized between ease of transition and either college players’ “celebrity status” or help provided by

alumni and/or boosters. This could be because respondent pool was largely comprised of athletes with college degrees, or that very few of the respondents came from traditional college football powerhouses with reputations for heavy booster involvement (often in violation of NCAA rules) in the football program.

The composition of the respondent pool is likely also to have erased any inherent educational differences between the two sports. Nearly all professional football players have some college experience (many have degrees), while only two players on a typical MLB roster have graduated from college. The fact that, on average, the baseball players in the study had nearly the same level of educational attainment as the football players may have washed out any differences that would have shown up between the two sets of athletes in a larger, random sample.

I was not at all surprised to find that both the survey and interview data supported the existence of differences between the generation of players that could be attributed to the advent of free agency and the tremendous increase in salaries that followed. I view this as common sense and believe that going forward, studies of this kind need not expend tremendous efforts to include players of the era before free agency. It was, indeed, a different era and the experiences of the older generation of players is no longer particularly relevant to understanding the current one.

The additional finding of the survey, that football players begin to think about a career after sports earlier than baseball players (H8), was not unexpected. It is a well-worn adage that in football a player is “only one play away” from the end of his career due to the high probability of injury. While I did not specifically ask interview subjects about this, many football players

repeated the adage to me when talking about how they began to prepare for life after their playing days.

I believe that the additional findings from the interviews provide interesting ideas for future study and underscore the psychological aspects of the transition to a new identity. Specifically, I was surprised to hear players talk about how difficult the transition was on their family members who had part of their own identity wrapped up in an athlete's career. This also tied into the heavy toll in terms of divorce and family troubles that came at the end of many players' careers. Although few athletes specifically mentioned the need to earn money to help them create a new identity for themselves, it was clear that many felt the need to be recognized for something other than their athletic accomplishments and feel as if they mattered after they left the playing field. I found this somewhat surprising as the press routinely runs stories of former professional athletes who have burned through their earnings and are left with nothing, their lives in shambles as they could never make the transition to life after sports and manage their finances after the big paychecks stopped. As well, this notion that many of them did not want to be defined by their sport is intriguing.

B. Major Themes

1. Loss of the Dream

Levinson (1978) outlines an individual's progression from childhood musings through settling into an adult identity. He writes about a man "going through the process of forming an occupation (often making more than one provisional choice), he establishes himself first at a junior level and then advances along some formal or informal ladder until, at around 40, he

reaches the culmination of his youthful strivings. He is now ending his early adulthood and beginning a new era” (p 22). However, this sort of career progression is not typical of professional athletes. Even those with long careers are often retired from their sport well before their 40th birthday, with no chance to returning again to their dream. For them, the childhood dream for which they have worked so hard is past – fulfilled or not – before they reach the middle of adulthood. Thus, having achieved their Dream or failed to do so, most are forced to leave it behind and forge a new life, a new set of goals, and a new dream to replace it. This is what makes the transition at the end of their careers so traumatic for many former athletes – they have at least half of their life to live and the most significant accomplishments for most of them, those that make them stand apart, are behind them and they are ill-prepared for the rest of their lives.

The intensity of the Dream was evident among many in my study population, and some reported it not only in themselves but in those around them.

I do remember one [teammate who only identified with being a professional athlete] – a tight end for the Colts. He had suffered a really bad knee injury in training camp and was trying to come back. And he was having a conversation with someone in the training room and he said “you know I have to get back (to the field) -- I was put on this earth to play this position, to play football and score touchdowns.” And I remember that just shook me – I just froze. I had never heard anyone say that and I didn’t know if I admired him for such a singular vision or felt bad for him because when it was over, was his whole life over? (F0034)⁷

⁷ Note: subjects are identified only by their respondent ID numbers to maintain confidentiality. Those that begin with “B” are former baseball players; those with “F” are former football players.

There was little similarity among the former professional athletes who took part in this study as to how their life after the end of their athletic career progressed. The respondent pool contained athletes with a wide range of “success” in terms of the length of their careers, the financial rewards, and the notoriety gained, yet even those athletes who achieved more than they had dreamed of in terms of performance and pay, and left the game when they felt they were ready, were filled with regret. This was the one area in which there was near unanimity among the respondents. From baseball players who never made it out of Rookie League to football players with Super Bowl rings, nearly all admitted to a sadness, a sense of loss, and great regret at the end of their playing careers.

The open response to the survey question that asked respondents what was the most difficult part of the transition to life after their professional sports career provide some insight into the raw emotion and fear they experienced. Some spoke to the loss of their childhood dream:

The toughest part is realizing that you will never achieve the goal you set as a kid of ever playing in the big leagues. (B0060).

Several players also spoke of difficulty in being able to even watch a game right after they left their sport:

Being able to watch a baseball game [was the hardest part of the transition]. It took two years before I could do so. (B0049)

It was difficult to enjoy watching football for a time. (F0049)

Another common response involved worrying about finding something else to match the excitement of professional sports or give the retiring athlete a sense of importance to replace how he felt on the playing field.

Finding out what my next phase of life would be. Would I ever find a career that would come close to matching the job I used to have, i.e., enjoyment level, competitiveness, etc. (B0021)

My transition to the real world was hellish. ... The worst part of it was that I was searching for something to give me the buzz that football did – and there was nothing out there, even though I did pursue my financial management credentials and had a college degree. I had to come to that realization on my own – I thought that making lots of money outside football would give that to me, but the pursuit of that was really empty. It didn't do anything for me. I had to work hard to find a job that I really liked to do. It took almost a decade but I am so thankful that I finally did. I can't imagine the misery I would be in if I hadn't been able to find what it was. (F0024)

Finding a purpose with work, finding something to fill the void of excitement and energy experienced week to week in the NFL. (F0041)

The interview subjects also talked about how traumatic the transition was. A football player who stated that even though he had started to think about all the things he wanted to do after he stopped playing still noted how difficult it was to make the decision to retire:

That was tough; brought tears to my eyes. I played organized football for 12 years. I enjoyed the locker room and the culture. Winning was very contagious. When you give that up you give up a lot. You can't replace that. You give up your youth. (F0023)

A baseball player who suffered through injuries and then faced the prospect of being too old to make it back to the Major League level reported that even though he had been offered a

coaching position that was attractive to him, the news that he was no longer good enough as a player was difficult to accept.

After (receiving that news) the flight back home was devastating. That was when it sank in that I was not going to spring training in 2006. It was something I was passionate about ... poured my heart into. That was a kick in the gut. ... I don't know if you could diagnose me with clinical depression (after eight weeks of being unable to do anything) but that was as close as I have ever been. (B0060)

Even those lucky few who walked away on their own terms expressed regret. Steve Rogers, who spent his entire 14-year Major League career with the Montreal Expos and was an accomplished pitcher, told me that even though he had plans for his retirement that involved putting his degree in petroleum engineering to good use, he would have still made a “small pact with the devil” to hang on to his baseball career in some way. “What I would like,” he said, “was for each of the next 30 years to just have *one* more day on the mound each year – just to be competing again.” (personal communication, 2011)

In the sports memoirs I reviewed for information regarding a player's end-of-career transition, several included poignant passages regarding the realization that the player's Dream was now in the past. George Plimpton (2003), in his memoir of the time he spent in training camp with the Detroit Lions, devotes many passages to the process of letting players with unguaranteed contracts – mostly rookies – go from the team and gives us insight to the plights of not only the cut players but the coaches and remaining teammates. All felt the loss personally.

“What do they say when you tell them you've got no place for them?”

“They worry about the future.” Doll (one of the coaches) said. “Where they're going to go, what they're going to do. They put a lot of stake in sticking with his club. Then the bottom drops out.” ... It was easier in the beginning of the training season when they could be let go for obvious reasons – lack of physical

equipment, or attitude – but when the season got under way and two or three good men had to be cut to get the squad down to the thirty-seven-man limit, that was when the profession of coaching was for the birds.

Doll said that in his day the awful process was referred to as the “Turk” – he supposed in reference to the cut of a Turkish scimitar. “‘The night of the Turk,’ that was what we called it,” he said. “The Turk is coming. Nowadays,” he went on, “the rookies refer to it as the ‘Squeaky Shoes’ – ‘the Squeaky Shoes are coming down the hall, *tonight*, men.’” (pp. 104-5)

The plight of these doomed players even affected Plimpton, though he was merely a visitor to the training camp with nothing at stake. “The days of the squad cuts made everyone uncomfortable – the empty beds and the missing faces – and I felt it strongly.” (p. 106) But those remaining behind, many of whom may be fearing a visit from “The Turk” before the regular season roster was finalized reacted strongly as well as they tried to distance themselves from their failed teammates.

The reactions of the players cut from the roster were likely to be more consistent than the methods of dismissal – often tearful, then sullen, for the most part, as they thought back on all the wasted effort; then there would be a slow shift to the problems of the future, the wondering what would come next, and after a few phone calls they would make a quick departure, to get the place behind them ... They (the players remaining) quieted down only when one of the rookies who had been cut came through the common room, or stood by waiting for the telephone, which was in a booth just off the corridor, the group at the table avoiding him as if his humiliation was infectious. (pp. 258, 260)

Though Plimpton was writing of the era before large signing bonuses and huge multi-year, guaranteed contracts gave even players with short careers some financial security, the later memoirs echo how devastating not making the roster can be. Robert Smith (2004), writing 44

years after Plimpton's stint with the Lions, saw much the same, though he was a sought-after rookie with a bright career ahead of him.

The roster cuts opened my eyes to how brutal the competitive world of the NFL could be. These guys had worked their butts off in camp the previous weeks and their thank you was a pink slip. I never got cut during my career, but it must be an awful feeling. Some guys get their hopes dashed after having given so much of themselves. The sad look and slow walk of these players display their feelings of rejection. Some of them will get another chance, but not all of them. There just aren't enough jobs for everyone in the NFL. For some of them, the NFL dream is over, but they have made it farther than most ever do. (p. 91)

The baseball memoirs are also from two different eras and tell very different stories. Doug Glanville had a 15-year career and an Ivy League education. He was a well-liked teammate and by all accounts – and based on his current position as a member of the Major League Baseball Player's Alumni Association Board – is well-respected by colleagues and the management of the league. On the other end of the spectrum is Jim Bouton, who published a tell-all memoir that alienated nearly all of his teammates and many people associated with Major League Baseball. Bouton's career ended well before Glanville's started, so he was not in a position to earn the large salaries of more recent players, and he has never truly left baseball behind him. He says that when he retired the second time:

I walked away from the professional game, but I didn't walk away from baseball. I continued playing amateur baseball and retired when I was about 56. Then three or four years ago I was walking on a snowy day and made a snow ball and threw it at a stop sign that was 10 feet away – I missed the damn stop sign and said 'Geez, that's disgraceful.' I couldn't stand to be that far out of it. So I decided to start throwing again in my basement and joined another league – that was three years ago, this is my third summer and I am in better shape than when I was 50 [he is now 72]. (personal communication 2011)

During his comeback after a long hiatus, Bouton (1990) tried to reinvent himself as a knuckleball pitcher, with mixed success. While he did make it back to a Major League roster eventually, he did get sent down to the minors leagues at one point. Much of his sentiment, also cited by Ball (1976) speaks to the person being demoted as immediately becoming an outsider.

It's funny what happens to a guy when he's released. As soon as he gets it he's a different person, not part of the team anymore. Not even a person. He almost ceases to exist. (p. 76) ... but after I started throwing stuff into my bag [after being sent down] I could feel a wall, invisible but real, forming around me. I was suddenly an outsider, a different person, someone to be shunned, a leper. (p. 112)

He also speaks to how the demotion affects family members and friends and how that affects the player.

One of the worst things about getting sent down is the feeling you get that you've broken faith with so many people. I know my mother and father were rooting real hard for me, and all my friends back home, and they'll all feel bad – not for themselves, but for me. Quitting altogether crosses my mind. But I won't. I *can't*. I'm convinced I can still get out big-league hitters with my knuckleball. I *know* I can. I know this is crazy, but I can see the end of the season and I've just won a pennant for some team, just won the final game, and everybody is clamoring around and I tell them, "Everybody have a seat. It's a long story." I could be kidding myself. Maybe I am so close to the situation I can't make an objective judgment of whatever ability I have left. Maybe I just *think* I can do it. Maybe everybody who doesn't make it and who gets shunted to the minors feels exactly the way I do. Maybe, too, the great cross of man is to repeat the mistakes of all men. (p. 113)

Glanville (2010), whose career ended a generation after Bouton's, faced the end after 13 years in professional baseball. His words echo much of what I heard from former players I interviewed about the end of their careers. So many truly believed that could still play at the

professional level and nearly all of them felt the “spirit” of their sport within them, which made walking away painful.

After the (spring training) game, the Yankees’ general manager, Brian Cashman, and manager, Joe Torre, brought me into the office to tell me that I had been released. They were giving me a week’s head start to catch on with another team. I didn’t say much other than to thank them for the opportunity. I thought I was a good fit for the Yankees: a player who had been a starter, able to play all fields, and young enough to run out there a lot. But I was trumped. I would no longer take my place in center field, at least not as a major leaguer, although I still believed I belonged there. Not because I was bitter about my rejection, but because of the spirit of what makes center field so special within me. (2010, p. xviii)

The need to continue to compete at a high level was a constant theme in the interviews I conducted with players from both sports. There was a palpable fear expressed by many of the former players and one memoir, in particular, expressed much the same sentiment. Dirk Hayhurst (2010) wrote his account of a year he spent in the minor leagues. Though he was subsequently promoted to the Major Leagues, his *Bullpen Gospels* provides a compelling insight into the world of raised and dashed hopes of minor league players hoping for their one big break. While he strove to fulfill his dream, he wanted to be given a true assessment of his chances and not fed false hope.

No baseball player will ever tell another baseball player his future is over. If someone believed the object of your heart’s ambition was unattainable, would you want to hear that person say it? It’s the hardest for middle-of-the-pack players to feel safe. They’re lukewarm and in the gray, unsure if it’s their time to get spit out or not. If you know you’re on your way out, you can prepare accordingly. Call your uncle in the oil well company, get an internship with a bank, or finish your degree. You can hop out of one profession and get tied up in another before the reality of what happened sets in and you find yourself back in Grandma’s basement, consumed with your failure. ... I just didn’t want to be jerked around. It

may sound crazy, but it'd be such a relief to know I'd no chance at all. None. Then I could say I did all I could; I could close the book and walk away from it with no regrets. Instead, I'm supposed to live by the mantra, "If you have a jersey on your back" ... Is that a chance I want? Don't keep me around as an innings mopper or a babysitter. Don't lie to me; don't postpone my life with false promises. Is that too much to ask? (p. 95)

Throughout his memoir Hayhurst writes of the fear of no longer being a baseball player if he failed in the minor leagues, thus echoing many of the interview respondents and reinforcing how difficult the transition is for many people. He writes: "Look ... it's different for everyone I suppose, but I put so much stock in what it meant to be a baseball player, I became afraid to fail at it. I'd be out of a job, and out of an identity. I thought I'd lose everything without it." (p. 274)

Two of the football memoirs were written by players with successful careers who decided on their own it was time to retire. Fran Tarkenton (2009), who was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1986, talks about the need to distance himself, physically and psychologically, from his playing days.

After that season (1978) ended in Los Angeles, I decided to return to Georgia permanently. ... I needed to go home and I wanted to separate myself from being Fran Tarkenton, quarterback of the Minnesota Vikings. ... But I wanted to move on and be successful at something else, and even more importantly, put my roots down. I believe that I could not have grown personally or professionally had I stayed in the Twin Cities. I would always be Fran Tarkenton, the football player. I was proud of what I achieved there; I always appreciated the recognition from fans and the signing of autographs (well, most of the time anyway), but it was time to move on. ... At first, I didn't know how much I needed to get away from the environment where I had spent so many years until I actually made the permanent move. It is nice to be recognized, but sometimes people expected too much. It was starting to take its toll on me. (p. 109-110)

While Tarkenton relates the transition as one which allowed him to succeed in other areas, he was writing 30 years after his retirement and one has to wonder if time had softened the blow of being unable to finish his career as a Minnesota Viking and falling victim to age and diminished skills.

Robert Smith (2004) left football well before his skills diminished. His insistence that he never let the game “define him” was a sentiment echoed by several of the former players I interviewed.

I knew it made more sense to walk away early than to limp away late. ... You are one play from your career ending whenever you play football. ... Every year people sustain injuries while playing that affect them the rest of their lives. I didn't want to be one of those people. ... It's not that I couldn't continue, but I felt it made more sense to leave. ... You have to retire from pro football at some time. It's simply not the kind of game you can play indefinitely. I had been playing for eight years, and that was longer that I ever thought I'd play. I had always envisioned football as a means to an end and when I felt that it had done enough for me, I would move on. I truly enjoyed the level of competition and being considered one of the best in the world at my profession. But I knew I wasn't one of the players that would have to be dragged kicking and screaming away from the sport. I would have been crazy not to take advantage of the opportunity to play professional football. It provided a life of comfort for me and my family. ... I never let football define me as a person. Football was what I did, not who I was. ... I had thought about life after football well before it came, of course. (p. 166-169)

Tarkenton and Smith recount transitions less painful than most of the participants in this study, however.

Odd Man Out: A Year on the Mound with a Minor League Misfit is Matt McCarthy's memoir of his short minor league baseball career and it also provides an example of how painful it can be for a player to realize that his dream of a professional career is over, even if he has other

career options that are quite attractive in their own right. McCarthy, a Yale graduate who majored in molecular biophysics and went on to Harvard Medical School and a medical residency at New York Presbyterian Hospital, provides insight into how devastating the death of the dream of a professional sports career can be – even for someone with such excellent career prospects outside of the game. McCarthy, when summoned to the manager’s office for his release, struggled with how to react. He wrote, “I wondered if I should be crying. I didn’t feel like crying. I was trying to think about things rationally, and rationally I knew that my average fastball and average off-speed pitches weren’t going to get me to the big leagues.” (p. 284) After calling his former college coach for comfort and reassurance, he headed home to a life without baseball.

When I boarded the plane I learned that the Angels had just released another minor-leaguer from central Florida, Kevin McClain ... and the two of us were seated next to each other on the flight home. Kevin was twenty-five and in the midst of his sixth season with the Angels when Tony Reagins had called him into his office earlier in the day. We sat in silence for the first hour of the flight. I stared at the seat in front of me while Kevin ran his fingers through his short brown hair over and over and over.

“I can’t believe it,” he said to his tray table.

“Me either.”

I put in five good years and then this happens. Comes out of nowhere.”

His eyes welled up with tears. I tried to imagine five years of toiling in minor league limbo.

“I know.”

“I don’t know what the hell I’m gonna do,” he murmured.

“Try to get back in the game?”

“I don’t know,” he said. “I’m twenty-five.”

For the life of me I couldn’t think of the right words to say.

“I suppose I better,” he added, “because I got a wife and kid at home and we need the paychecks.”

“Yeah.”

“I got no work experience ... no education to speak of ... I guess I could get a job at Target. But I just don’t know.”

“This is a crazy time,” I said.

He lifted his head up and looked me in the eye.

“What about you?”

“I don’t know,” I said as a tear rolled down my cheek.

Six months later I enrolled at Harvard Medical School and tried to forget about baseball. I did a pretty good job of it until spring rolled around, when, instead of gearing up for another baseball season, I found myself daydreaming of curveballs over cadavers in the anatomy lab. (2009, pp. 287-9)

Glanville (2010), as well, writes how even a player with a healthy bank account, a long proud career, and a good educational background suffers a profound loss at the end of his professional sports career. He also notes that he was one of the most prepared players and worries at the plights of others less so. This was also a common worry among those athletes I interviewed.

On paper, I was ready for my ride into the sunset. I had a nice Ivy League engineering degree, a wonderfully supportive family, some coins in my pocket. My transition to the other side was supposed to be smooth sailing to blissful relaxation. But I really didn’t know much about this world I was entering. I had a Ph.D. in baseball, but in every other realm that involved making a living, I was stuck at my college graduation ceremony, thirteen years before. And I was one of the more prepared players. ... You get the pat on the back, the thanks for the memories, and the “you are going to be fine because you have money” platitudes while the door closes behind you. ... No matter how your career ends, once it does, it feels like the rocket you rode to the top has been abruptly stopped by an errant

asteroid. There's nothing to fill that void of competing every single day at the highest level. (p. 239)

... The former professional football player Eddie George noted to CNN.com, "What people fail to realize is that when you make a transition away from the game – emotionally, physically, mentally, spiritually – you go through something. You change, and you're constantly searching for something." Who will understand that a transitioning athlete needs help? There are few soft landings when you've been flying high. ... You return home, and there isn't a ticker-tape parade for the homecoming king. In some ways you're a stranger to your own family, you need to learn how to be consistently present. And how do you accomplish that while dealing with the trauma of missing the only way you've ever made a living, or the depression of feeling forgotten? (pp. 239-240)

... Having been nearly invisible for a decade between March and October, you have no idea of how to be an ever-present father or a spouse, no idea how to create a resume or handle a job interview, no idea what is required to run a business or even what to do in the summer – a season with, suddenly, an inordinate amount of time. Plus, because you can no longer perform athletically, you're probably fighting a strange emptiness that you can't talk to just anyone about; with a million dollars at your disposal, your complaints don't resonate. (p. 242)

McCarthy and Glanville, though at the opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of their career longevity and success in professional baseball, nonetheless shared a similar pain, one which many of the participants in this study experienced as well.

2. Factors that Influence the Transition

The main purpose of this study was to identify the factors that affected how the participants created a new central identity at the end of their playing careers. To that end, I used previously cited research to contrast how former professional baseball and football players relinquished their central identities as professional athletes in four ways: using the different organizational structures of the two sports, investigating the level of educational attainment of

the athletes before and during their professional careers, discerning whether there were differences between those who had abandoned their identities as professional athletes and those who had not yet done so, and determining whether the celebrity status on campus of college football players provided them with greater career opportunities after their professional playing days were over than baseball players. These four areas led to seven distinct hypotheses, which I investigated using the survey and interview data.

The differences in organizational structure between baseball and football revolve mainly around baseball's extensive minor league system and the absence of such a multi-tiered training ground for professional football players. Faulkner (1975) notes the difference between minor league hockey players and professional musicians and describes how the hockey players work their way up through a minor league system in an attempt to make it to the NHL. These players do not control their own fate as the decisions of which players moved up were controlled by the owners and coaches, whereas the musicians were free to audition for openings with other orchestras and could follow a path of their own choosing to seek advancement. Ball (1976) notes the differences between professional baseball and professional football due to the presence or lack of a minor league system. Baseball players can languish in the minor leagues for many years trying to make it to a major league club, whereas football players are typically only afforded a year or two to make it to an NFL roster. Thus baseball players can survive many instances of failure and still make it to the major league level but football players generally have only one chance to do so. I have hypothesized that those players whose professional careers end after a shorter amount of time are more likely to find an acceptable new identity more easily than those who spend years in pursuit of their professional careers (H1).

While the survey data showed only very weak evidence to support this hypothesis, the interviews included arguments for it, and for its converse, that those with longer careers are better off in their end-of-career transition. Thus, these results fail to support my hypothesis (H1).

It was common among my interview subjects for individuals to set timetables for themselves to reach certain levels of advancement or achievement by a certain age. This was especially prevalent among baseball players when faced with a slowed or stalled progression up through the ranks of the minor leagues. One baseball player noted that he felt the need to continually assess his prospects.

Going into the season, I told myself by 24 or 25 (years old) I need to reassess myself and see if there was a possibility to have a career in the major leagues. I knew it was possible but not highly. By 2006 I didn't know what I was going to do ... It was more if I'm good enough by the time I'm 26 I will have at least put myself in a position to have a career in the majors. I wanted to take time to reassess myself of where I was at. I had heard there were many people who did not assess their career prospects. (B0059)

Although football players do not have to work their way up through the minor leagues in the same way as baseball players, those who lose time due to injuries often face the same need to reassess their progress.

I didn't see a real pathway back to the pros ... at age 27 I was feeling like maybe I'd missed the window and it was time to get on with it. And, of course, now I know that I had some special skill set and I probably should've kept at it because I had the rest of my life to work. But I wasn't thinking that way back then. I was thinking it was time to get on with the rest of my life." (F0032)

Two football players, in particular, gave opposite views of the merits of a longer or shorter career and the subsequent transition to life after professional sports.

I think something was also important – I played 11 years where the average career was four years. I imagine it must be harder for the guys that didn't get to have a long career or got hurt and had to walk away when they felt they could still play. That would be hard. I never had to go through that. (F0010)

The amount of time you actually spend in the league – the longer you are there making that kind of money and living that kind of life makes it harder to transition away from the game. ... The shorter the career, the better. (F0023)

It was evident from my conversations with former players that there was no clear consensus as to whether a shorter or longer career better benefitted players when making the transition to a life after athletics. Rather, what made the difference was how the individual prepared himself for the transition. Some clearly stated they knew the odds were against their ever making a Major League or NFL roster, and so they concentrated on their education. Players of the older generation included job training, too. One player, looking back on advice given to him while trying to make it to the pros said, “In those days my father had a saying: ‘from your chin down you are worth one dollar an hour, but from your chin up your worth is unlimited,’ so I kept that as one of my mantras.” (F0050). But even those who prepared faced the end of their careers with regret.

The second factor I investigated was educational attainment. The survey asked how much education the respondents had completed when they began their professional careers and whether they had pursued any additional education during their sports careers. The interview subjects were also asked about the role education had played in their transition to life after their professional sports careers and if they knew of teammates whose prospects for an easy transition away from sports were hampered by their low level of educational attainment. Like Ball (1976), Haerle (1975), and Koukouris (1994), I surmised that players

who had a stronger educational background going into their professional sports careers would fare better when they had to find a new career after their playing days were over (H2). The survey data support this hypothesis to a limited extent but the interview responses support it more strongly. Regardless of the sport played, the level of educational attainment, or the generation of the former players interviewed, there is overwhelming support among the interviewees that getting a solid education benefits life after sports. Many also believed that their teammates who lacked college degrees -- or had degrees which held little relevance or involved little true academic rigor -- had bleaker prospects for life after the end of their playing career. Baseball players in particular cited their understanding of the long odds to make it as a professional athlete and how a college degree would give them something to fall back on.

I signed with the pros after my junior year and I had two semesters left. I didn't get a lot of money and I had heard about the odds of making it to the big leagues. I didn't want this opportunity to go by -- I went to a good school and I wanted the degree so I went back and finished off my courses the first two off seasons. ... I met guys that came out of high school and who didn't want to go back to their hometowns and become a high school baseball coach or anything of that nature. They only knew baseball. (B0012)

Several football players interviewed also noted the importance of getting a solid education, including a legitimate college degree, and thinking about their life after sports from the outset.

I know guys in my draft class who didn't graduate from college ... a guy who was drafted in the fifth round, got a \$90,000 signing bonus -- so that's a check for \$55,000 (after taxes) --- bought a \$60,000 car and was cut before the season started and so here he is with debt on the car. The car cost more than the money he made. He has no life skills, no college degree, and no job. ... I would say the

majority of players in the NFL have done nothing but football their entire lives and have zero other skills. A lot don't graduate college. And even the three or four years they attend college it is not college – it is a joke. It seems like the guys who have had the most success were the guys who knew they weren't going to have long NFL careers and thought early on about another career. The guys that struggle are the ones who felt they were going to have long careers and then didn't. Two of the guys I played with have committed suicide. (F0037)

One former NFL player, in particular, tries to educate aspiring professional players about the need for a solid education. He is currently a coach at an NCAA Division I institution.

As a coach, I talk to my players and tell them that when you graduate you'll be chasing those NFL dreams for at least two years. But your counterparts who are in the academic realm are doing internships and planning their future while you are practicing. The players are years behind the others and then apply for jobs for these others to hire you. (F0015)

He speaks from personal experience as after he retired from his professional football career he contacted all the “back-patters” who had told him through the years what a great guy he was, what a great personality he had, and had praised his people skills. He called them to see if they could help him get a job after his retirement from the NFL.

They all asked if he had a college degree [and I didn't so they had nothing to say to me]. I knew things wouldn't work out until I finished my degree. ... I always tell my guys that an NFL career is a long shot – that they need to get the most out of school as they can. Yeah, the school may be making money off of them for three to four years, but they have an opportunity to earn a lot of money going forward – and for the rest of their life – if they take their education seriously and do something with it. An NFL career is not certain and not long and few really make big money. ... I was not any Rhodes Scholar but I knew I had to get my education for my future and my family. I try to encourage the kids that I coach – the university is going to get its share out of them, so you'd better get more from this University than the football you are going to steal during the summer time and the old jersey and the shorts you won't remember to turn in. (F0015)

As previously mentioned, educational attainment was also important for three of the players whose memoirs I studied for this project. Doug Glanville and Matt McCarthy both went into baseball with degrees from Ivy League institutions. While Glanville's 13-year professional baseball career opened up future opportunities for success, McCarthy lasted only one year in the minor leagues and made the most of his education by moving on to a career in medicine. Interestingly, though, both Glanville and McCarthy felt other players and their coaches viewed them with suspicion due to their educational pedigrees.

Glanville (2010), a Systems Engineering major at the University of Pennsylvania, felt the additional burden of being both an African-American and an Ivy Leaguer.

There have only been a handful of Ivy League baseball players of any race, though our ranks included some of the greats: Lou Gehrig, Eddie Collins, Ron Darling, and Red Rolfe. In the minor leagues, that pedigree wasn't considered a badge of honor or even much of an asset. Quite the opposite. The fact that I'd gone to a school like Penn caused question marks to swirl about my "focus" and my "commitment" to the game. After all, I was seen as someone who could walk away at any time as one of my teammates who'd gone to Stanford did after a demotion. (p. 128)

McCarthy (2009) had to lie about his achievements and never let on that he majored in molecular biophysics at Yale with grades good enough to get him into Harvard Medical School two years later. Upon arriving for his first training camp with the Angels Rookie League affiliate he was questioned by one of the team's coaches.

"So, McCarthy ... somebody told me you went to Yale, is that right?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, it is."

"All right, you can drop the 'sir.' I'm not one of your cocksucking Yale professors. I'm a strength coach."

“Okay.”

“Now, you’re not one of those goddam Ivy League know-it-alls, are you?”

“No, definitely not. I barely graduated,” I lied. I wasn’t expecting such a grilling from someone dressed like an eight-year-old.

“Is that right?” he said.

“Yeah.”

“Good, ‘cause I hate a know-it-all.” (pp. 48-9)

Former professional football player Robert Smith saw his college degree as something to fall back on, but not important enough to graduate from Ohio State University before declaring for the NFL draft. Though he vowed to complete his degree at some point (and has since done so), he also felt that he was being used by his college and that the restrictions on college players were too onerous. For him, the decision to leave college early was one of economics and opportunity. His subsequent early retirement from the sport, however, was influenced by his belief that his intelligence and education would benefit him in the years to come.

... does it make any sense for a player to risk injury in a sport as dangerous as football for virtually nothing (in college) when they could earn hundreds of thousands of dollars a year doing the same job as a pro? Why do people even go to college in the first place? Some purists may say to receive an education. But I have learned far more on my own than I ever learned in a classroom. What about getting a good job? Being a professional football player is a pretty good job. Sure, you get the hell knocked out of you sometimes, and your body pays a hefty price, but you’re well compensated. You can earn enough to go back and get your degree if you want. Some would say that these players are just using the college system as a stepping stone to the league. So what? Anybody outside of sports would leave school early if the right job opportunity came along. Do you think Bill Gates is upset he left school early? Do you think anyone at Harvard is upset with him? It’s not just about money, it’s about common sense. What would you tell your child to do in the same situation? (p. 52)

Thus, all the sources of data and information used in this study concur to some extent with previous studies cited and support my hypothesis (H2) regarding the importance of education for life after the end of a professional sports career.

Regarding Goodman's (personal communication, 2010) concepts of "abandoned" versus "not-yet-abandoned" self and how releasing one's identity can help free a person to create a new one, I considered whether an individual still viewed himself as a professional athlete after retiring. I then hypothesized that those who clung to their previous identities would have greater difficulty in creating a new one (H3). The survey data showed no support this. Realizing that the individuals could retain their old identity for the purposes of self-promotion or self-image and that the related survey question would provide no information to make this distinction, I turned to the interview responses. The interview subjects were mixed on this issue and, thus, also did not provide support this hypothesis. Some former players held onto some aspects of their career identity because of the unique status they felt it brought them.

Even to this day my baseball past has helped me. Companies have recruited me simply because they saw on my resume that I was a professional baseball player ... employers know you are competitive and will probably work hard to succeed. (B0009)

The kids I work with know I used to play pro ball. I got respect they wouldn't give the typical officer or counselor. In fact in almost everything I do I get a different level of respect because I used to play pro football. (F0003)

Others acknowledged the notoriety of their playing days but seemed determined to be judged on their subsequent professional performance instead.

So my identity in business was never “Hey I’m Robert Williams,⁸ a former football player or a former Kansas City Chief. I am here to do business on my merits and if you want to read through my resume and my football background is interesting to you, that’s okay and we can talk about that after.” (F0032)

One of the people I asked for advice (at the end of my playing career) was starting his own real estate development company and he asked me to come work with him. My name recognition helped a little bit, but the best situation is that after I met someone and they learned to take me seriously, then they learned I was a Cowboy. I didn’t want them thinking I was only there because I was a Cowboy. (F0039)

Still others purposely distanced themselves from their past sports career and felt out of place among former teammates who had been unable to move past their days on the playing field.

I had trouble hanging around with my teammates today because they still can’t look past football. It is like their whole life revolved around football. I would never let my life be like that. I had other things I liked to do – football was a big part of that but when it was over, it was over. Some guys – you go back for reunions – and I hate doing it – but they all start talking about who made the 40th anniversary team, etc. But who cares? I’m like, it’s time to move on, fellas. ... I don’t get it. Their whole identity is still wrapped up in football – yeah, it’s fun sometimes – you walk into a bar and everyone knows who you are and people come up to talk with you, shake your hand, or ask for an autograph. It is an intoxicating thing, so I can understand the draw. (F0010)

I had a friend in college who would introduce himself, “Hi, I’m Bill Jones, I’m Number 40.” I never could understand that. I could never do that. When a guy lives life as “Bill Jones, Number 40,” then he does retire you are in that position it is hard to let it go. Super Bowls are the hardest time as all the players gather and hang out and party – you see the old retired guys with their old NFLPA (National Football League Players’ Association) sweatshirts that they are wearing to be recognized as a former player. (F0015)

⁸ Note: the names have been changed to protect the identity of the interview subjects.

A few former players also expressed something akin to disdain of those who would not let them leave their identity as professional athletes behind. The players seemed anxious to be seen as something other than an athlete.

It is not that you are tethered to your identity, it's that other people are tethered to it and it is hard to express yourself if you are an athlete. You may want to move on but other people won't let you move on because they constantly remind you that they didn't make as much money as you did, have you moved on, aren't you lost? ... Yes, there is always more to life than football. One classmate of mine who worked in the Athletic Department said to me "this (football) is a means to an end to you, isn't it?" And yes, I guess it was. It was a scholarship, a next career right after college. I didn't know what the end was, but I knew that football wasn't it. I don't think people are open to hear that you aren't defined by football.
(F0034)

I always tried to force my identity to be other things, even though they all thought that all I really wanted to do was play football. I was a good student. I wasn't just a football player. I was a [high school] valedictorian. It was important."(F0041)

None of these former players, grouped by whether or how long they hung onto their identities as athletes, seemed to fare better than the others in terms of moving onto a new career identity and neither the interviews nor survey data offered support for this hypothesis (H3). Nonetheless, many interviewees agreed that even if they tried to put it behind them, their identity as a former professional athlete stayed with them well past retirement – sometimes 30 years or more.

And also, I must admit, sports is something that stays with you as far as recognition. It has always dumbfounded me. I am 69 years old but everywhere I go, they know that I played, even though I wasn't Frank Gifford or someone like that. You are treated a little differently – they think of you as having a credential that none of them has ever had but they all would have liked to have had and, as a result, there is a certain respect that goes with you no matter where you are. I am the president of the [State] NFL Alumni Association – we run a charity golf tournament – but I will

never, ever wear the NFL alumni logo garb. I don't need to advertise. My wife told me years ago [chidingly] that meeting me "is a big deal to people and you can't give them the time of day and be gracious?" (F0054)

A loosely related concept is the way in which a player's career ends influences his transition. Players who get a chance to plan for their retirement may have a very different experience than those who are cut from the team without warning or suffer a sudden, career-ending injury. Ebaugh (1988) uses this concept of a voluntary versus involuntary retirement to identify one of the characteristics that shapes the exit from a role. Those whose careers end suddenly, she argues, do not have a chance to experience all four stages of role exit and thus don't fully plan for their future. Drahota and Eitzen (1998) also recognize serious injury as an involuntary exit and note the difficulty professional athletes have in creating the "ex-role" in such instances of a sudden, unexpected career ending. Additionally, Koukouris (1994) finds that those athletes whose careers ended with little warning, and thus had little time to prepare for life after sports, had difficulty in abandoning their sports identity and creating a new one. Thus I expected to find that those individuals whose careers ended involuntarily would have a more difficulty time in transitioning to a new career identity (H4).

The survey data showed no support for this relationship but the interview data did show conclusively that such a relationship existed. Even those who claimed to have left "on their own terms," who expressed pride or satisfaction with their careers, or who knew without question that it was time to retire, still expressed regrets and reported facing difficulties with the transition.

In between pitches, I made up my mind (to retire from baseball). I was pitching against a friend of mine. First of all, when you go that level, you play against everybody that you're going to play against all your life. You know everything about them and they know everything about you. The trick was how to be

different. And I found myself pitching to a friend of mine and in between pitches I caught myself, thinking to myself “*how am I going to get him out? I hope he gets out*” [instead of my usual thoughts of “*this guy is no good – I can get him out.*”] I reached a conclusion at that point, well, wait a second. This happened very quickly no more than ten seconds. I lost my confidence. A minute ago he didn’t belong up there. How long is it going to take me to get back? Maybe two years. If I stayed two years I could never leave the game because I’ve done it all my life. Do I choose to do that? No, I chose to retire at the end of the season. (B0054)

I decided to retire because I wanted to spend more time with my daughter. It wasn’t necessarily a difficult decision – it was physically challenging however. Your body is so used to training and the schedule that it was hard to break that. (F0002)

Some former players spent years asking “what if” questions – many of those were players whose careers were cut short by injury or who felt they were victims of some sort of political or financial “intrigue” that knocked them out of the sport. Though the experiences of those injured were different than those who felt they had been forced out, both groups expressed sadness and frustration at the way their careers ended.

Those who experienced injuries that they believe cut their careers short expressed great disappointment.

I hurt my arm after four years — I had surgery after the Yankees released me and then offered me a contract after my surgery but I just walked away. In all sincerity I didn’t want to be 30 years old with a wife and two kids and nothing to fall back on and be a career minor league baseball player. Going back home after being released was the hardest part. People know who you are. It was a small town and it was a little embarrassing. People are proud of you – I was the first person to get drafted in any sport – now I know I didn’t really disappoint them but it didn’t feel like that at the time. (B0052)

I went through a lot of “if only” – and I think you do for the rest of your life (after retiring because of knee problems). Even today – I am 62 years old– I still have dreams about playing football. ... What happens when your whole life is tied up in this and one day someone comes to you and says it is over? What do you mean

it's over? I never had had a fall when I wasn't in training camp. Most of my identity was tied up in this. ... I think in football, almost everybody I played with in the NFL – with a couple of exceptions – that they viewed themselves as an athlete only. (F0040)

While those who believe their careers were cut short because of internal team politics expressed a degree of bitterness that others did not.

When I was released it was an embarrassing moment, I lost the love of the game – it was so political and it messed with my head. In my mind, I was better than the guy who got my spot. (B0009)

[It was difficult] not having the choice to end my career. I've always felt it was taken away from me, not due to playing ability but due to business decisions. You cannot cut a player you picked in the 4th round (who was kept on the roster instead of me). ... Business decisions are made every day, me getting cut is no different than layoffs, downsizing, etc. I've accepted it, but cannot say with great confidence it does not still sting. (F0025)

Some just didn't know what to do without the structure and schedule that their playing careers had brought them.

Next year not being in spring training was weird. I've been playing since I was six so when the weather gets warm you start throwing the ball around. ... But still the (athletic) death thing comes back to me – there is part of your heart that just isn't going to revive. You seem fine and even though you love what you are doing, there is a drag internally. ... Longing for the norm, the familiar, going into the unknown. ... I was worried looking for a job – no experience at age 33 at anything other than athletics, other than internships. At 33, does anyone want to invest in me? (B0043)

First time the next year I didn't have to play football in July or August – I just really didn't know what to do with myself. I couldn't attend a game, couldn't watch a game, would cry during games. It was awful. I felt terrible, I felt like I had lost my persona – half of who I was. I felt like a shell. I had tried to convince myself that it was going to be fine – I had my college degree – I was a smart guy, I

am a go-getter, I am going to be fine. And nothing was further from the truth.
(F0024)

And others had great difficulty in letting go of their childhood dream even if they knew there was something else out there for them.

It was terrible. That's where I wanted to be so bad. I had never sat behind a desk. It was awful. I hated it. Baseball has stressors of its own and it was frustrating. You're like hanging out with your buddies and take bus rides. Playing in the grass or dirt and you're going from that to sitting behind a desk. It was difficult. I was an emotional time for me. (B0059)

I was frustrated when the phone wasn't ringing – I was frustrated with the process. Maybe my opinion of myself was a little inflated. I felt I was good enough but was frustrated by not getting the calls, frustrated with moving – I had lived in eight cities in four years, so that was difficult. It was time for me – mentally, I was a little worn out. I felt like I could accomplish a little more than I was doing, so I made the decision [to retire]. It wasn't easy – but it was time. It was more that I had been with football for 12-13 years. I loved the locker room. I loved being with the guys. I loved the strategy. But I didn't love being cut, I didn't love not knowing if today was going to be my last day. It is a mentally tough thing to go through, so I decided to pull the plug. I probably could have hung on for one more year but I didn't want to put off graduate school for a whole year. (F0037)

The ways in which the interview subjects ended their professional sports careers were as varied as the stories of their identity transitions, whether successful or not. This makes it impossible to identify any consistent relationship between a “voluntary” career ending and the ease of the subsequent transition to a new identity. Those who report leaving the game on their own terms were found to struggle initially almost as much as those whose careers were short by a sudden injury.

Ball (1976) notes the difference in popularity on college campuses between football and baseball. Baseball is not a money-making sport that attracts local business people and enthusiastic alumni, nor are star baseball players often showcased by an institution's Sports Information Department. Only during the annual College World Series tournament do college baseball players get any media attention. Coupled with the fact that many, if not most, of the best professional prospects forego college to sign with the pros right out of high school, college baseball simply does not get much attention. However, football stars get very different treatment on college campuses. Their exploits are covered by ESPN and other sports media outlets, their faces grace the cover of school brochures, press guides and billboards, fans buy their replica jerseys at the campus bookstore and neighboring sporting goods stores, and boosters vie for the chance to meet with them.

Ball surmises that the celebrity status of these players will translate into greater career opportunities for football players who can return to their college campuses after the end of an NFL career. Thus I expected that college football's popularity would lead to relationships with supporters who could provide former players with transitional assistance (H5). Neither the survey data nor interviews showed any evidence to support this hypothesis. There is reason to believe that the composition of the subject pool may have affected the results, however. Few of the football players interviewed came from colleges or universities that are among those with the strongest identities as "football schools." There are stories every year about boosters, alumni, or businessmen local to the campus providing benefits to the players – often in violation of the NCAA rules – and also donating large sums of money to the football programs at colleges and universities. It would seem reasonable to assume that some of them would latch on to a young

man who was a celebrity on campus due to his football abilities and try to help him out after a professional football career ended if his name recognition would be of benefit to the employer.

Ball (1976) further concludes that baseball players have bleaker prospects for acceptable alternative careers than football players at the end of their playing days. He believes that this is because football players are more likely to have attended and/or graduated from college than baseball players, who are often drafted right out of high school. In addition to the educational opportunities that provide the student with skills outside of athletics, the years spent in college provided football players with access to alumni and boosters, as mentioned previously, who can provide valuable career contacts after a failed or discontinued NFL career. Thus, my next hypothesis (H6) was an effort to see whether Ball was correct, that former professional football players would have an easier time transitioning to a new career identity than former professional baseball players. Once again, neither the survey data nor interviews supported this hypothesis. So, the question becomes was Ball incorrect or was the study population somehow skewed so as to produce results that invalidate his hypothesis? My interview subjects offered many different explanations for why their transition was easy or difficult, focused on issues already raised: educational attainment, whether or not they allowed their sports to “define” them and completely take over their identity, and how they dealt individually with the end of their careers, whether voluntary or involuntary. The responses, however, were so varied it is impossible to draw any conclusions from them to point to why there were differences between Ball’s assertions and this study’s results.

Four of the previous studies on professional athletes (Ball, Faulkner, Harris and Eitzen, and Haerle) were conducted in the 1970s. Since that time, the worlds of professional baseball and professional football have been through dramatic changes. The advent of free agency, which

has set off an arms race of sorts as teams poured millions of dollars into guaranteed, multi-year contracts for the best players and caused even the rookie pay scale and minimum league salaries to increase ten-fold or more, has reshaped how players view their sports careers. In addition, endorsement deals and the explosion of sports media coverage have given more players the opportunity for lucrative careers during and after their playing careers. Thus I expected to find significant differences between players of the older (born in 1960 or earlier) and younger (born in 1961 or later) generations of players based on whether or not they spent the bulk of their playing career before or after the changes brought by free agency (H7).

Here the survey data showed relationships between the player's generation and the time to become satisfied with a new career identity – the older generation having the shorter transition. The data also showed that players of the older generation were much more likely to have pursued job training during their professional athletic careers than those of the younger generation. I believe – and the interview data support – that these relationships are attributable to the higher salaries, signing bonuses, and longer-term contracts given to today's players. The players I spoke to who played before the “big money” era all spoke about the need to find work during the off-season and the difference it makes to be earning enough in baseball or football to live and retire on comfortably. They did not have that luxury.

I was 29 years old (when I retired). That was old back then. Right now because of the off-season conditioning and the amount of money they play for and the (roster) expansions, a lot of guys play in their thirties. The economic rewards are so great. When I retired in 1979, the minimum wage in the major leagues was probably \$25,000-\$30,000. Now it's \$400,000. That's worth waiting around for. (B0049)

Football was what you did four or five months a year (back in the 1960s). You had to get a job then. I would say the graduation rate was higher when I was playing than now. A lot of these kids, if they know they are going to be drafted, they drop out the last six months of school and just work on their skills to get ready – the set

up is so different now – just start working out for the [NFL draft] combine. The pot of gold is so big if they make a team they don't need to graduate. They are pretty well set-up if they have any brains. If they don't well then they'd better get their fanny back in school and learn something. (F0031)

3. The Psychological Aspects of the Transition

As mentioned above, the interviews provided the richest source of information about how each player dealt with the loss of his central identity as a professional athlete at the end of his playing career and provided interesting topics for future study.

Among those interview subjects who reported that members of their family had difficulty with the end of their playing careers, a former baseball player gave me a very lengthy and detailed description of the issues related to marriage and divorce from his perspective. He gave me a tutorial on how a woman becomes a “baseball wife.” He described in great detail his experience meeting his future wife while he was in the minor leagues and her acceptance and support of his career while he was advancing to the major leagues. But once his career was over, he believes that her interest in him waned and thus their marriage ended. It was a sad and poignant tale, but other interview subjects hinted at similar experiences. One baseball player in particular prepared for this possibility and told me that he and his wife started couples counseling as he neared the end of his career and were prepared for the transition. He credits that preparation for the fact that his marriage is still sound. This was an issue I had not intended to study, but the responses below regarding the effect of the end of a career on family relations suggest it as a possibly valuable topic for future investigation and speaks further to the emotional trauma experienced by many of these players at the end of their athletic careers.

After I quit baseball – to this day I don't speak with my father. I really think it was because I stopped playing. I was my parents' investment – thousands of dollars and miles traveled to play tournaments, etc. My mother I still speak with – she wanted me to play at least one more year. I was just so out of it and didn't want to. My father was counting on my making it and has always struggled financially and so he just cut me off. It is unfortunate. (B0009)

My father had a tough time with my retirement. I went to him and told him I was thinking about retiring, as I couldn't play – he tried to talk me out of it. A lot of his identity was tied up in me being a college player and then a pro player. He had more to talk about with his friends because I was a football player. (F0040)

When the end of the career comes, he (the player) is scared to death. He doesn't know what to do or who he is without his glove and spikes. And then I got these kids I don't know and a wife and we're kind of distant. When he stops playing everything changes – he is home all the time, her domain has been invaded, and the guy is reeling from this near-death experience and doesn't know who he is. 75-80% divorce rate in the game; 85-90% out of the game – that's how it plays out. (B0043)

My ex-wife had a tough time with my retirement. She was very disappointed – argued in favor of my playing another year or two. She was getting all the perks but none of the pain. There are a lot of players who divorce right after they quit/retire. That's probably one of the things that makes the transition difficult – if you have a good support network at home it is easier but if everyone is second-guessing you it gets harder. Family identity does get tied up in this. (F0039)

Those interview subjects who reported needing to find something to do (job, parenthood, coaching, players association/alumni association involvement) to replace the “glory” or “importance” of their past sports careers felt that until they did so, they could not complete the transition away from their identity as a professional athlete. One survey respondent asked “Do I matter anymore?” while another wrote “Am I important?” as being the hardest part of the transition. I was able to follow up on this issue through the interviews and found several players who struggled to find something they could excel at again.

“Am I important any more?” -- It probably took me three to four years. Part of it was passing the CPA exam on the first try, getting good reviews from my superiors at work and realizing that I can be successful doing this as well and get satisfaction from doing a good job and having people appreciate it almost the same way you might get from hitting a home run. But when you are a professional athlete people look at you differently. It’s an ego boost. “Jim the Accountant” never gets asked for an autograph. (B0029)

Where I am now (in my company and career), not many people can get there. I am at a pinnacle. It is extremely challenging and ... even though I am proficient at it, it took me a long time to feel the sense of worth that I did when I was a ball player. For so long everything I did felt so mundane – is this making any difference? No, not really – anybody can do this. But with this job, not anybody can do it ... this is what makes me feel good about what I do. But forever it felt like my identity, because of who I was and everyone knowing me as a football player ... was such a huge part of my persona and everyone saw me that way. I almost had to reinvent myself from the standpoint of being more than a player. ... And so I had to almost undo what I had to do as a football player, because no matter how good a football player you are it doesn’t prepare you to do anything else in life. Nothing. All it does is say you are one of the best football players. Nothing else. I have realized that I like where I am at and I am really good at what I am doing and I really don’t feel like I have to pursue anything else because I really like what I am doing. (F0024)

As previously mentioned, the assertion by 14 of the interview subjects that they were not dominated by their identity as a professional athlete and did not experience it as completely overwhelming and consuming was a surprise to me. This is also reflected, I believe, in the problematic use of “career identity” as a description of the new identity athletes seek to replace what was lost. The assertion that the interview subjects wanted to be viewed as who they are rather than what they do (sports) came through strongly among this group.

My identity is not wrapped up in what I do. It is not who I am. If I tried to wrap up my identity in the White Sox what happens when you lose that position. That it when we wrap ourselves in an identity or a profession there has to be a real fulfillment. (B0060)

[The hardest part of retiring was] getting people to not just see me as an athlete but as a businessman first. There are 2 people – Don Smith and Donald Smith. Don Smith was the football player, but Donald Smith is the entrepreneur, the person, the whole package. I always wanted people to see me as Donald Smith. I didn't want football to define who I was. (F0002)

There were a handful of players who reported being relieved at the end of their careers and spoke to a similar “rebirth” as noted by the athletes studied by Koukouris (1994).

[After struggling with injuries for years] I knew I was done. By the next year I had started working and moved on. I had moments of relief that I didn't have to play the charade any more and I had more time to myself and didn't have the grind and the schedule. (B0029)

So when my career ended I thought maybe it was God saying it was time. Looking back on it I can't remember any time since then when I wanted to go out and play again. (F0015)

Even those players who seemed ready and accepting of their end of the professional sports careers often spoke in their interviews of regret. There is also little in the interview or survey data to use to point to any common characteristics that could be responsible for the relative ease of their transition to life after sports and towards a new, satisfying identity.

One particular area of note from the interviews was how few players mentioned the need to find a job to earn money after their athletic careers were over. Athletes who were in a position to earn very high salaries were in the minority in my subject pool (for example, only a small percentage of the baseball players ever made it out of the minor leagues), yet financial concerns clearly took a back seat to the need to feel important, accomplished, and recognized. Thus the issues surrounding the psychological aspects of the transition suggest the more intriguing areas for future study, not the objective measures like educational attainment, length of career, or generation.

4. The “Nostalgic Self”

While investigating Goodman’s distinction between those who have left their identity as a professional athlete behind them (“abandoned self”) and those who have not yet be able to move on to another meaningful identity (“not-yet-abandoned self”), I interviewed several men who had successfully created a new central identity for themselves yet had kept some aspects of their former identity as a trophy or keepsake. These individuals I refer to as those who exhibit a “nostalgic self.” The nostalgic self is displayed like favorite old photos, awards certificates or college diplomas on office walls or mantles. It clearly denotes past achievement, but they don’t rely on it for their current success nor incorporate it into their daily lives in any large measure. In one case, a former minor league baseball player who indicated on his survey, via the two “Twenty Statements Test” (Kuhn and McPartland, 1954) entries, a very strong identification with his athletic identity during his career, now identifies himself only as a financial planner. He has earned success for himself in his field and some of his clients do not know of his past athletic achievement and he does not believe it is a key to his success. When asked about his transition away from baseball and to a new career he said:

It took me awhile to be satisfied with new identity as it took me awhile to get comfortable with my life. You have to be ready to explain at a local bar what’s going on (after I was released and that people should) no longer ask me about baseball. They don’t know me as the baseball player any more, now I am the financial planner. ... I have my jersey and draft photo on the wall of my office. The *corner* office. (B0052)

He is fully engaged in his identity as a successful financial planner and while baseball has no active place in his daily life, he retains a link to his past by displaying it on the wall of his corner office, itself a symbol of his new, successful identity.

Two respondents, a baseball player and football player who each retired from their respective sport several decades ago, still receive requests from fans to sign their old bubblegum trading cards. Both former players moved on to create new non-athletic identities soon after their retirement. They both expressed surprise that people would still send in cards for their signature. Each feel honored to be remembered for their accomplishments on the field but are at least as proud of their achievements off the field. Additionally, two football players who each had long, successful (by most standards) careers each expressed discomfort at being around former teammates who got together and could do nothing more than relive old games. They each did, however, mention that while football is no longer part of their daily life in any way, it was nice every once in a while to be recognized and asked for an autograph. They were comfortable with their new identities, but retained pride in the past accomplishments.

Another common characteristic among this group of respondents is that they all credited their post-sports success to attributes learned and/or honed on the playing field. While most interview subjects responded that they believed their athletic experience subsequently helped them in their jobs, they typically cited attributes such as dedication, hard work, and the will to win as those of most importance. The respondents who seemed to exhibit the “nostalgic self,” however, most often reported that the skills that helped them most were the ability to strategize and plan, work as a team, and their self-confidence. An example of this was provided by a football player who told me that he succeeded in life after his playing days by always following the “35-second rule,” which he learned in football but served him in other areas of his life.

I succeeded in my career and football by excelling at the 35-second rule. So let's say you are a running back and you ruin a play and some guy knocks the snot out of you. Well, you've got 35 seconds to recover and get ready for the next play. You need to regroup because you might get the ball again. So when things happen to me, I can put it aside easily – that's how I live. I don't let things bother me and I live by the 35-second rule. At the end of the day you have 35 seconds to dust yourself off and get back to the huddle and get in the play. (F0010)

The athletes who exhibited the “nostalgic self” viewed these types of qualities as making them successful as athletes and in their later pursuits. They seem to credit the less physical attributes to their success.

The concept of “nostalgic self” may be an indicator of how successfully individuals move forward to create a new central identity without relying on their athletic notoriety. They work for success and recognition in a new field, and then are able to look back happily to their athletic careers with pride. Moreover they display that pride modestly. It may be useful to view the nostalgic self as an analog to the concept of “possible selves” put forth by Markus (Markus and Nurius, 1987). The nostalgic self retains some of the sweetest memories of a former athlete's career and leaves behind those aspects that were unpleasant. In this way, the nostalgic self looks for the best possible self while distancing itself from a feared possible self. While the nostalgic self seemed to be present in several of my interview subjects (including those who seemed most successful at moving into new, meaningful identities) it cannot be determined if a real relationship exists between those who retain this “nostalgic self” and an easier transition to a new identity after the end of their playing careers. However, it is an interesting subject for possible future study.

C. Comparison of Research Findings to Previous Studies

As mentioned above, four of the relevant studies concerning professional athletes were conducted before the significant changes brought about by free agency, making any differences in those findings and the results of this study suspect. It is perhaps more important, then, to focus on the study by Drahota and Eitzen (1998) and the work of Ebaugh (1998) regarding the transition professional athletes have to go through at the end of their sports careers. Ebaugh's four stages of "becoming an ex" were evident throughout this study in many respondents. The first stage, experiencing doubts regarding commitment to the role, was evident among the many players who doubted whether they were good enough to even be drafted, let alone earn a spot on the roster of an MLB or NFL team. They all knew that the odds were against them and thus all but the most confident and single-minded realized they were long shots.

The second stage, searching for alternative roles, was expressed by many of the interviewees as having a "back-up plan," which for most was getting their college degrees.

I went to Brown because I knew baseball wouldn't be everything. I knew the chances and struggles for baseball and I needed a backup plan. In college I thought it was something that going to the majors could happen. ... Not all of the guys had Ivy League degrees to fall back on. (B0057)

We were realistic about college and education – there just wasn't a pot of money at the end of the rainbow. In football you are just one play away from the end of your career – in practice and in games. (F0039)

Among the older generation of players, jobs or job training pursued during the off-season were important along with education as players began to search for other roles they could perform off the field: "Football was what you did four or five months a year. You had to get a job then." (F0031).

The findings also point out that football players typically began thinking about their next careers before starting their professional careers, while baseball players waited until their professional careers are already underway. This would mean to Ebaugh that football players are more likely to successfully navigate the exit from their athletic identity than baseball players. My results do not confirm this difference between baseball and football players, however. This result may indicate that the earliest stages of role exit need not be completed in the beginning of the role occupancy to influence a successful transition.

These first two stages are the ones Ebaugh believes individuals do not have time to complete if they exit their roles suddenly and involuntarily. This study did find some evidence of this occurrence, though such players who graduated from college did note that they had their degrees to fall back on. For many, though, the end was sudden. They were unprepared and struggled.

I had a really tough first couple of years (after being cut), was depressed and felt I should have made it to the majors as a left-handed pitcher. They can always hang on. (B0007)

[After being forced to retire] I lost my swagger. ... It took about a decade to get it back. But still to this day when I hear the national anthem at a game I get a lump in my throat and tear up. (F0024)

This fear or inability to prepare for a life after sports was also mentioned by two former baseball players as a possible motivation for players to gamble with performance-enhancing drugs to increase their chances of reaching or staying the major leagues.

That desperation which I saw was where the steroids thing came from. If I don't take steroids I am done and go back home and teach lessons for \$15/hour or try to get a desk job somewhere. I don't want to be back on the streets that quick. ... I was the poster

child for someone who prepared extensively for life after the game – I got my degree, interned, saved, etc. – and I still went through a tough time. (B0043)

The last two stages of role exit – the event or turning point that triggers the exit and the creation of a new identity – were also studied. I equate the event that triggers the role exit with whether the retirement of a professional athlete was voluntary or involuntary. The results of this study indicate no definitive relationship between the type of ending to a sports career and the ease with which the individuals transition to a new identity, thus I cannot determine if Ebaugh's role exit progression is applicable to this population. As the survey participants had unique experiences in how their careers ended and how they found their way to a new identity, it is not possible to draw any conclusions regarding the process of role exit from the data. As well, the problematic definition of a "voluntary" ending to a career further complicates this, though among the interview pool there is some support for this relationship.

Drahota and Eitzen (1998) draw on Ebaugh and also conclude that the process of distancing themselves from the role of professional athlete and creation of a new identity is very difficult. They maintain that the athletes in their study never fully exited their roles and noted that "the problem for athletes is not how to finally be rid of their past identity but rather the challenge of how to live with it" (p. 273). While this study did find individuals who had great difficulty in moving past their professional sports careers – those still living with their "not-yet-abandoned selves" and relinquishing that identity – there were others who clearly were able to do so. Many did so by putting their past lives completely behind them, their "abandoned selves" having no place in their daily existence. Others exhibited the ability to move well beyond their past identity, yet call upon it for reminiscences and enjoyment, those who exhibited their "nostalgic selves." Thus the findings of this study do not agree with those of Drahota and Eitzen

regarding former professional athletes' ability to leave their identities behind them at the end of their playing days.

As discussed previously, Ball (1976) argues that failed professional baseball players typically experience "status degradation," while the failed football player is more likely to be "cooled out." Ball refers to Jim Bouton's memoir as a source that supports this claim:

It's funny what happens to a guy when he's released. As soon as he gets it he's a different person, not part of the team anymore. Not even a person. He almost ceases to exist. (p. 76)

... but after I started throwing stuff into my bag [after being sent down] I could feel a wall, invisible but real, forming around me. I was suddenly an outsider, a different person, someone to be shunned, a leper. (p. 112)

I also noted that while Harris and Eitzen (1978) cite "status degradation" and "cooling out" among failed athletes, they reverse Ball's assignment of the terms and view baseball players sent down to the minor leagues as those being cooled out as they have opportunities to advance again through the minor leagues, and that football players released from the team and facing a total separation from the sport as suffering status degradation.

I had expected to find support for Harris and Eitzen's position rather than Ball's, but the interview subjects who had experienced being sent down to a lower level, cut from a roster, or released from a team did not corroborate either position.

According to the former professional athletes with whom I spoke, the specific circumstances surrounding the demotion or release was the factor that determined how the player was treated. It is devastating for a player when he is cut from the team, but a younger player with

a reasonable chance to sign on with another team will likely receive support and good wishes from his teammates, “cooling him out” with reassurances. Much the same is true for a player who is traded, though if the new team is performing poorly it is not always a welcome situation. As a former baseball player said: “... there is a saying in baseball, it is good to be wanted, though going from a contender from an also-ran is tough, but the other way is great” (B0039). Glanville (2010) notes the inherent difficulties in being treated as merchandise when he learned he was traded:

My journey to Philadelphia had begun two days before Christmas when the Cubs traded me like a set of steak knives for second baseman Mickey Morandini. It was the first time I became exchanged goods, and, like every other player who has gone through the experience, I grappled with the idea of being wanted and not being wanted in the same transaction. (p. 2)

These sentiments held true for football players as well. Pre- or mid-season trades and releases were viewed as more or less devastating based on the specific situation, and many players who became eligible for free agency or reached the end of their contracts did shop their services around and while seeking the best situation for themselves. Many, however, did realize that Glanville’s portrayal of an athlete being treated as a consumer good was appropriate in many cases.

For those baseball players who have made it to the Major League level at last but are then sent back to AAA, the demotion is bittersweet. They have had a taste of the Majors, but there is also the possibility that they will be back up later that season or during the next season. In those cases, according to another former baseball player, “the guys at the major league level would say the nice thing of ‘see you soon,’” to soften the blow, even though, as he continued, “the guy being

sent down would see it as death. You go through a number of deaths being sent down.” (B0043)

This treatment, again, is “cooling out.” At the lower levels of the minor leagues in baseball, however, the treatment of the player being cut or sent down was markedly different. For a baseball player that does not make steady progress up through the minor leagues, any setback indicates the end of his career may be near. None of his teammates wants to acknowledge that this fate could soon befall them, so they distance themselves from the player being sent down, thereby degrading the status of their former teammate. Interviewees I spoke with about these occurrences used terms such as “demotion disease” to indicate they did not want to “catch” what the other player had. They also, like Bouton, spoke about death and the player being a “dead man” and said little to the player as he cleaned out his locker and packed up to leave. In football, this scenario also occurred during training camp before the start of the season. The players who were cut early on during camp – the first round of players being asked to turn in their play books – were those least likely to sign on with another team. Those I spoke with explained they would hide out in their rooms on the nights that “The Turk” (the coach responsible for telling the players they were being cut) would walk the halls, as Plimpton reported. Some told me that they felt that if they hid in their rooms rather than gathered with players likely to be cut they wouldn’t draw The Turk’s attention and would survive this round of roster cuts and remain on the team.

Thus my findings do not support the assertion that the organizational structure of the sport affects how players are treated when they are traded, cut, released, or sent down to a lower level. Rather, my finding is that it is the other players’ impressions of how likely the player being let go is to find another team to sign on with that affects their behavior. Those who are least likely to find another team – and whose teammates are in a position to fear a similar fate – experience status degradation and are avoided, while those seen to likely succeed with another

organization are “cooled out” with encouraging words. What I was unable to determine, however, was if the dramatic increase in players’ salaries since Ball and Harris and Eitzen were writing in the 1970s had any impact on my findings. I saw no difference in the responses between respondents from the different generations, but again, my sample size was quite small.

VIII. Summary and Conclusions

A. Summary

This project began as an attempt to determine what factors influenced individuals' transition from the central identity as a professional athlete to a new identity after the end of their sports careers. The areas in which the data revealed statistically significant relationships included length of career (limited and weak support), educational attainment (limited support), and whether the decision to retire was voluntary or not (limited support). There was no support for a relationship between a successful transition to a new identity and whether the players retained or relinquished their previous identities (abandoned versus not-yet-abandoned selves), whether the players had some level of notoriety or celebrity status from their college playing careers, or whether the transition experience depended on the sport played. These findings contradict those of some earlier studies and confirm others. Possibly obscuring the results in comparison with studies conducted in the 1970s are the differences in professional baseball and football brought about by the advent of free agency; thus direct comparisons with several of the earlier studies on professional athletes are misleading.

On the surface, the contradiction of this study's results with conventional wisdom (such as that regarding the benefit of education) seems troubling. While there remains the possibility that the make-up of the study population skewed the results or that I introduced errors in coding or recording the data, I believe that the results speak more to the evidence that each individual has a different background and thus experiences the transition differently. While more than half of the survey respondents graduated from college, they attended very different schools and had differing academic goals and preparation for life after sports. Some graduates held advanced

degrees from some of the nation's finest institutions, others attended less prestigious schools, while only a few respondents attended schools not generally regarded as being academically rigorous. Indeed, even at schools with solid reputations, the respondents' academic programs varied in rigor. One football player offered a telling example:

I have a friend who went to Penn State and was a second string player and wanted to be a business major but the coaches told him if we wanted to be a starter he should be a PE major like all the other starters. It did great things for their graduation rates but not for the players' educations. (F0039)

Thus it may well be that the lack of a strong relationship between higher levels of educational attainment and the ease of the transition to life after professional sports is because the study did not measure the quality of the education received, just the amount.

With regard to how men experienced their transition away from careers as professional athletes, it became evident in speaking with the interview participants that this transition was a highly emotional experience for most. No two stories were the same, but there was near unanimity that, regardless of how successful and long their athletic careers were, they were filled with regret at the loss of that piece of themselves. They reported missing most the camaraderie of the locker room, the exhilaration of the competition, and their youth. Other considerations that I had expected to be more prevalent were not so. For example, I had expected those who had tasted of celebrity and received a generous paycheck would miss the cheering and the money. This was not the case for the majority of players. What they missed more than the public adulation and celebrity was the feeling of being important, of being "somebody special." Those that were able to move onto activities – careers, volunteer or charity work, or family life – that afforded them the opportunity to feel as if they mattered seemed to be among those who

made the transition to a new identity most effectively. This subject was not the target of any question on the survey but came from the interviews, as the former players talked passionately about their transitions and how they are now happy with their new roles. This was an area not covered by the research studies I consulted, but is perhaps among the areas that would be worth further investigation.

Thus the study did not produce a succinct list of factors that serve to facilitate a successful transition from the consuming identity of professional athlete to a satisfying new identity at the end of a player's career. It did, however, provide information regarding the emotional turmoil faced by former professional athletes, even those who were seemingly well-prepared for the transition through high educational achievement and planning for the future. Any future study of this transition needs to factor in the emotions of the individuals and that the loss of the Dream is, by its nature, tumultuous for many, if not most, people.

B. Limitations of this Study

Looking back on this project, there are several things I would have done differently. I believe that the survey, as constructed, was of limited benefit for a study of this nature as much of the important information came from what were often emotionally-charged interviews. These players all regretted the end of their professional athletic careers and often took years to recover from them. One player's assertion that the transition was "in a word, HELLISH" speaks to the difficulty many of them had letting go of the Dream. In addition, one glaring omission from the survey and follow-up interviews was any measure of self-esteem. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem test would have been useful to include in order to help calibrate the players' responses and

determine changes in self-esteem as they transitioned away from their identity as a professional athlete. This omission made any attempt to measure changes in self-esteem after the loss of the central identity superficial at best. The survey attempted to get at changes in identity, and by extension some indication of self-esteem, by including questions asking the respondents to list up to ten words or phrases to the question “Who am I?” (the “Twenty Statements Test”) both when they began their professional careers and when they were completing the survey. However, the answers were, in general, not particularly enlightening and the responses suggest many of the survey respondents either did not understand the question or had difficulty thinking back to their playing careers, which may have been decades in the past. This may have been true for the Rosenberg Self-Esteem test if it had been included as well.

I abandoned early on questions as to whether the players’ viewed their careers as being a “failure.” While the value judgment came from a handful of players as to whether or not their career was a success or failure, I did not get enough information on this topic to include in any meaningful analysis. Despite the sensitivity of asking people if they believe they were a success or a failure, I believe it would have been an important measure to include if it was asked respectfully.

Additionally, it is possible to question whether the survey provided any important data as many of the positive results came from the interviews, even in areas where the survey and interview data were in disagreement. While I attribute these differences to the emotional responses given by the interview participants and believe that the consideration of such emotions is important for this study, I believe that it was necessary to include the survey data to provide some quantifiable background information on my study population and use it not only as a ground-clearing exercise but also as a way of preparing those individuals who would be

subsequently interviewed to refresh their memories regarding the transition. In this way, I believe they were able to give more detailed answers and explanations of their transitions during the interviews. I would have liked to have been able to conduct more interviews and include more subjects in the interview pool, however. Many more responded positively to the request, but I was unable to contact many of them to schedule the interviews.

Most importantly, I believe that the small size of my population and its significant differences from the large population of all former professional baseball and football players were important factors in producing my limited results. As it turns out, I have now been able to forge relationships with individuals connected with the Major League Baseball Players' Association and the Major League Baseball Players' Alumni Association. They not only expressed their interest in my project but offered, belatedly, their help in providing subjects for this project. I do not know definitively that the results would have been markedly different with a larger, more representative subject pool, but I would certainly have had more confidence in them.

C. Suggestions for Future Study – The Dream of Projects Yet to Come

This study provided a glimpse into the death of the Dream for professional baseball and football players when their playing days came to an end. They were forced to confront issues regarding how to find a new career, adjust to a life away from accolades and ovations, struggle with re-inventing themselves, and develop and accept a new identity to replace that of the professional athlete. Their responses to the transition were often fearful and deeply emotional. There are likely many fruitful projects that could be undertaken to further study this transition. I

believe that they would best be accomplished by focusing much more on interviews than static survey instruments that limit emotional responses. The inclusion, as well, of a way to measure changes in self-esteem throughout the process in more detailed interviews would also be beneficial.

Additionally, while I believe that free agency, strong players' unions, and rich signing bonuses and contracts have changed the end-of-career transition for former players, enough time has passed so that looking back to the years before these lucrative deals is of limited value. Instead, it would be interesting to study subsets of players in this "big money" era, including the "bonus baby" top draft picks, the mid-draft players who make more than the league minimum, and the unheralded, undrafted free agents who come in at the league minimum. Not all prized prospects become stars and not all undrafted players wash out. Tracing players' careers based on where they enter the professional ranks, how their careers unfold, and whether that affects their end-of-career transition might prove interesting.

My study population was further skewed with relation to the baseball players in my subject pool. For ease of completion of this study, I purposely omitted foreign-born players, except for those who may have been born overseas but were educated in the United States. The recent explosion in the number of players from Latin America – in particular the Dominican Republic – adds a layer of complexity I was not able to tackle for this project. These young men come to the United States in their mid-teens to pursue a professional baseball career, not only for the love of the game but oftentimes to provide for impoverished families back home. They do not have the benefit of college degrees and it can be argued that the stakes are higher for them and the consequences of failure that much more grave. As one interview subject said to me when I asked him about teammates who had not completed college "they aren't the ones I worry

about. The ones I worry about are the kids from the Dominican. They have nothing. We (the US-born players) are the lucky ones. We always have options.” (B0059)

An additional area to investigate would be the role of lingering injuries on the lives of these former athletes. Nearly all survey respondents noted that they suffered ill effects from injuries suffered during their athletic careers, but I did not follow up on this during the interviews. With all the attention being paid to lives of former players being harmed by the injuries they suffered in sports, it might be interesting to study whether injuries of a certain nature or extent make the transition to a life after sports more difficult.

I believe that this sort of study could also be performed using other sports. A possibly valuable next study would include professional basketball players. The differences in organizational structure between basketball and football are similar to those between baseball and football. The National Basketball Association (NBA) has an active developmental league which is similar to a minor league in baseball, and the growing popularity of foreign leagues in Europe, China, Russia, and Australia with American players who are not drafted by or earn a roster spot with an NBA team is another form of minor leagues, though the salaries earned by many of the players far exceed those of minor league baseball players. This difference would be interesting to study. Additionally, the prevalence of the “one and done” college basketball player who plays only one year with a college or university that is a powerhouse in NCAA basketball provides an interesting contrast as few NBA players actually graduate from college before entering the NBA draft and, unlike football, if a college player declares for the NBA draft and is not pleased with the result he can return to school and is eligible to play basketball the next season.

Hockey, as studied by Faulkner (1975), would also be a logical sport to investigate with its multi-tiered minor league/junior hockey structure and the growing presence of players born outside of Canada and the United States in the professional ranks.

Goodman (2001) details other populations he asserts have strong central identities and for whom the failure to attain the Dream would be interesting to study. After completing this project, I believe two of his suggested populations in particular would make interesting studies. One trait shared by many of the athletes studied was the near total devotion to the goal of becoming a professional athlete and the reluctance among many of them to consider what would happen to them when the Dream was not attained or sustained. The lives professional athletes envision after their playing days are over is not one they anticipate as being as fulfilling, exciting, or elite. Thus the populations interesting to study would be those for whom failure in their central identity leads them to a less fulfilling alternative identity. In that regard, business executives who crave the excitement of the business deal and military officers accustomed to a sense of authority, duty, and national service seem to be particularly appealing.

While the project I undertook focused on the loss of a central identity and the transition towards something to replace it and Goodman (2001) proposed a comprehensive research program regarding self-esteem and failure in a central identity, I believe that this study can be considered a very small step toward the development of that larger program. A next step would be to take the lessons learned from this project and apply it to a research design to work towards the fulfillment of Goodman's program.

Perhaps most important, in my view, would be to investigate ways to ease the transition for the former professional athlete to a fulfilling subsequent career or role. Some programs do exist to assist in this regard. The NFL has a Career Development Program that has had some

success in working with players to help them finish their college degrees and build some basic business and financial skills to benefit them at the end of the playing career. Several players told me, however, that their coaches and team owners made them feel as if any time spent on such endeavors sent the message that they were not completely committed to their performance on the field. Similarly, minor league baseball players said that they were told that their job was to focus on doing whatever they had to in order to make it to the majors “24-7,” including forgoing school and job training in the off-season to go play winter ball. Another group working with former college athletes who left school before completing their degrees is the National Consortium for Academics and Sports (NCAS). The NCAS was founded in 1985 by activist Dr. Richard Lapchick and includes over 230 colleges and universities who have come together to craft innovative degree completion and community service programs to help former athletes prepare for careers after sports.

Last summer, the Major League Baseball Players’ Alumni Association (MLBPAA) announced its intention to develop a career transition program targeting players who are in the last few years of their expected playing career and helping them through the first few years after their retirement. Daniel Foster, Chief Executive Officer of the MLBPAA, believes that by utilizing former players to work with current players – and not having the programs associated with the teams or even the league itself – will make it easier for current players to feel comfortable discussing their fears and work on a plan for the next stage of their life. It may well be that this model will be the most effective given its reliance on former players and its sponsorship by the alumni association rather than any league entity. I am concerned, however, that there are no immediate plans to duplicate this at the minor league level, where the need may actually be greater. What is evident from this study, however, is that there are many players who

could have benefitted by some sort of program to help them prepare for life after sports. Of particular note is the disturbingly high rate of divorce for these athletes at the time of or shortly after their retirement and the implications for their family life. The heavy toll of the transition is taken on the individual but also his family, which makes the situation even more troubling. It is hard to prepare for the death of the Dream.

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Appendices

A. Baseball Survey

B. Football Survey

C. Interview Script

baseball survey

1. Introduction and Consent

*** 1. Dear Participant,**

You are being asked to volunteer in a research study: Doctoral Dissertation on Loss of Central Identity Among Former Professional Athletes.

The purpose of the study is to collect responses from former professional baseball players with the intent of investigating whether or not there are certain factors which positively or negatively influence the transition after the end of their playing careers.

If you agree to participate, your part will be to answer multiple questions. It should take no more than 15-20 minutes of your time. There are no foreseeable risks or benefits to you for participating in this study. You will not be paid for your participation.

The following procedures will be followed in an effort to keep your personal information confidential – the data collected will be coded. To ensure that this research activity is being conducted properly, Stony Brook University's Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects and/or applicable officials of SBU, OHRP (Office for Human Research Protections) have the right to review study records, but confidentiality will be maintained as allowed by law.

There are no costs to you for participating in this study.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you don't want to.

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you may contact Maria Anderson at 631-371-1430 or via email at mdanderson@ic.sunysb.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, or if you would like to obtain information or offer input, you may contact Ms. Judy Matuk, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 631-632-9036.

If you complete the attached survey it means that you have read (or have had read to you) the information contained in this letter, and would like to be a volunteer in this research study.

Thank you,

Norman Goodman, Professor, Stony Brook University

baseball survey

Maria Doelger Anderson, doctoral student, Stony Brook University

Clicking here indicates that you have read the information above and volunteer for this study. PLEASE NOTE: MANY QUESTIONS REQUIRE A RESPONSE IN ORDER TO CONTINUE TO THE NEXT QUESTION IN THE SURVEY.

2. Section I – questions regarding your background & life before signing a...

***2. 1. In what year were you born?**

***3. What was your place of birth (state/country)?**

***4. Please indicate your ethnicity (select all that apply)**

- White/Causasian
- African-American/Black
- Hispanic
- Asian or Pacific Islander
- Other
- Decline to State

***5. What was the highest level of education your father completed?**

- Did not graduate from high school
- High school graduate/GED
- Some college
- Graduated from college
- Earned advanced degree
- Don't know

***6. How would you characterize your family's standard of living while you were growing up?**

- Very poor/at or below poverty line
- Lower middle class
- Upper middle class
- Upper class/affluent

baseball survey

***7. Location (state/country) of last high school attended/graduated from?**

***8. Did you have an older, close male relative who was a professional athlete?**

No

Yes

If yes, please describe relationship and sport he played:

***9. How old were you when you signed your first professional baseball contract?**

***10. How much education had you completed when you signed your first professional baseball contract?**

High school graduate/GED

Some junior college

Completed junior college

1-2 years of college

3 years of college

Graduated from college

Other (please specify)

3. Section II – questions relating to your career as a professional baseball p...

***11. In what round, if any, were you drafted?**

***12. What position(s) did you play in baseball at the professional level?**

baseball survey

***13. Thinking back to the time of your playing career, which words or phrases (up to 10 statements) best answered the question "Who am I?" at that time.**

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.

***14. At what level did you begin your professional baseball career? (example: Rookie League, A, AA, AAA, etc.)**

***15. How many years in all did you spend in the minor leagues?**

- None
- Less than 1 full season
- 1 - 2 full seasons
- 3 - 4 full seasons
- 5 or more full seasons

***16. How many years in all did you spend at the major league level?**

- None
- Less than 1 full season
- 1 - 2 full seasons
- 3 - 4 full seasons
- 5 or more full seasons

baseball survey

***17. While in the minor leagues, were you ever sent down to a lower level?**

- No
 Yes

If yes, how were you treated by your soon-to-be-former teammates when they found out?

***18. If you were in the major leagues, were you ever then sent back to the minor leagues?**

- I never played in the major leagues
 No
 Yes

If yes, how were treated by your soon-to-be-former teammates when they found out.

***19. How many times during your professional career were you traded to another team?**

- I was never traded
 Once
 Twice
 3 or more times

4.

***20. If traded, how were you treated by your former teammates after the trade?**

baseball survey

***21. How many times were you on the disabled list during your playing career?**

- I was never on the DL
- Once
- Twice
- 3 or more times

5.

***22. If you were on the disabled list during your career, how much time in total did you spend there throughout your career?**

- Less than 3 months
- 3 - 6 months
- 1 full season
- More than 1 full season

***23. Did you pursue additional education/earn a degree during your playing career?**

- No
- Yes

If yes, please describe

***24. Did you pursue any job training/acquire job skills during your playing career?**

- No
- Yes

If yes, please describe

baseball survey

***25. Did you have a job that was NOT related to your playing career during the off season (s)?**

No

Yes

If yes, please describe

***26. Did you have a job related to your playing career during the off season(s)?**

No

Yes

If yes, please describe

***27. How old were you when your playing career ended?**

28. How did your playing career end?

Voluntary retirement

Injury

Cut from the team due to performance

Released from the team for contract/financial reasons

Personal/family considerations

Other

baseball survey

*** 29. How did your teammates treat you as your career ended?**

*** 30. How did your family/friends treat you as your career ended?**

*** 31. When did you start thinking about a post-playing career?**

- Before your professional career began
- During your professional career
- After your playing career ended

6. Section III – questions relating to the transition to life after the end of...

32. Were you interested in finding a job related to your professional baseball career after your playing days were over?

- No
- Yes

*** 33. Did you meet anyone at college who helped in your post-playing career job search?**

- I didn't attend college
- No
- Yes

If so, what was their position/occupation and how did he or she help you?

*** 34. Did you meet anyone during your playing career who helped you to find a new job/career after you left professional baseball?**

- No
- Yes

If so, please describe his or her position and how he or she helped you:

*** 35. What was your first full-time job after leaving professional baseball?**

*** 36. How long did you actively look before you found your first job after leaving professional baseball?**

- Less than 6 months
- 6 - 12 months
- 1 - 2 years
- 3 or more years
- Went back to school before finding a job

Other (please specify)

*** 37. How long after the end of your playing career did it take you to find what you consider to be your new career identity?**

- Less than 6 months
- 6 - 12 months
- 1 - 2 years
- 3 or more years
- I haven't found what I consider to be my new career identity yet

*** 38. How long did it take you to be satisfied with your new career identity?**

- Less than 1 year
- 2 - 5 years
- 5 or more years
- I am not yet satisfied with my new career identity

*** 39. Is your identity as a former professional baseball player relevant in your current position?**

- No
- Yes

*** 40. Do you still view yourself as a professional baseball player?**

- No
- Yes

*** 41. Do your family and friends still view you as a professional baseball player?**

- No
- Yes

*** 42. Do the people you work with view you as a professional baseball player?**

- No
- Yes

*** 43. Do you suffer any lasting effects of injuries suffered during your playing career?**

- No
- Yes

If yes, please describe

baseball survey

*** 44. Are you still in contact with any of your former teammates?**

No

Yes

If yes, please describe nature and frequency of contact.

*** 45. Are you still in contact with any of your former coaches?**

No

Yes

If yes, please describe nature and frequency of contact.

*** 46. What did you find to be the most difficult part of the transition from an active playing career to life after baseball?**

baseball survey

***47. Now, in your life after your playing career, which words or phrases (up to 10 statements) best answered the question "Who am I?"**

1.
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10.

48. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

8. Section IV – results of survey

49. Optional: Are you interested in hearing about the results of the survey? If so, please include contact information below and you will be sent a report of the results upon the completion of the project:

Name:

Email:

Mailing address:

9. Section V -- request for follow-up interview

50. Optional: Are you willing to be contacted for a follow-up interview? If so, please complete the following:

Name:

Email:

Phone:

Mailing address:

10. Thank you

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey.

1. Introduction and Consent

*** 1. Dear Participant,**

You are being asked to volunteer in a research study: Doctoral Dissertation on Loss of Central Identity Among Former Professional Athletes.

The purpose of the study is to collect responses from former professional football players with the intent of investigating whether or not there are certain factors which positively or negatively influence the transition after the end of their playing careers.

If you agree to participate, your part will be to answer multiple questions. It should take no more than 15 - 20 minutes of your time. There are no foreseeable risks or benefits to you for participating in this study. You will not be paid for your participation.

The following procedures will be followed in an effort to keep your personal information confidential – data collected will be coded. To ensure that this research activity is being conducted properly, Stony Brook University's Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects and/or applicable officials of SBU, OHRP (Office for Human Research Protections) have the right to review study records, but confidentiality will be maintained as allowed by law.

There are no costs to you for participating in this study.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you don't want to.

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you may contact Maria Anderson at 631-371-1430 or via email at mdanderson@ic.sunysb.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, or if you would like to obtain information or offer input, you may contact Ms. Judy Matuk, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 631-632-9036.

If you complete the attached survey it means that you have read (or have had read to you) the information contained in this letter, and would like to be a volunteer in this research study.

Thank you,

Norman Goodman, Professor, Stony Brook University

football survey

Maria Doelger Anderson, doctoral student, Stony Brook University

Clicking here indicates that you have read the information above and volunteer for this study. PLEASE NOTE – MOST QUESTIONS REQUIRE A RESPONSE TO CONTINUE TO THE NEXT QUESTION IN THE SURVEY.

2. Section I – questions regarding your background & life before signing a...

***2. 1. In what year were you born?**

***3. What was your place of birth (state/country)?**

***4. Please indicate your ethnicity (select all that apply)**

- White/Causasian
- African-American/Black
- Hispanic
- Asian or Pacific Islander
- Other
- Decline to State

***5. What was the highest level of education your father completed?**

- Did not graduate from high school
- High school graduate/GED
- Some college
- Graduated from college
- Earned advanced degree
- Don't know

***6. How would you characterize your family's standard of living while you were growing up?**

- Very poor/at or below poverty line
- Lower middle class
- Upper middle class
- Upper class/affluent

football survey

***7. Location (state/country) of last high school attended/graduated from?**

***8. Did you have an older, close male relative who was a professional athlete?**

No

Yes

If yes, please describe relationship and sport he played:

***9. How old were you when you signed your first professional football contract?**

***10. How much education had you completed when you signed your first professional football contract?**

High school graduate/GED

Some junior college

Completed junior college

1-2 years of college

3 years of college

Graduated from college

Other (please specify)

3. Section II – questions relating to your career as a professional football p...

***11. In what round, if any, were you drafted?**

***12. What position(s) did you play in football at the professional level?**

football survey

***13. Thinking back to the time of your playing career, which words or phrases (up to 10 statements) best answered the question "Who am I?" at that time.**

1.
2.
3.
4.
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7.
8.
9.
10.

***14. At what level did you begin your professional football career? (example: active roster, practice squad, injured reserve, other league such as the CFL, etc.)**

***15. How many years in all did you spend on the practice squad, injured reserve or in an alternate leagues, such as the CFL.**

- None
- Less than 1 full season
- 1 - 2 full seasons
- 3 - 4 full seasons
- 5 or more full seasons

***16. How many years in all did you spend on the regular active roster?**

- None
- Less than 1 full season
- 1 - 2 full seasons
- 3 - 4 full seasons
- 5 or more full seasons

football survey

***17. Were you ever sent down from the regular season roster to the practice squad?**

- No
 Yes

If yes, how were you treated by your former teammates when they found out?

***18. How many times during your professional career were you traded to another team?**

- I was never traded
 Once
 Twice
 3 or more times

4.

***19. If traded, how were you treated by your former teammates after the trade?**

5.

***20. How much time in total did you spend on injure reserve and/or the physically unable to perform list during your career?**

- Less than 3 months
 3 - 6 months
 1 full season
 More than 1 full season

football survey

***21. Did you pursue additional education/earn a degree during your playing career?**

No

Yes

If yes, please describe

***22. Did you pursue any job training/acquire job skills during your playing career?**

No

Yes

If yes, please describe

***23. Did you have a job that was NOT related to your playing career during the off season (s)?**

No

Yes

If yes, please describe

***24. Did you have a job related to your playing career during the off season(s)?**

- No
- Yes

If yes, please describe

***25. How old were you when your playing career ended?**

26. How did your playing career end?

- Voluntary retirement
- Injury
- Cut from the team due to performance
- Released from the team for contract/financial reasons
- Personal/family considerations
- Other

***27. How did your teammates treat you as your career ended?**

***28. How did your family/friends treat you as your career ended?**

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- Before your professional career began
- During your professional career
- After your playing career ended

football survey

30. Were you interested in finding a job related to your professional football career after your playing days were over?

No

Yes

*** 31. Did you meet anyone at college who helped in your post-playing career job search?**

I didn't attend college

No

Yes

If so, what was their position/occupation and how did he or she help you?

*** 32. Did you meet anyone during your playing career who helped you to find a new job/career after you left professional football?**

No

Yes

If so, please describe his or her position and how he or she helped you:

*** 33. What was your first full-time job after leaving professional football?**

football survey

***34. How long did you actively look before you found your first job after leaving professional football?**

- Less than 6 months
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- 3 or more years
- Went back to school before finding a job

Other (please specify)

***35. How long after the end of your playing career did it take you to find what you consider to be your new career identity?**

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- 1 - 2 years
- 3 or more years
- I haven't found what I consider to be my new career identity yet

7.

***36. How long did it take you to be satisfied with your new career identity?**

- Less than 1 year
- 2 - 5 years
- 5 or more years
- I am not yet satisfied with my new career identity

***37. Is your identity as a former professional football player relevant in your current position?**

- No
- Yes

***38. Do you still view yourself as a professional football player?**

- No
- Yes

football survey

***39. Do your family and friends still view you as a professional football player?**

- No
 Yes

***40. Do the people you work with view you as a professional football player?**

- No
 Yes

***41. Do you suffer any lasting effects of injuries suffered during your playing career?**

- No
 Yes

If yes, please describe

***42. Are you still in contact with any of your former teammates?**

- No
 Yes

If yes, please describe nature and frequency of contact.

football survey

***43. Are you still in contact with any of your former coaches?**

No

Yes

If yes, please describe nature and frequency of contact.

***44. What did you find to be the most difficult part of the transition from an active playing career to life after football?**

***45. Now, in your life after your playing career, which words or phrases (up to 10 statements) best answered the question "Who am I?"**

1.	<input type="text"/>
2.	<input type="text"/>
3.	<input type="text"/>
4.	<input type="text"/>
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9.	<input type="text"/>
10.	<input type="text"/>

46. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

8. Section IV – results of survey

football survey

47. Optional: Are you interested in hearing about the results of the survey? If so, please include contact information below and you will be sent a report of the results upon the completion of the project:

Name:

Email:

Mailing address:

9. Section V -- request for follow-up interview

48. Optional: Are you willing to be contacted for a follow-up interview? If so, please complete the following:

Name:

Email:

Phone:

Mailing address:

10. Thank you

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey.

Interview Script:

Thank you for offering to talk with me about your survey responses and the transition you went through at the end of your (baseball/football) career. I would like, with your permission, to tape the interview to not only allow me to accurately transcribe your responses but also concentrate on our conversation rather than on taking notes. Is that acceptable? *[If subject answers no, hand-written notes will be taken instead.]*

I anticipate that this interview will take approximately 20 – 30 minutes. As with the on-line survey you took, your answers will be coded and remain confidential. You may end the interview at any time. Do I have your permission to proceed?

[The questions asked will be based on the answers the interviewee gave for his survey. The following questions are the full set that will be asked across all interviews, though their will only be a subset asked of each individual based on his survey and the sport played. As the interviewees will have already been familiar with the type of information I am seeking from their participation in the survey, this is meant to be a conversation to add some additional details to the responses they have already given.]

1. Why did you make the decision to leave college early (or not attend college) to play profession (baseball/football)?
2. Did you ever regret that decision? If so, what would you do differently if you could? Why?
3. You indicated that you began thinking about a post-playing career (before/during) your playing career? Can you tell me about when you started thinking about it and whether or not you did any planning?
4. You indicated that you voluntarily retired from (baseball/football). How did you arrive at that decision?
5. You indicated that you did not voluntarily retire from (baseball/football). Did the end of your playing career come as a shock to you or did you realize it was coming?
6. What did you do, if anything, to prepare yourself for the end of your playing career? Did you have an idea of what you wanted to do afterward?
7. What was the most difficult thing about the transition to life after your playing career? Why?
8. Is there anything you would do differently in preparing for this transition if you could do it again? Why?
9. Do you believe that your experience as a professional (baseball/football) player has helped you in your life after your playing career? If so, how? If not, has it been a hindrance? How?
10. Did you take part in any programs offered by your school or your team(s) that were designed to prepare you for the business of life after (baseball/football)? If so, can you describe them for me? Did you find them helpful? In what way?

11. Do you believe that there are enough resources available to current/former players to help them in their career transition at the end of their playing days? If not, what types of programs do feel are needed?
12. Is there anything else you'd like to add?
13. Thank you for your time and your willingness to talk with me about your transition from your playing career to life after baseball/football. I appreciate your time.