



## IOC ATHLETE CAREER PROGRAMME

# ADJUSTMENT TO TRANSITION OUT OF SPORT

### What is the purpose of the following fact sheet?

The purpose of this factsheet is to define what transition adjustment is, to describe the typical signs of maladjustment to career termination and to indicate the factors that will help athletes adjust efficiently to their transition out of sport.

### What is “adjustment to transition out of sport”

“Adjustment to transition out of sport” relates to the efforts, to the adaptation strategies and sometimes to the difficulties associated with the career termination process. As a matter of fact, transition out of sport implies that you undergo a deep transformation of your own self, with significant consequences on your emotions, on your relationships with your social environment and on the way you perceive yourself. These changes imply that you need to adapt, or to adjust, to a new role beyond your sport.

### Which are the signs of transition maladjustment?

Traditionally, there has been a tendency to view athletic career termination as a sudden and abrupt event, associated with emotional consequences that can be compared to the experiences of dying. Indeed, if you are experiencing career termination as traumatic, the risk of serious emotional consequences and identity crisis is much higher. In such cases, transition out of sport may be accompanied by the following maladjustment expressions:

- a) Emotional distress (characterised by an extreme dissatisfaction with yourself and your life, with feelings of depression and helplessness, frustration and disappointment).
- b) Social disorientation (such as feelings of isolation, perceived lack of support, loss of social status).
- c) Dysfunctional self-perception (identified with overwhelming feelings of loss, loss of identity).

Nevertheless, a growing number of studies have shown that transition is not necessarily a sudden “cut” with traumatic consequences for you. As a matter of fact, if you are able to experience it as a process with gradual phases, maladjustment feeling decreases. Feelings such as curiosity (in exploring new fields) and relief (from a sport that is no longer a source of motivation) can facilitate your transition out of sport.

### What can I do to maximise positive adjustment to transition out of sport?

When the transition process implies severe maladjustment, it is absolutely necessary for you to be assisted by a sports psychologist who will accompany you while going through the grief process, preceding a self-reconstruction into a new life after sport.

Here are some steps to put all the chances on your side for positive adjustment to life after sport:

- 1) Retire voluntarily as long as it is feasible. The feeling of controlling your retirement is much stronger when you retire through your own choice instead of being forced to retire (i.e. due to injuries or loss of contract), and has a positive effect on your adjustment strategies.

- 2) Be prepared and make plans for the future throughout your sporting career, as preparation allows you to anticipate a career termination scenario and minimises the feeling of loss occurring upon sport career termination.
- 3) Strive to develop a multiple defined identity, which is not exclusively supported by your success in sport, but also by your social relationships, your experiences and successes outside sport.
- 4) Develop a nurturing and supportive network that will give you encouragement in the transition process and a strong basis you can rely upon. Cherish your friendships and social involvement throughout your career.
- 5) Come to terms and seek for psychological peace with your own athletic successes, failures and unfulfilled dreams, which will foster your capacity to formulate motivating projects for the future.