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An international analysis of career assistance programmes for high-performance athletes

Hee Jung Hong^a and Brian Minikin^b

^aFaculty of Health Sciences and Sport, University of Stirling Ringgold Standard Institution, Stirling, UK of Great Britain and UK; ^bFaculty of Health Sciences and Sport, University of Stirling Faculty of Health Sciences and Sport Ringgold Standard Institution, Stirling, UK of Great Britain and UK

ABSTRACT

This study aims to offer a comprehensive analysis of Career Assistance Programmes (CAPs) available for high-performance athletes across the globe, addressing the current state of resources for their career development and transitional periods. The authors examined 23 sport organisations spanning five continents, focusing on aspects such as CAPs' accessibility, objectives, content, delivery personnel, practitioner training, and self-evaluation methods. Utilising web-based data collection and research tours, the study acquired pertinent information to address the research questions. Deductive content analysis was employed, with the research questions and the Holistic Athlete Career (HAC) model serving as the framework for categorisation. This study offers an in-depth exploration of global CAPs and provide empirical insights into their current practices. The results show resources available to high-performance athletes, while identifying service gaps, necessitating policies to support a wider range of athletes. Notably, advancements have been made in developing training programmes for practitioners; however, the study highlights the need to further investigate the specific competencies that practitioners develop or seek to acquire through such initiatives. It is suggested that sport organisations actively exchange best practices to augment the effectiveness of their CAPs. The study highlights a service gap for athletes not meeting the high-performance threshold for CAP eligibility, limiting access to resources. Consequently, this population faces limited opportunities for career development and may struggle to cope with the challenges stemming from their athletic pursuits. The authors advocate for the expansion of services to address this disparity, ensuring equitable access to resources for athletes at varying performance levels.

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KEYWORDS

Career transitions in sport; athlete support programmes; athletes' career development; athletes' career transitions; organisational support

Introduction

Over the past several decades, research on career assistance, development, and transitions for high-performance athletes has significantly expanded (Stambulova et al. 2009, 2021). This progression of scholarship is evident in the study of career assistance, which encompasses the provision of support for athletes in managing and addressing a range of career-related issues both within and beyond the realm of sports (Stambulova and Wylleman 2014). Career assistance entails a variety of interventions,

CONTACT Hee Jung Hong  heejung.hong@stir.ac.uk  Faculty of Health Sciences and Sport University of Stirling Ringgold standard institution, Stirling FK9 4LA, UK of Great Britain and UK

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often organised into coordinated programmes implemented by sports organisations for the benefit of athletes (Torregrossa *et al.* 2020). The necessity of aiding athletes in navigating their athletic careers alongside non-athletic pursuits has been acknowledged for over two decades, prompting the establishment of various career assistance programs (CAPs) worldwide. Examples include the Athlete Career and Education (ACE) program in Australia and the UK, the Career Assistance Programme (CAP) for Athletes in the US, and the Olympic Athlete Career Centre (OACC) in Canada (Stambulova *et al.* 2009).

From the standpoint of sport career development and transitions, CAPs encompass 'integrated and comprehensive combinations of workshops, seminars, educational modules, individual counselling, and/or a referral network offering individualised and/or group-oriented multidisciplinary support services to athletes, addressing athletic participation, developmental and lifestyle issues, as well as educational and vocational development' (Wylleman *et al.* 2004, p. 511). The overarching goal of these CAPs and associated interventions is to facilitate athletes' management of both athletic and non-athletic careers, whilst concurrently promoting career excellence within their chosen sports (Stambulova *et al.* 2021). The concept of athlete career excellence, introduced by Stambulova (2020), is characterised as 'an athlete's capacity to maintain a healthy, successful, and enduring career in both sport and life' (Stambulova *et al.* 2021, p. 537). As a dynamic process unfolding throughout an athlete's career trajectory, career excellence may necessitate various forms of support. Accordingly, career assistance can play a crucial role in bolstering athletes' efforts to achieve and sustain career excellence (Stambulova *et al.* 2021).

Anderson (1993) pioneered the identification of elite athlete education programmes by visiting highly-regarded sports organisations and centres in Australia, Canada, the UK, and the US that offered career assistance programmes. Gorely *et al.* (2001) investigated the usage and satisfaction levels associated with Australia's ACE program, but they were unable to determine the program's efficacy in terms of athletes' behavioural changes. Lavalley *et al.* (2001) conducted a comparative analysis of career assistance programmes in seven countries, including Australia, Canada, and the UK, coinciding with the emergence of research on sport career transition programs. Over a decade later, Park *et al.* (2013) reviewed eight studies on sport career assistance programmes in their systematic analysis of athletes' career transitions out of sport (Selden 1997, Stankovich 1998, Goddard 2004, Lavalley 2005, Albion 2007, Redmond *et al.* 2007, Torregrossa *et al.* 2007, Gilmore 2008). These studies revealed positive correlations between involvement in career assistance programmes and athletes' life skills development, as well as the quality of their career transitions. Building upon these findings, Stambulova *et al.* (2013) examined research on career transitions and career assistance programmes in 19 countries, providing a more comprehensive evidence base for career assistance programmes compared to earlier studies. However, they noted that research on this subject remains limited in scope. Hong and Coffee (2018) expanded the scope of inquiry by exploring career assistance programmes in 19 countries across five continents (Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe, and Oceania), which the five rings of the Olympic flag represent (Douceff 2012). Their research aimed to provide an overview of resources available to high-performance athletes for managing their athletic careers and fostering life skills in preparation for post-sport life. The study's findings revealed that the majority of the countries examined had established career assistance programmes designed to support athletes in balancing their athletic and non-athletic careers. These programmes provided a range of services, including educational, vocational, personal development, career development, and life skills support.

In a recent study, Torregrossa *et al.* (2020) offered an in-depth examination of CAPs, delving into aspects such as definitions, objectives, delivery methods, and the processes of emergence, development, and implementation. The authors proposed a taxonomy of CAPs, consisting of: (1) Holistic CAPs for elite athletes, (2) Sport-specific CAPs for professional athletes, and (3) Dual CAPs for student-athletes. This classification system was derived from an analysis of various CAPs ($n = 8$) originating from different countries and organisations, including Australia, Belgium, Canada, the UK, and the US. The taxonomy serves as a valuable tool for understanding CAPs not assessed in their study,

particularly those implemented beyond Europe and North America. Despite recent investigations into CAPs (e.g. Hong and Coffee 2018, Torregrossa *et al.* 2020), research in this area remains limited, as highlighted by Stambulova and Ryba (2014). Consequently, there is a pressing need for increased research focused on evaluating CAPs, as well as the practical application of such findings (Torregrossa *et al.* 2020). With this in mind, the primary aim of the present study is to furnish a comprehensive overview of CAPs for high-performance athletes on a global scale. In pursuing this objective, the study not only aims to showcase the availability of resources that facilitate athletes' career development and transitions but also to identify existing gaps in practice. By pinpointing these gaps, the study seeks to inform sports organisations, policy makers, and other key stakeholders, enabling them to enhance their support provision and scheme development in order to address the identified shortcomings.

Literature review

Career development, transitions, and assistance for high-performance athletes

Throughout the past five decades, the scope and depth of research exploring athletes' career development, transitions, and assistance have undergone considerable transformation (Stambulova *et al.* 2021). This evolution has been marked by shifts in research focus. During the initial stage (1960s – 1980s), researchers approached the topic of retirement from sport using non-sport frameworks. Later, the focus shifted towards a whole person/career perspective and within-career transitions (e.g. junior-to-senior transitions), employing sport-specific frameworks such as the Athletic Career Termination Model (Taylor and Ogilvie 1994) and the Analytic Career Model (Stambulova 1994). Since the turn of the millennium, research has increasingly embraced 'whole person' and environmental perspectives, as well as culturally specific investigations and practices. This shift has led to the development of numerous new frameworks, including the Athletic Career Transition Model (Stambulova 2003), the Holistic Athletic Career Model (Wylleman 2019), which was adapted from the Developmental Model of Transitions Faced by Athletes (Wylleman and Lavallee 2004), and the Cultural Transition Model (Ryba *et al.* 2016). As the research focus has shifted towards whole person perspectives and post-sport careers, athlete career transitions have come to be understood in relation to athletes' developmental challenges, various transitions, and non-athletic activities throughout their athletic careers (Wylleman and Lavallee 2004). Researchers have underscored the importance of coping skills and strategies (internal resources), as well as social and organisational support (external resources), in navigating these transitions effectively. The need to match the demands and challenges faced by athletes with the available resources has been consistently emphasised in the literature (Taylor and Ogilvie 1994, Stambulova *et al.* 2009, Brown *et al.* 2018, Henriksen *et al.* 2020). In recent years, studies have continued to investigate the complexities of athlete career transitions and the significance of support systems. For instance, Henriksen *et al.* (2020) examined the mental health of high-performance athletes and emphasised the critical role that a supportive sporting environment plays in facilitating successful transitions out of sport. By fostering a well-structured and nurturing environment, stakeholders can help athletes navigate the challenges inherent in this crucial period of their lives.

Career Assistance (CA) is designed to help athletes navigate various challenges associated with their athletic and non-athletic careers (Stambulova and Wylleman 2014). CA can be implemented as an intervention, facilitating athletes' management of their sports careers alongside other aspects of their lives (Torregrossa *et al.* 2020). These interventions can be viewed from two perspectives: preventive/supportive and crisis/negative coping (Stambulova and Wylleman 2014). From the preventive/supportive perspective, interventions aid athletes in anticipating and preparing for upcoming demands associated with transitions and managing dual careers. Conversely, from the crisis/negative coping perspective, interventions assist athletes in analysing crisis events or traumatic circumstances they have encountered, enabling them to explore and identify effective coping

strategies (Torregrossa *et al.* 2020). These interventions have given rise to career assistance programmes (CAPs), with the first CAP developed in the late 1980s to support retired athletes transitioning out of sport (e.g. the Olympic Job Opportunities Program; Stambulova *et al.* 2021). Since then, sports organisations worldwide have established CAPs to facilitate athletes' career development and transitions.

Hong and Coffee (2018) conducted a study investigating CAPs in 19 different countries, demonstrating that numerous CAPs have been developed and implemented globally since Lavalée *et al.* (2001) reviewed CAPs in seven distinct countries, as previously mentioned. Their examination of CAPs focused on five key features: (a) identifying the organisation responsible for delivering sport career transition intervention programs at the government level; (b) outlining the overall strategies of sport career transition intervention programmes; (3) detailing the activities and content of these intervention programmes; (4) determining who is responsible for delivering the intervention programmes; and (5) ascertaining whether sporting organisations offer training and development programmes for practitioners who deliver these programmes to high-performance athletes. Based on their findings, Hong and Coffee (2018) emphasised the need for further research on international comparisons of CAPs and the training programmes available for CAP practitioners. This highlights the ongoing requirement for a deeper understanding of CAP implementation and effectiveness in supporting athletes during their career transitions. Although Hong and Coffee (2018) did not categorise CAPs, Torregrossa *et al.* (2020) identified two primary programme types: reactive and proactive. Reactive programmes aim to provide direct assistance, such as financial aid, while proactive programmes offer resources to help athletes prepare for their transitions and address related challenges. In this context, Park *et al.* (2012) also suggest that practitioners should provide both proactive (e.g. career planning and education to develop transferable skills) and reactive support (e.g. coping with emotional and identity crises). Hong and Coffee (2018) found that most career assistance programmes focused on proactive approaches. Henriksen *et al.* (2018) delineated common features of successful interventions, which include "a thorough assessment of athletes' needs, a whole person approach, following the athletes over time and across contexts, involving significant others, and monitoring the effectiveness of the intervention" (Stambulova *et al.* 2021, p. 16). Given that 'monitoring effectiveness of the intervention' was not considered in Hong and Coffee (2018), a comprehensive analysis of career assistance programmes worldwide, grounded in established theoretical frameworks from the literature, may elucidate the necessary resources for athletes to manage their career development and transitions, as well as attain career excellence. A notable research gap was identified in Hong and Coffee (2018), as it remains unclear how sport organisations assess their own programmes to evaluate their effectiveness and utility. This aspect of CAPs warrants further investigation to ensure that these programmes are delivering the intended outcomes and providing adequate support to athletes.

Another gap identified in Hong and Coffee's (2018) study is the lack of information about the eligibility criteria for each programme. It is crucial to identify who can access such programmes in order to better understand the target audience of existing CAPs. The current study endeavours to address these gaps in the literature and contribute to a deeper understanding of CAPs.

Theoretical frameworks underpinning

The current study is grounded in the Holistic Athlete Career (HAC) model (Wylleman 2019; see Figure 1), which evolved from the developmental model of transitions faced by athletes proposed by Wylleman and Lavalée (2004). The developmental model of transitions faced by athletes was informed by the investigation of athletes' interpersonal relationships (Wylleman *et al.* 2004, 2017), dual careers of elite student-athletes (Wylleman *et al.* 2004), and the experiences of retired athletes (Wylleman *et al.* 1993). Initially, the model featured four distinct levels: athletic, psychological, psychosocial, and academic-vocational, signifying a clear shift towards a holistic developmental perspective encompassing both athletic and non-athletic domains (Stambulova *et al.* 2021). The

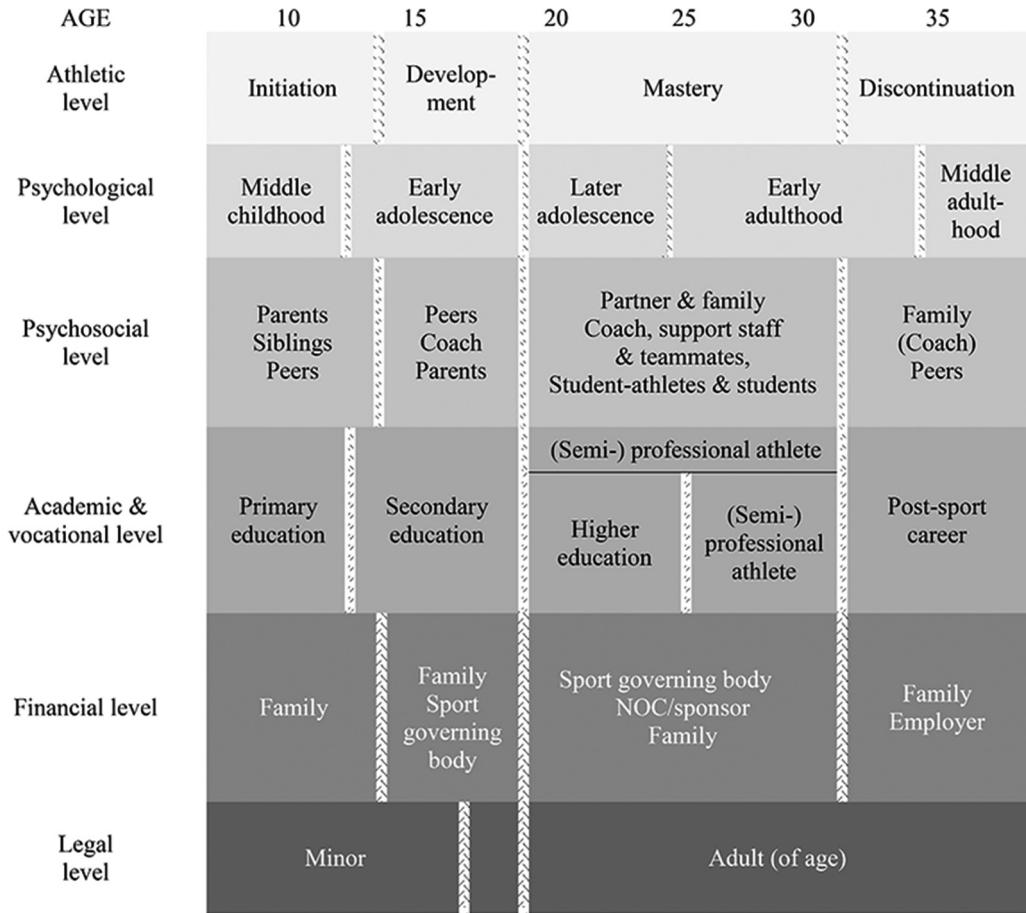


Figure 1. Holistic Athlete Career (HAC) model (Wylleman 2019).

developmental model eventually evolved into the HAC model, incorporating two additional levels: financial and legal (Wylleman 2019). As a cornerstone for career studies, the HAC model guides researchers to adopt a holistic developmental perspective in their investigations (Stambulova *et al.* 2021).

The HAC model emphasises the significance of adopting a holistic approach when supporting athletes and the necessity of understanding athletes' career development processes from a multidimensional perspective, which should be taken into account when designing and implementing CAPs. For example, challenges at the vocational level (e.g. loss of elite athlete status) can substantially impact the financial level (e.g. financial insecurity) and the psychological level (e.g. depression resulting from a loss of athlete identity), which is crucial to consider when providing assistance to athletes. Similarly, if athletes encounter psychological difficulties (e.g. anxiety, depression, eating disorders), these issues may be connected to challenges at the psychosocial level (e.g. dysfunctional relationships with coaches, abuse/bullying by teammates, loss of significant others), potentially leading to suboptimal or decreased performance (athletic level; Wylleman 2019). However, it appears that the content of CAPs in various countries has not yet been examined through the lens of the HAC model in previous research. Although Torregrossa *et al.* (2020) investigated the primary characteristics and content of some CAPs and proposed a taxonomy for

these programmes, a comprehensive analysis of CAPs in a diverse range of countries is still warranted. Such an examination can inform athletes, practitioners, researchers, and other stakeholders who are affected by or can influence the implementation of CAPs about current practices and trends.

The research objectives aimed to expand upon the data from Hong and Coffee (2018) by introducing two additional research questions, focusing on the identification of eligibility criteria for accessing CAPs and the methods employed by sports organisations to evaluate their programmes. The research questions are as follows: Q1. Which sports organisation is responsible for delivering CAPs in each respective country?; Q2. Which athletes qualify for programme access?; Q3. What are the overarching aims and objectives of the programme?; Q4. What activities and content are encompassed within the programme?; Q5. Who is accountable for programme delivery?; Q6. What training and career development opportunities do sports organisations provide for practitioners responsible for delivering these programmes to high-performance athletes?; and Q7. What methods do sports organisations utilise to assess their programmes or their implementation?

Methods

The present study forms a component of a comprehensive investigation of CAPs for high-performance athletes worldwide, scrutinising various facets of career assistance, encompassing both reactive and proactive measures. This was accomplished while concurrently replicating the methodology employed in Hong and Coffee's study. Furthermore, the 'Research Tour' approach, as implemented in Anderson's (1993) seminal work, was also employed to enrich the methodological framework.

Data collection

Between May 2018 and September 2019, web-based data collection was employed to gather pertinent information from organisation websites to address the research questions. Hong and Coffee (2018) conducted data collection by examining the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and National Olympic Committees (NOCs) websites, as these organisations have been shown to develop CAPs for high-performance athletes and employ practitioners (e.g. advisors, coordinators, counsellors) to deliver these programmes to athletes. Torregrossa *et al.* (2020) also asserted that the 'Athlete Career Program' (ACP), which evolved into 'Athlete365' and was developed by the IOC in collaboration with ADECCO (IOC n.d.), is the most widely recognised CAP worldwide. Athlete365 addresses three key areas: (1) education, (2) life skills, and (3) employment. Approximately 22,000 Olympians and Paralympians in over 30 countries were offered the ACP through their NOCs; in some instances, the programmes were adapted by the respective NOCs to suit their specific needs. In the current study, data was primarily collected from the IOC and NOCs, with a few exceptions (see Table 1), following the methodology employed by Hong and Coffee (2018).

A research tour was also employed to collect data. Anderson (1993) investigated some of the most prominent international sport centres that provided career assistance programmes in Australia, Canada, the UK, and the US. She visited these four countries and interviewed selected researchers and practitioners, given the limited information available during her study. Two decades later, technological advancements have enabled researchers to access information online more easily. However, the authors aimed to partially replicate Anderson's pioneering work in data collection to gain a deeper understanding of programme provision. During the data collection period, the first author conducted a research tour, visiting three organisations – IOC, Oceania National Olympic Committee (ONOC), and Sport Singapore – located in Switzerland, Fiji, and Singapore, respectively. In contrast to Anderson's (1993) utilisation of interviews, the present study involved taking field notes and consulting key officers related to the CAPs. Qualitative researchers are encouraged to take field notes to enrich the data collection process and offer a robust context for data analysis (Patton 2002,

Table 1. Overview of career assistance programmes worldwide.

Country	Sport organisation and its programme	Eligibility	Aims/Objectives	Practitioners (P)	Training for P	Evaluation
Australia	Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) – Athlete Wellbeing and Engagement (AW&E)	National level athletes with podium potential.	To manage dual careers (sport and education/work) while training to compete at the highest level. To develop self-aware and self-directed athletes.	AW&E Managers	Certificate IV in Career Development, Complete range of skills in the AW&E space.	Surveys. Face to face meetings.
	South Australian Sports Institute (SASI) – Personal Excellence; Athlete Wellbeing and Engagement (AW&E)	Age between 18–22 emerging athletes. Or athletes on SASI scholarship.	Sport and Work balance	A Director and an Athlete Career Development Advisor	Some opportunities for Personal development (e.g. Career pathway)	Review process, collect feedback from athletes (not regularly assessed).
Belgium	ADEPS (Administrative service of the Ministry of the French Community of Belgium) – <i>Projet de vie</i>	The priority is given to high-level athletes.	To help the athletes to make transitions Sport and Work balance.	' <i>Projet de vie</i> ' representatives from each federation.	Regular meetings with federation representatives and top athletes to discuss about future career path.	Not clear.
	Sport Vlaanderen (Administration of the Ministry of Sport) – <i>Carrièrebegeleiding</i> Topsport	Olympic disciplines. European/World level.	To career support during and after sporting career. To improve the policy regarding dual career.	Advisors, career coaches, and dual career support providers.	One day of training for career coaches.	Surveys.
Botswana	Botswana National Olympic Committee – IOC Athletes Career Program (ACP)	Elite Athletes. National team some potential athletes.	To prepare athletes for life after sport. To help them develop life skills.	Manager, Sport Development & Team Services officer, Logistics officer- member support, Games Assistant, and Anti-doping Officer.	No structured training and development programmes, but support services providers are nominated to attend courses as organised occasionally by the IOC.	No impact assessments.

(Continued)



Table 1. (Continued).

Country	Sport organisation and its programme	Eligibility	Aims/Objectives	Practitioners (P)	Training for P	Evaluation
Canada	Canadian Olympic and Paralympic Sport Institutes – Game Plan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sport Canada carded athletes – or national training group athletes. 2. Category one athletes who have retired from sport within the past two years. 3. Category one athletes who have been retired for more than two-years are eligible for some Game Plan services. 	To provide support to excel on and off the field of play so that their transition is as smooth and healthy as possible.	Game Plan has National Manager, a marketing and programmes manager, a logistics and services specialist. 10 Game Plan advisors and three part time advisor assistants.	Support professional development opportunities for the team. No specific courses yet but consider designing courses for the advisors.	Surveys.
Denmark	Team Denmark – Dual Career (DC) as a support model	International level athletes or potential international athletes	To develop elite athletes in sport, education, and personal life.	An advisor and dedicated educational advisors. Coaches and sport directors advise and integrate DC in the sport setups.	Network meetings. Workshop and seminars.	Surveys.
France	Ministry of Sports via the National Institute of Sport	All the athletes classified 'High Level Athlete'.	To enable athletes to perform in sport and in education.	Counsellors, tutors, one coordinator per federation. A coordinator at the regional level, a coordinator per CREPS (regional centre of Performance Team).	Organised by the Ministry – training sessions to increase the level and the competencies of the counsellors.	None.
Germany	German Olympic Sports Federation (DOSB) – Dual Career (DC)	Members of the national teams (approximately 5,000 athletes).	To help athletes find adequate career opportunities, as well as assistance during sport career transition.	The career advisors in the Olympic Training Centres. Two employees in the department support and service management.	Two conferences per year (two to three days) with workshops and/or seminars for professional development and opportunities to interact and interchange with colleagues.	Unclear from data.
Hong Kong	Sports Federation & Olympic Committee of Hong Kong, China (SF&OC) – The Hong Kong Athletes Career & Education Programme (HKACEP)	Nominated by National Sports Associations. Current national team. Retiring athletes (to be retired within 24 months). Retired athletes up to 6 years after retirement.	To reduce apprehensions of serving athletes; To prepare for life after sport. To have successful employment upon retirement. To equip with life skills and knowledge.	HKACEP staff members.	Staff to join external job training courses or career enhancement courses.	Key Performance Index on athletes' education and career support, reviewed each year.

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued).

Country	Sport organisation and its programme	Eligibility	Aims/Objectives	Practitioners (P)	Training for P	Evaluation
IOC	IOC – Athlete 365 Career + (online) and Outreach	Open access to all the athletes.	To provide customised support/ services. To help athletes career development. To provide educational resources and scholarships.	IOC supports NOCs for their delivery. NOCs (delivery). Sport Department: –Director –Olympic interns –Full time consultant (outreach programme) –Adecco officer	For outreach programme, a series of workshops, retired athletes are trained as an instructor. No structured training programmes for practitioners yet.	Planning to develop a structured assessment.
Ireland	Sport Ireland Institute – The Athlete Career Development Programme	Carded athletes identified by the National Governing Bodies (NGBs).	To help athletes develop life skills. To assist athletes in managing performance and their sport career. To provide personalised services based on athletes' needs and requests.	Performance Life Skills Advisers.	Multi-discipline team training day. Individual service focus to upskill individuals. CPD training opportunities.	Surveys. Internal evaluation process. Performance review.
Japan	Japanese Olympic Committee – Career Academy	Olympic Athletes and potential Olympic athletes.	To help athletes focus on performance enhancement in sports. To help athletes find work places to continue their sports careers. To help athletes find jobs after retirement.	Director of career design department.	No structured training programmes yet.	Annually complete questionnaires
Malaysia	National Sports Council of Malaysia – Malaysian Athletes Career and Education Programme (MACE)	All athletes under the national programme, including disabled athletes.	To prepare the athletes to be ready for their retirement in terms of securing job opportunities, and financially.	Government administered some mentoring	Outsource to the private institutions and sports clubs. NSC provides the education programmes where they have the expertise.	No structured assessment yet.
Netherlands	National Olympic Committee & National Sports Federation (NOC*NSF) – Transition to the next career	High-level current and recently retired athletes. There are approximately 800 athletes.	To help athletes become familiar with the importance of a good transition to ensure a smooth career change.	Support team consists of the programme project leaders, TeamNL experts, performance managers, and activity-specialised partners.	No training and development programmes for support services providers yet.	Surveys and Impact Assessments.

(Continued)



Table 1. (Continued).

Country	Sport organisation and its programme	Eligibility	Aims/Objectives	Practitioners (P)	Training for P	Evaluation
New Zealand	High Performance Sport NZ (HPSNZ) – Athlete Life, Crossroads	The NZ Government supports 13 sports and 350 athletes. Other sports can buy back services from HPSNZ.	To help athletes identify their values, motivations, and strengths. To build identity and balance outside sport.	Athlete life advisors. Sports psychologists	Professional development as required (e.g. ICF accreditation, motivational interviewing, strength-based counselling, career counselling courses, sponsorship workshops, strengths training, and disc profiling). The psychology team completes their own training. Trained via Champion's programme.	Satisfaction survey. Feedback after workshops and interventions.
Oceania National Olympic Committee (ONOC)	Voice of Athletes (VOA) programme National level athletes	Members of national teams who compete at international level (e.g. Olympics, Pacific Games).	To raise awareness of public issues. To assist athletes in taking leadership roles in addressing such issues. To help athletes develop life skills. To assist athletes in finding employment opportunities.	VOA Champions (former/current athletes) who are trained to deliver the programme.		Structured assessment recently carried out.
Portugal	NOC of Portugal, through the Portuguese Olympic Athletes Commission – Athlete Career Programme	Primarily Olympic athletes. Other elite Portuguese athletes included.	To alert the athletes of timely preparation for the transition to the post-sporting career. To prepare athletes for transition. To offer direct support in the moment of transition.	Athletes commission members and staff, with the support of Adecco professionals.	No structured training programmes yet. However, the board member of the Athletes' Commission is an ACP trainer.	Unclear from data.
Singapore	Singapore Sport Institute – Athlete Life Management (ALM) programme	Team Singapore carded athletes.	spexBusiness: is a customised scheme that seeks partnerships with industry. spexEducation: provides support for student-athletes to cope effectively with the dual demands of sports and education.	Staff of Athlete Life team. The team is made up of four staff (two spexBusiness staff, and two spexEducation staff).	Workshops and seminars on life coaching.	Database kept and monitored.

(Continued)



Table 1. (Continued).

Country	Sport organisation and its programme	Eligibility	Aims/Objectives	Practitioners (P)	Training for P	Evaluation
South Korea	The Korean Sport Olympic Committee (KSOC) – Athlete Career Support Program	Former & current athletes on the KSOC athlete registration system. The targets can vary according to courses within the programme.	To grow career mindset and raise awareness of athletes. To assist athletes in developing career transition competency.	Advisors and counsellors from key stakeholders and Commissions within the KSOC.	For a counsellor: 1 million KRW/year budget for tuition. For a KSOC employee (education/training in general), – 500,000 KRW/year budget for tuition – 50 hours-compulsory education/training –Other programmes affiliated with other organisations (e.g. MEMOS).	Surveys and overall monitoring and evaluation.
Spain	The High-Performance Sports Centre of Catalonia (CAR) – Athlete Support Service (SAE in Catalan)	Eligibility not clear.	To advise the athletes throughout their sporting career in order to guide and help them.	One coordinator and two counsellors.	No structured training programmes yet.	No structured assessment yet.
Sweden	Swedish Olympic Committee – Top and Talent programme	Current national team athlete or athletes with potential to reach top 8 in the world.	To support athletes for reaching their top level of performance. To support athletes' dual careers.	One officer as a contact person of the programme. Sport directors also work with athletes, coaches, and managers from federations.	No structured training programmes. Network of specialists support the practitioners in relation to programme contents and delivery.	Annual development dialogues with the sport director and athletes.
USA	U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee – Athlete Career and Education (ACE) program	Current Team USA elite and emerging elite athletes in all Olympics and Paralympic sports plus Pan American sports. Retired Olympians and Paralympians.	To provide current and retired Team USA athletes with career, education, and life skills resources to support athletic performance goals, facilitate successful transition to post-elite competition careers.	ACE Career Coaches, contracted service providers, sponsors, and donors.	Career coach certification, leadership training, assessment certification, mental health first aid – all provided by external organisations and experts	Full monitoring and evaluation of athlete careers during and post their time as athletes.

Lofland *et al.* 2005, Creswell 2013). The field notes gathered during the research tour spanned five A4 pages, totalling 1,280 words, including bullet points. This information was integrated with other collected data for comprehensive analysis.

Samples

The websites of the IOC and NOCs were initially examined to identify relevant information to address the research questions. Additionally, the websites of other pertinent sports organisations in each respective country offering CAPs were analysed. To gather more information, NOCs from 50 countries were contacted. These countries were selected by the research team, taking into account Hong and Coffee's (2018) list, countries from continents not included in their study, and through leveraging personal contacts. The first author then communicated with each sports organisation to clarify website information and collect further details via emails and video calls. Subsequently, data was gathered from 25 organisations. However, the data from Norway and the UK was excluded from this study. The practitioner who provided further information regarding the UK organisation advised the research team to double-check this information with his senior colleague, but no response was received within the data collection period. The practitioner from the Norwegian organisation provided relevant websites to identify necessary information, but the required details were not available. As a result, data from 23 sports organisations was presented in this paper. Other sports organisations from the initial 50 countries were contacted at least five times (e.g. email reminders) within the data collection period. They were excluded from data collection because they either did not respond to email requests or declined to answer questions. It is worth noting that data was collected from five continents across the world, representing the five rings of the Olympic flag, as previously mentioned (Doucleff 2012).

Data analysis

Deductive content analysis was employed to analyse the data collected. Content analysis serves as a method for examining written, verbal, or visual communication messages (Cole 1988) and offers a systematic and objective way to describe phenomena (Krippendorff 1980, Downe-Wamboldt 1992, Sandelowski 1994). The goal of content analysis is to provide a succinct and comprehensive representation of the phenomenon, allowing concepts or categories to emerge from the data analysis and illustrate the phenomenon (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

In a deductive approach, the first step involves developing a categorisation matrix and coding the data according to the categories. This matrix is typically based on previous work, including theories, models, mind maps, and literature reviews (Sandelowski 1994; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), as well as the study's purpose and research questions (Azungah 2018). In this study, the categorisation matrix was derived from the seven research questions and the HAC model (Wylleman 2019; see Tables 1 and 2). All data collected was in English, with the exception of South Korea. Back-translation was conducted by the first author, a native South Korean, to ensure semantic equivalence (Chen and Boore 2010). No significant differences were identified between the initial and final English transcripts, confirming the integrity of content during the translation process. Using the transcript of collected data from websites, email responses, and field notes (totalling 9,025 words), the first author initially developed a table (see Table 1) to present data based on research questions (Q1, 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7). Both authors thoroughly reviewed the content for each question and met frequently to finalise the table. The authors organised and analysed data related to Q4 (contents and activities of career assistance programmes) based on the HAC model (Wylleman 2019; see Table 2).

Table 2. Contents and Activities of Career Assistance Programmes measured by the HAC model (Wylleman 2019).

Sport organisations	Contents and Activities	Levels
Australia (AIS)	Personal development; career and education; mental health; conduct and professionalism; community engagement.	Psychological Psycho-social Academic/ Vocational
Australia (SASI)	Workshops including induction; athlete wellbeing support.	Athletic Psychological Psycho-social Academic/ Vocational
ADEPS	Adapt the study courses to the athlete schedule within the school/ universities; customised tutoring to help the athlete.	Academic/ Vocational
Sport Vlaanderen	Individual support and advice; cooperate with organisations which offer interesting measures or programmes for athletes; lobby to policy makers.	Psycho-social Academic/ Vocational
Botswana National Olympic Committee	The data did not specify the contents and activities.	-
Canadian Olympic and Paralympic Sport Institutes	Career: Job shadowing, internship, flexible work, project-based work term. Employer network. Networking: Networking skills, networking events, game plan alumni network. Education. Skill development workshops: Brand management, financial management (amateur athlete trust, at the bank, borrowing, buying a home, personal income tax training). Health: Mental health support and athlete support (retirement assistance, childcare assistance, and relocation assistance).	Athletic Psychological Psycho-social Academic/ Vocational Financial
Team Denmark	Partnership with schools, universities, companies, and local communities; DC advice; Financial support for extended study programmes, Mentor programme.	Psychological Psycho-social Academic/ Vocational Financial
INSEP	Individual coaching; adaptation of the studies along the career for employment.	Psycho-social Academic/ Vocational
DOSB	Counselling sessions; dual Career events: athletes' education; sport career transition management programmes and career counselling.	Psychological Psycho-social Academic/ Vocational
SF&OC	Athletes consultation; career support; life skills training	Athletic Psychological Psycho-social Academic/ Vocational
IOC	Athlete365 Career+ : discover who you are; preparing for the transition; preparing for the workspace; Outreach programme : who I am? behavioural discovery; dreams to results; game plan; networking; CV/résumé; interviewing; translating sports to business language; social media; dual careers, entrepreneurship.	Athletic Psycho-social Academic/ Vocational
Sport Ireland Institute	Three pillars: education; career (career coaching, skills transferred to work); performance skills.	Athletic Psycho-social Academic/ Vocational
Japanese Olympic Committee	Career education programme to help athletes develop knowledge of job market and industry.	Academic/ Vocational
MACE	Courses related to sports such as physiotherapy, massage, supporting groups, managers, volunteers, and entrepreneurship.	Academic/ Vocational
NOC*NSF	Career planning; coaching on the job; group coaching; job market orientation; internships and working experience; competence development, and psychic and psychosocial support	Psychological Psycho-social Academic/ Vocational
HPSNZ	Career education; study support; work experience; CVs and interview techniques; personal development activities (request from individuals); individual coaching and mentoring; group workshops;	Psycho-social Academic/ Vocational Financial

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued).

Sport organisations	Contents and Activities	Levels
ONOC	Play True (anti-doping/substance use); Stay Healthy (education on health and lifestyle issues and how to address them); Go Green (education on the impact of human activities/behaviours on environment); Play Safe (education on safeguarding athletes).	Psycho-social Academic/ Vocational
National Olympic Committee of Portugal	Workshops for athletes: education; employment; life skills; entrepreneurship; work experience and preparation.	Academic/ Vocational
Singapore Sport Institute	Employment through (1) spexBusiness network partners, (2) spexEntrepreneurship, and (3) spexEthos. spexEducation (athlete life coaching and support, and academic flexibility and support).	Academic/ Vocational
KSOC	Career counselling; career education; mentoring programme [request from individuals]; job matching system; surveys and awareness.	Psychological Psycho-social Academic/ Vocational
CAR	Customised programs; academic and/or professional education; creating a personal project; monitoring and coordinating with mentoring programs for athletes; advice on finding jobs; support in the process of retirement.	Athletic Psycho-social Academic/ Vocational
Swedish Olympic Committee	Specific programmes based on athletes' needs.	-
U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee	Grants and Funding; career coaching, readiness, and development; education; scholarships and opportunities; financial advisory services and tax preparation; personal growth workshops and advising; skills development training; transition support for retiring athletes; community, network, and resources centre.	Psychological Psycho-social Academic/ Vocational Financial Legal

Results and discussion

The findings are presented and discussed in two subsections: (a) Overview of Career Assistance Programmes Worldwide and (b) Contents and Activities of Career Assistance Programmes. In the first subsection, the findings critically examine the eligibility criteria, aims, and objectives of CAPs, as well as the practitioners responsible for delivering CAPs, available training programmes for these practitioners, and whether the sport organisations have conducted evaluations of their CAPs. By scrutinising these aspects, this study sheds light on potential disparities and gaps in the provision of CAPs across different sport organisations. In the second subsection, the content and activities of CAPs, analysed within the context of the HAC model (Wylleman 2019), are presented and discussed.

Overview of career assistance programmes worldwide

The results of an overview of CAPs, addressing six of the seven research questions including Sport organisation and its programme (Q.1), Eligibility (Q.2), Aims/Objectives (Q.3), Practitioners (Q.5), Training for Practitioners (Q.6), and Evaluation (Q.7), are presented in Table 1. In comparison with Hong and Coffee's (2018) study, the current research identified CAPs in the majority of the countries they investigated, with the exception of Brazil, Russia, South Africa, Switzerland, and the U.K. However, additional data from Botswana, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Portugal, Singapore, the IOC, and ONOC was uncovered, thus offering a more diverse profile. Most programmes cater to high-performance athletes at the international level (e.g. Olympics, World Championships, and European Championships), while some programmes (Australia [SASI], Botswana, and Sweden) also accommodate talented young athletes with the potential to reach elite levels (e.g. Top 8 in the world, qualifying for a national team). Eligibility criteria for CAPs access remain previously unexplored (Hong and Coffee 2018), thus enriching our comprehension of established CAPs and their features. Crucially, the findings unveil resources accessible to high-performance athletes, potentially raising

awareness and enhancing accessibility for athletes and their support network (e.g. coaches, parents, peers).

This also exposes a gap in service provision, as athletes who have not yet attained the high level required for eligibility lack access to such resources and might encounter limited opportunities to develop their careers and manage the demands and challenges arising from their sporting careers (Hanton *et al.* 2005, Park *et al.* 2012, Lundqvist *et al.* 2022). Notably, the programmes delivered by the IOC (Athlete 365) and the KSOC in South Korea cater to athletes at all levels. Additionally, the IOC's Athlete 365 is globally accessible, as it is delivered online. Athletes in countries lacking CAPs can benefit from this well-established international programme. In this context, sports organisations without established CAPs should proactively direct their athletes to other available CAPs and consider developing their own programmes based on the best practices shared in this paper. Furthermore, retired athletes can access programmes in Canada, Hong Kong, and the U.S. While it is noteworthy that these three countries provide CAPs for retired athletes, sports organisations in other countries might need to consider extending access to this demographic. Past studies have shown that involvement in support programs positively correlates with retired athletes' life skills development and the quality of their career transitions (Park *et al.* 2013).

The prevalent aims and objectives across the programmes include assisting athletes in (1) pursuing sports excellence, (2) developing life/transferable skills, (3) achieving a balance between athletic careers and non-athletic activities, particularly managing dual careers (i.e. sport and education/work) in European countries, and (4) preparing for transitions out of sport (post-athletic employment). These aims align with findings in the literature, which highlight critical areas that warrant attention for the quality of athletes' athletic and non-athletic careers. For example, Park *et al.* (2013) illustrated in their systematic review of 126 studies that career/personal development, sport career achievement, and maintaining a balanced life during their athletic career are key factors influencing the quality of career transition. Furthermore, pre-retirement planning is a vital resource that athletes can utilise to enhance their quality of life after retirement. This suggests that the four common aims and objectives are well-founded in supporting athletes both during and after their sporting careers. However, a critical examination of the current state of these programmes is necessary to ensure that they effectively address the specific needs of athletes in various contexts. It would be beneficial to investigate whether these aims and objectives are consistently applied and adapted to accommodate the diverse needs and challenges faced by athletes in different sports, countries, and stages of their careers. Moreover, evaluating the effectiveness of these programmes in achieving their stated aims and objectives could provide valuable insights into potential areas for improvement or adaptation, ultimately enhancing the support provided to athletes.

While Hong and Coffee (2018) identified practitioners in 13 out of 19 countries, the present study found that all organisations identified specific practitioners for their programmes. Furthermore, most organisations (except for three) provided various training opportunities for practitioners, including workshops, conferences, certification courses, networking with specialists, and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses. Although the study reveals significant improvements in practitioner training compared to Hong and Coffee (2018), it is crucial to delve deeper into the competencies that practitioners have developed or need to develop through such training programmes. While it is beyond the scope of the present study to identify specific competencies required for providing high-quality CAP services, previous research has suggested key areas for competency development, including dual career management, self-regulation and resilience, social competence, and career planning (Wylleman *et al.* 2017). These findings should be taken into account when practitioners plan to undergo training programmes, and sport organisations develop structured training opportunities for practitioners. Moreover, the study highlights that many sport organisations ($n = 17$) have assessed their programmes through various methods, such as surveys, interviews, individual meetings, workshops, and annual reviews. While this aspect was not examined in Hong and Coffee (2018), the current study provides empirical evidence of the different evaluation methods used to assess CAP practice. However, the study does not determine whether the

evaluation results demonstrate the effectiveness of CAPs or how the results have been utilised to improve these programmes, as it is beyond the scope of the study.

The findings of this study demonstrate that 23 sport organisations worldwide have developed and implemented career assistance programmes to support athletes' career development and transitions. This aligns with the argument that sport organisations have a responsibility to assist athletes in their career development and transitions while creating an environment conducive to life skill development and post-career planning through CAPs (Anderson and Morris 2000, Hong and Coffee 2018, Torregrossa *et al.* 2020). These programmes are designed to aid athletes in managing and balancing their athletic careers with non-athletic activities, including dual careers (Stambulova *et al.* 2021). Given the positive association between CAP engagement and the development of life skills, as well as improved career transitions (Selden 1997, Stankovich 1998, Goddard 2004, Lavalley 2005, Albion 2007, Redmond *et al.* 2007, Torregrossa *et al.* 2007, Gilmore 2008), it is essential to recognise the critical role sport organisations play in athletes' development and career transitions. This study highlights the importance of sport organisations' efforts in providing comprehensive support for athletes' holistic development, emphasising the need for continued improvement and expansion of CAPs. Further research should critically examine the effectiveness of these programmes and identify best practices for enhancing athletes' career development, transitions, and overall well-being.

Hong and Coffee (2018) underscored the crucial role practitioners play in coordinating and delivering CAPs, emphasising the need for structured and regular training programmes to foster their professional development. Although the organisations in this study offer various training opportunities, there seems to be a lack of structured and tailored training programmes for practitioners, which warrants further attention from sport organisations. Torregrossa *et al.* (2020) stressed the importance of evaluating and implementing practitioner support programmes, such as the psycho-educational curriculum for practitioners proposed by Hong and Coffee (2018). It is noteworthy that 17 of the 23 sport organisations in the present study collect athlete feedback to assess their programs. Albion and Fogarty (2003) highlighted the need to clarify the extent to which athletes have benefitted from CAPs. However, there is a dearth of research evaluating the effectiveness of CAPs in the existing literature.

In summary, the findings critically identify an area for improvement in sport organisations' efforts to develop and support practitioners. It emphasises the need for comprehensive, structured, and customised training programmes that cater to practitioners' specific needs and competencies. Moreover, it accentuates the importance of further research evaluating the efficacy of CAPs, which can help identify best practices and enhance the overall impact of these programmes on athletes' development and career transitions.

Contents and activities of career assistance programmes

The results of the contents and activities of CAPs (Q.4) assessed using the HAC model (Wylleman 2019) are presented in Table 2. The contents and activities of nearly all programmes, with the exception of Botswana and Sweden, address multiple levels within the HAC model, ranging from one to five. The most prevalent level across programs is the 'Academic/Vocational' level, suggesting that services in other areas such as Psychological (e.g. counselling, mentoring), Psycho-social (e.g. social support network), and Athletic (e.g. strength and conditioning, physiotherapy) should be strengthened to provide more comprehensive support to high-performance athletes.

Notably, few programmes offer legal support, a recent addition to the HAC model. Athletes transitioning out of early-specialisation sports (e.g. gymnastics) may encounter legal issues related to their post-athletic careers at a relatively young age, such as 'social security, professional responsibilities when establishing in private practice, tax obligations' (Wylleman 2019, p. 209). This critical analysis highlights a potential gap in the scope of support provided by CAPs, emphasising the need for programmes to incorporate services across all levels of the HAC model. The inclusion of legal

support and a more comprehensive range of services can better address the diverse needs of athletes. The U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee exemplifies good practice by offering support related to tax preparation (see [Table 1](#)). Sport organisations should consider addressing this aspect, as athletes may encounter legal issues for which they are unprepared and may struggle to cope without adequate assistance. However, it is important to acknowledge that some programmes (Belgium [both ADEPS and Sport Vlaanderen], New Zealand, South Korea, Spain, and Sweden) reported providing personalised support based on athletes' needs and requests. Consequently, such support services may encompass more levels within the HAC model. It is crucial to recognise that athletes may require individualised support due to their unique circumstances and career phases. Accordingly, sport organisations should be equipped with comprehensive support schemes and be capable of customising their assistance to provide appropriate and timely help. Additionally, while organisations like the Canadian Olympic and Paralympic Sport Institutes and the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee explicitly offer services to Paralympic athletes, it remains unclear whether these services are equally accessible in other programmes. The suitability of such services for Paralympic athletes, who may have specific needs (e.g. accessing disability-related financial support), also warrants further examination. This critical perspective underscores the need for sport organisations to develop more inclusive and tailored support services for all athletes.

While the contents and activities of CAPs were analysed using the HAC model (Wylleman 2019) in this study, the findings can also be interpreted through Torregrossa *et al.* (2020) taxonomy of CAPs: (1) Holistic CAPs for elite athletes (Athlete Career Program [ACP; multinational] and Canadian Sport for Life/Long Term Athlete Development [CS4L/LTAD]), (2) Sport-specific CAPs for professional athletes (The Trust [U.S.], Career development for professional players [Australia], and Masia 360° [Spain]), and (3) Dual CAPs for student-athletes (Top class sport and studies VUB [Belgium], Talented athlete scholarship scheme [U.K.], and Student-athlete development program [NCCAA]). In this context, most CAPs in the present study align with Holistic CAPs for elite athletes (excluding Botswana and Sweden, where the CAP contents were not identified), and one CAP can be considered a Sport-specific CAP for professional athletes.

It is worth noting that some CAPs might also fall into the Dual CAPs for student-athletes category based on their aims/objectives and contents and activities: AIS (Australia), ADEPS (Belgium), Sport Vlaanderen (Belgium), Team Denmark, Ministry of Sports via the National Institute of Sport (France), DOSB (Germany), CAR (Spain), and Swedish Olympic Committee. Intriguingly, seven out of these eight organisations are European. This may reflect a growing interest in Europe in supporting dual career athletes, spurred by the European Dual Career (DC) Guidelines (European Commission, 2012). Additionally, the volume of DC research in Europe has been expanding and is supported by the European DC Guidelines and funded by the European Commission (Stambulova *et al.* 2021). This critical analysis suggests that current CAPs may be influenced by regional trends and policy initiatives, which warrant further investigation to better understand their implications for athlete support. The findings underscore that organisational interventions have been well-established to facilitate athletes' career development and successful adaptation to transitions throughout their sporting careers. CAPs seem to have adopted a more proactive approach, while content and courses for retiring/retired athletes and counselling sessions addressing athletes' issues remain reactive in nature. This supports previous studies that emphasised the importance of proactive interventions (Wylleman *et al.* 2004, Gilmore 2008, Park *et al.* 2012).

Despite the focus on proactive approaches in the current study and previous research, it is essential to recognise that practitioners should offer a combination of proactive (e.g. career planning, development of transferable skills) and reactive support (e.g. coping with emotions and issues related to athletic identity) tailored to the unique needs of each athlete. Additionally, the findings reveal the presence of resources for high-performance athletes at the macro level of the environment (Henriksen *et al.* 2010), although accessibility is limited to those who achieve international status. Nevertheless, such resources can be beneficial if eligible athletes are informed about access methods and utilisation strategies (Albion and

Fogarty 2003). This highlights the importance of addressing both proactive and reactive support components, as well as ensuring athletes' awareness and ability to utilise available resources effectively.

Conclusion

The present study holds both academic and practical implications for career assistance programmes (CAPs). By providing a comprehensive overview of global CAPs, the findings contribute to a deeper understanding and knowledge of resources available for high-performance athletes' career development, transitions, and sports organisations' practices. Sports organisations are encouraged to share best practices and enhance the effectiveness of their programmes. While the current study did not specifically evaluate CAP efficacy, as it is beyond its scope, it does highlight that 17 out of 23 sports organisations have assessed their CAPs. Future research should focus on measuring CAP efficacy, determining the number of athletes utilising these programmes, and examining the impact of engagement on post-athletic career and life outcomes.

Given the limitations of desk-based data in providing insights into the details of CAP practice and delivery, further studies may employ both quantitative and qualitative approaches to delve into the intricacies of programme implementation. Despite the challenges, this study has made significant contributions by employing research tours and directly contacting organisations to obtain adequate information to address the research questions, as website data proved insufficient. Although most organisations were cooperative, the time-consuming nature of the study required persistent communication efforts. Establishing strong connections and networks in advance is essential for conducting this type of research, emphasising the importance of the study's achievements in a demanding context. Although the HAC model (Wylleman 2019) emphasises a multidimensional perspective in athletes' career development processes, the present study could not identify how CAPs consider such a perspective when addressing the associations between challenges and demands at different levels. Thus, future research should explore how support services at various levels (e.g. psychological, psychosocial, and educational) are integrated to more effectively address athletes' issues and maximise the benefits of support services. It is important to acknowledge that changes may have occurred since the data collection for this study considering the data were collected between 2018 and 2019. In addition, it is worth noting that the programmes may have been modified or adjusted due to the impact of COVID-19. Subsequent research can investigate these changes and updates to programmes, sharing established best practices that can inform sports organisations in the development and enhancement of their support schemes. This study's contributions and implications serve as a foundation for continued exploration and improvement in both literature and practice within the realm of CAPs for athletes.

This study did not ascertain whether support services are accessible to Paralympic athletes, as most organisations examined are NOCs. Although eligibility requirements typically grant service access, future research should clarify whether Paralympic and Olympic athletes have equal access to support services. Investigating the inclusivity and diversity of services provided by sport organisations is crucial for ensuring equal opportunities for high-performance athletes and exemplifying good practice. While most CAPs target athletes, recognising the needs of other stakeholders, such as coaches and families (Torregrossa *et al.* 2020), warrants further investigation in future studies.

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